ROBERT HALL

Chinese Snuff Bottles III
ISBN 0-9516667-0-3

© Copyright 1990
Produced and printed by: Orientations/Techpearl Printing Ltd

Front cover illustration:
Porcelain reclining lady
Jingdezhen, 1800-1850, length 8.8 cms (catalogue no. 65)
For Tom and Mary
Introduction and Acknowledgement

This year’s book, Ill, has been arduous to compile, mostly because the snuff bottles have come from many different sources, and I had to wait until the very last moment before drawing the portcullis and starting the photography, research, and writing. Book II was very different in that the majority of that collection was from one provenance, Marian Mayer, and so there was a great deal more time to plan ahead.

The strength of this year’s collection is in its diversity of materials, but special mention must be made about the extraordinary inside painted bottles, the finest group to have been on the market for many years. Their importance lies in their sheer quality, originality and condition; all examples set a standard which is hard to follow. It is particularly pleasing to offer this group because of the sudden interest in this field. For many years, inside painted bottles have been taking a back seat with numerous collectors, largely because of insufficient knowledge or confidence to acquire them.

The group of porcelain bottles is also worth noting in that it has some fine marks and period examples of unusual types, not to mention the famous reclining lady. Porcelain bottles have always been popular with collectors, but the mere fact that the material is so fragile means that there are few examples of good quality and condition available today.

It is fitting that I call attention to the talented and willing colleagues without whom I would be considered an illiterate:

My good friend, Hugh Moss, is always happy and ready to create his five-dimensional footnotes adding his personal insight to each snuff bottle. Actually, I learn more from these notes than from any other source. They are written in a delightfully informal style which draws the reader into an understanding that goes further than the learning process itself. Hugh's observations occasionally touch on aspects which could be detrimental to the course most dealers would like to steer, but I feel strongly that any editing of such potent information would reduce it to a travesty.

Susan Gavins is an integral part of this book. No one can really know the hurdles she has to surmount during my mad moments when preparing a book, but the more disorganized I become, the more tranquil she is, and she knows instinctively how to bring some semblance of order out of my chaos.

The task of photographing snuff bottles properly and effectively is not an easy one, particularly when the consignments arrive sporadically. Robert Hall excelled in all facets of this assignment, and his professionalism and good humour made it a pleasure to work with him.

My thanks also to Carol Michaelson for translation of the inscriptions.

Robert Hall
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qing Dynasty Chronology</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shunzhi</td>
<td>1644-1662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kangxi</td>
<td>1662-1722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yongzheng</td>
<td>1723-1735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qianlong</td>
<td>1736-1795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiajing</td>
<td>1796-1820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daoguang</td>
<td>1821-1850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xianfeng</td>
<td>1851-1861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tongzhi</td>
<td>1862-1874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guangxu</td>
<td>1875-1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuantong</td>
<td>1909-1911</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Catalogue
1. Glass, double overlay of cinnabar-red on sapphire-blue on an opaque white ground; carved in relief on one side with a single peony in a vase on a stand, two persimmons, a tassled ruyi sceptre, and a flying bat; the other side similarly carved with two fanciful ding tripods, one containing a flowering plant, the other three fruits, a pair of weiqi boxes, and a guqin; the two sides separated by identical musical chimes, each with an elaborate tassel, replacing the ubiquitous mask and ring handles; the foot also doubly overlaid.

1800 - 1880
Height: 6.2 cms
Stopper: coral; turquoise collar
Provenance: Dr and Mrs Stephen Weisz

The snuff-taking habit in China was centred initially around the influential minority of rulers and scholars, and this is reflected in snuff bottle subject matter to a very considerable extent throughout the Qing dynasty. Here is gathered a group of scholar’s objects and auspicious flowers, fruits and bats. The guqin (lute) was the quintessential musical instrument of the literatus, played by many of the influential minority and set in the studios of even those who could not play as a symbol of the achievements of the literatus and of the esoteric nature of silent music—recognized as the highest form of music for more than two thousand years in China. The two globular boxes alongside the guqin are for holding weiqi pieces. Weiqi is a strategic board game not unlike chess. The traditional Chinese scholar was trained to excel in all areas unlike today’s scholar who has to specialize in order to compete. Skill with the calligrapher’s brush and esoteric knowledge of the Classics might go hand in hand with military skills, making the game of weiqi, with its territorial concerns and strategic subtlety, an ideal game for the literatus. The vase with a single flower, set on the scholar’s desk perhaps, is tastefully decorative, but the choice of flower would also be significant. The ancient bronze forms of the archaistic tripod vessels connect the scholar with the past and its vital tradition, serving as a constant reminder of the value of precedence and tradition in a culture ultimately governed by a mode of consciousness beyond all rules.
2. Glass, single overlay of ruby-red, sapphire-blue, emerald-green, yellow and pale turquoise-blue on an opaque white ground; carved with a continuous design of a butterfly fluttering amidst lotus in different stages of growth.

1780 - 1860
Height: 7.5 cms
Stopper: glass
Provenance: Mr and Mrs McKeown

This crisply carved bottle employs a most unusual combination of colours to great effect. Their use also hints at the Chinese artistic attitude to subject matter. While in the West we have traditionally considered subject matter to be the predominant language of pictorial art, in the Chinese tradition it is merely a prelude to perception. There, much greater emphasis was placed upon form, line, colour and texture, and a harmonious balance sought between them and the subject matter through which they were expressed. Here, the abrupt changes of colour create an abstract layer of considerable strength in its own right, while still comfortably depicting the symbolic lotus. The thoughtful layout of these blocks of colour in relationship to the elegant, elongated form of the bottle is delightful.
3. Glass, single overlay of turquoise-blue on emerald-green; carved with a continuous design of two chi dragons frolicking amid eccentric rockwork through the holes of which they are playing and from the base of which lingzhi fungus grows; the oval foot in turquoise.

1750 - 1860
Height: 7.0 cms
Stopper: coral set on a chased gilt bronze collar
Provenance: Jean and Xaviere Pigoreau

The extremely rare and particularly effective combination of colours is enlivened here by completely controlled carving. In any medium if the artist is able to transcend that medium and dance with the formal languages of art with complete assurance, the essential artistic quality of confidence shines through, lifting a work of craft into one of art. This is an excellent example, where the carver has managed to create a design of great plasticity, lending vitality to the sinuously swirling chi dragons. It is difficult to look at this carving and not feel that the dragons are in constant motion, frozen in time for the moment, but essentially vital.
4. Glass, single overlay of translucent pastel green on opaque white; carved with a continuous design of two chi dragons, their bodies disposed on front and back, but their heads rounding on the edges of the bottle to bite upon the rings of the standard shoulder decoration of mask and ring handles in an imaginative twist to a common design; the oval foot of green overlay.

1760 - 1860
Height: 6.3 cms
Stopper: coral set on a blue glass collar

Cf. no. 3. Here again, vigorous and imaginative carving is combined with considerable control and an unusual colour combination.
5. Glass, single overlay of sapphire-blue on opaque white; carved in low relief and an unusual stylised manner with a similar circular panel on front and back of ducks in turbulent waters below overhanging willow trees growing behind ornamental rocks; the edges with highly formalised, symmetrical floral designs; the foot in blue.

1780 - 1850
Height: 5.8 cms
Stopper: tourmaline

Although the overlay colours and stylized treatment used here refer to the imperial output of the palace workshops from the Qianlong period (cf. Hall, Robert Chinese Snuff Bottles II, October 1989, no. 61, etc.), the form and style of this example suggest a later development. It is also possible to read too much significance into the use of certain colour combinations and styles which would, by the early nineteenth century, have become well known, and presumably, equally available in other workshops. References to glass manufacture in China also suggest, and certainly normal Chinese craftshop practices would dictate, that specialist shops created the basic overlay bottles, which would then have been bought by carving workshops to be carved into different designs. To judge style in glass bottles, therefore, it is necessary to bear in mind the possibly separate styles of the manufacture of the glass ground and its carving by specialist workshops.
6. Glass, of transparent sapphire-blue colour; carved with five Buddhist lions, three disposed on one side with two brocade balls, the other two on the reverse, all set amongst convoluted rockwork with lingzhi fungus, which design also fills the edges.

1780 - 1880
Height: 5.8 cms
Stopper: tourmaline
Provenance: Ko Family Collection
Andrew Hsueh
Published: Ko Family Collection of Chinese Snuff Bottles,
Part I (1971), no. 19

There is a series of carved glass bottles using overlay carving techniques but confined to a single colour of glass. These are generally rarer than the overlay examples and may owe their origin to a desire to imitate, in readily available, relatively cheap and easily-carved glass, the more precious stones they resemble. However, as happened with so many of the arts in China, this initial impulse soon gave way to an independent art form. A good example of this is the moulded porcelain bottles, made for the first time at Jingdezhen in the late eighteenth century, where the initial intent to copy imperial ivory and lacquer bottles rapidly developed into an art form bearing little surface resemblance to the originals.
7. Glass, imperial yellow; carved as a squared-off, tapering cylinder with four raised panels; the neck flared.

1730 - 1860
Height: 6.0 cms
Stopper: tourmaline
Provenance: Eric Young

Plain imperial yellow bottles are relatively common, suggesting that the colour itself was sufficiently powerful in its symbolism to reduce the need for elaborate surface decoration. In the same way, many precious materials, such as jadeite, ruby, sapphire, etc., were frequently left plain so that the beauty of the material and the significance attached to it could speak for themselves.
8. Glass, of translucent ruby-red colour; of octagonal form with faceted oval panels on each face.

Beijing palace workshops, 1750 - 1800
Height: 4.8 cms
Stopper: tourmaline with a pearl finial set on a glass collar
Similar example: Stevens, Bob *Chinese Snuff Bottles and Dishes*, an *Exhibition of Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Bob C. Stevens Collection*, October 1978, Mikimoto Hall, Ginza Tokyo, nos. 3 & 4

Cf. Hall, Robert *Chinese Snuff Bottles II*, October 1989, nos. 52 - 54 for a discussion of this popular Beijing palace form.
9. Glass, of pale, slightly greenish-beige colour with brown inclusions; decorated with incised inscriptions, one side with 'wealth, honour and longevity' in seal script followed by 'yihai year (1899)', followed by an illegible seal; the other side with further inscriptions, also in seal script, taken from archaic bronze vessels, one of which is identified as a ding; a casual seal, Kaoshi ('searching for the truth') following.

1899  
Height: 6.3 cms  
Stopper: glass

Archaic bronze vessels, with their often lengthy inscriptions in esoteric scripts, were an essential tool for the study of the past and the origins of the Chinese language—both of which were essential attributes for a well-rounded scholar. As such, they were revered, studied and collected by the influential minority. Inscriptions from these precious archaic vessels were often borrowed for other art forms as a none-too-subtle reference to the erudition of both maker and owner, and as a rather more subtle reference to the culture and its roots. The cyclical date here could also be read as 1839, 1959, etc., but the style of incising suggests the likelihood of a date at the end of the nineteenth century, when the incising of glass in this style became particularly popular. The nineteenth century as a whole was also a time of vivid awareness of, and a new interest in, archaeology and archaic scripts as new tomb-sites were discovered. The scripts revealed and studied began, finally, to form an orthodox calligraphic style based on certain fourth century masters of transcendent merit.
10. Glass, opaque white, with additional painted famille-rose enamels; decorated with a continuous scene of an exotic bird feeding an insect to its young in the branches of a blossoming fruit tree; the neck painted with a formalized floral design in dark on pale ruby enamel, divided from an elaborate shoulder pattern of formalized floral design by a single blue band; the outer foot with a simpler but still highly formalized band of floral motif based upon a lingzhi fungus head; the base inscribed with a raised blue enamel mark Qianlong nianzhi ('made in the Qianlong period') in kaishu (official script).

Ye Bengqi, Beijing, 1932 - 1945
Height: 5.0 cms
Stopper: chased gilt bronze decorated with a formalized floral design

Cf. Kleiner, Robert W. L. Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Collection of Mary and George Bloch, exhibition, Sydney I. Moss Gallery, London 1987, no. 21 for a similar example with borders and a discussion by Robert Kleiner of the group. This group of enamelled wares, produced by the Ye family of Beijing (well known painters of inside painted snuff bottles) has been extensively discussed in journal, ICSBS, Autumn 1985, in ‘The Apricot Grove Studio, Part III’, where many similar examples are illustrated. The process of enamelling on glass requires the repeated addition of individual colours, or layers of colour, which must then be fired onto the original bottle. These additional firings were done by the Ye family in a relatively small kiln, and occasionally a miscalculation of the kiln heat, or the time necessary to bond the enamels to the base glass, resulted in the original bottle being raised to a temperature sufficient for it to begin to melt. This appears to have happened in this case, as the bottle has an amusing lean slightly to one side and a mildly eccentric shape. Since the bottle could be seen at any stage of the repeated firings, Ye Bengqi was in a position to take the bottle out the moment any sign of collapse occurred. It is a governing feature of Chinese art that spirit rules over medium, and Ye clearly thought that the painting and quality of this example transcended the minor problem of an eccentric shape.
11. Nephrite, of pale celadon-green and brown colours; carved with a continuous design of a scholar and a fisherman strolling through a rocky landscape with pines and a copse of other trees shrouded in mist which encircles the upper section of the bottle, the natural colours imaginatively and effectively employed in the typical manner of this school of carving.

Suzhou, 1750 - 1860
Height: 6.5 cm
Stopper: coral mounted on a gilt metal collar

For a discussion on the Suzhou school of carving see Moss, Hugh M. Chinese Snuff Bottles of the Silica or Quartz Group. Cf. Hall, Robert Chinese Snuff Bottles II, October 1989, no. 43. In the idealized world of the Chinese literatus the scholar aspired to the simple wisdom of the peasant, particularly the fisherman, but with the necessary intellect to delight in its naturalness and closeness to nature. The fisherman represented this idea because of his solitary nature, capacity for adjustment to nature’s caprices, and ability to drift with the prevailing current in pursuit of his goal. In this delightful carving (powerfully typical of the Suzhou brilliance in use of colour and design) the two extremes of simple peasant and highly sophisticated scholar—each aspiring to what the other has—representing the duality of everyday life and the Chinese ideal of transcending it, are embodied.
12. Nephrite, of pale celadon colour; carved as a slightly compressed sphere, with a lipped shoulder mantle giving way to a waisted neck; the simply recessed base incised with the four character mark Qianlong nianzhi ('made in the Qianlong period') in neatly written juanshu (lesser-seal script).

Beijing palace workshops, 1736 - 1795
Height: 3.7 cms
Stopper: tourmaline with a pearl finial, set on a jadeite collar
Provenance: Dr and Mrs Stephen Weisz

A similar, slightly smaller, example is in the collection of Mr and Mrs A.R. Kleiner.
Cf. Kleiner, Robert W. L. Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Collection of Mary and George Bloch, exhibition, Sydney L Moss Gallery, London 1987, nos. 24 and 25 for two further examples of Beijing palace workshop nephrite carving, the latter being similar in form to this example but with additional mask and ring handles; both have similar marks. The form is possibly derived from the persimmon, an auspicious fruit which has the same substantial settled body weight surmounted by a stalk and mantle lending, by contrast, a solid elegance to the whole form. The balance here between the compressed sphere and the elegantly waisted neck and mantle are exquisitely achieved.
13. Nephrite, of pure white colour with areas of russet pebble-skin; the original pebble shape dictating the form of the bottle which is carved in relief with a continuous landscape scene with maple, pine and rocks, in which a scholar in flowing robes strolls, and an attendant offers a precious natural rock sculpture to another scholar resting on the steps of a stone bridge, while a chi dragon emerges from the swirling clouds encircling the neck and shoulders of the bottle.

Suzhou, 1680 - 1780
Height : 5.7 cms
Stopper: green stained bone carved in the form of a calyx

During the late Ming and early Qing periods, the Suzhou jade carvers enjoyed immense success, partly as a result of the famous artist, Lu Zigang, who so embodied both imperial and popular taste that he rose to be one of those rare late Ming figures who transcended the nature of his craft to become a recognized, recorded artist who was encouraged by this process to sign his works. As the popularity of snuff bottles increased, at first for use, and as early as the eighteenth century as collector’s items, earlier carvings originally intended as amulets, small sculptures, or artist’s paper-weights or whatever, were converted to snuff bottles by hollowing them out. That is the case with this example, where a paper-weight, or artistic plaything, has been converted. It is, as a rule, impossible to tell when such conversions took place, but a careful hollowing and shaping of the interior to match the exterior indicates the possibility of an early conversion, although, of course, not the certainty. It is not difficult to see from such an example, with its exquisitely subtle use of colour and superbly controlled carving, why the name ‘Suzhou’ became synonymous with fine hardstone carving in the three centuries since the time of Lu Zigang.
14. Nephrite, of whitish-celadon colour; of octagonal form with four faceted panels on each side and a straight cylindrical neck.

Beijing palace workshops, 1736 - 1800
Height: 4.6 cms
Stopper: tourmaline set on a turquoise collar

Cf. no. 8 for a similar form from the palace glassworks, but without the short foot, and for a note on this form.
15. Nephrite, of whitish-celadon colour; of faceted, octagonal form.

Attributed to the Beijing palace workshops, 1736 - 1795
Height: 4.5 cms
Stopper: pierced coral set on an ivory collar

This example is tentatively attributed to the Beijing palace workshops, or at least to their influence, because of a combination of material, form and workmanship in shaping and hollowing. The palace workshops had two distinctive styles of carving in jade: the one represented by form, where the popular octagonal shape of no. 14 suggests a palace origin; and the other by material, decoration, method of hollowing and marks, of which no. 12 is an example. In the latter group, the quality of the material is often rather poor, presumably deliberately considering what was available to the Qing court. This is probably because most are derived from archaic forms and are an imperial response to the archaistic taste of the time. It was well known that most early jade carvings were made from pebbles rather than mined stone. The flaws and natural markings of such pebbles, as opposed to the large areas of pure material to be found in mined stone, were valued because they echoed antiquity, constantly reminding the user of tradition and stability.
16. Nephrite, of yellowish-green colour, with a rich, russet brown skin covering all but the neck and a V-shaped section on each shoulder; the bottle carved into a simple, circular wedge shape and well-hollowed through a wide mouth.

1720 - 1800
Height: 5.2 cms
Stopper: quartz, hollowed out and painted green from the inside to imitate jadeite, set on a beaded, gilt-bronze collar

Collectors of snuff bottles since the eighteenth century have tended to favour obvious materials and craftsmanship. A finely carved ivory or lacquer, a delicately painted enamel or a richly coloured jadeite, a lavishly carved and imaginative chalcedony or a bright coral, have always caught and held the attention of the majority of collectors. The cornerstone of the art of the influential minority in Chinese aesthetics, however, has traditionally been a high level of subtlety. The Chinese literati, who made up the bulk of this minority, have been aptly described as the ‘quintessential in-group’, and among them a rather more subtle aesthetic reigned. Exuberant and obvious displays of fine materials and workmanship gave way to a more esoteric taste, necessarily inaccessible to the casual and uninitiated observer. At the highest level, they delighted in naturalness and understatement, and a simple pebble of nephrite, if it fulfilled their in-group criteria, would be valued aesthetically far above a more precious material in the general marketplace. This example, with its rich, leathery surface using the skin of a pebble with a harmony of nature and human-kind rarely encountered, is the epitome of this subtle aesthetic. Such works of art do not have the immediate appeal of ornate, more obvious works, but once they begin to weave their quiet magic, they have extraordinary depth and allure.
17. Nephrite, of palest celadon-white colour with areas of very slight brown veining; carved as an elongated pear shape, both faces carved in low relief with two kui dragons enclosing a formalised shou ('longevity') character; the sides carved with a formalized floral motif; the bottle unusually well-hollowed.

1740 - 1820  
Height: 7.3 cms  
Stopper: coral, set on a green stained ivory collar

The motifs on the sides of this bottle are similar to those on no. 5. Each is a symmetrical, formalized floral design tied around its centre and distinctly European in appearance. Style is arguably the ultimate criterion in connoisseurship, and further research will undoubtedly augment our capacity to place and date works based upon the use and style of certain motifs. Stylistic connoisseurship is already well advanced in some fields—in painted enamels for instance—but remains an untapped area in many others. Perhaps, with continued research, we will be able to identify such distinct motifs as representative of a local style, but in the meantime they are merely tantalising hints at greater meaning to be uncovered. Because of the obviously European appearance of this particular motif, it has been suggested that it originates from the Beijing palace workshop, and certainly no. 5 is a feasible mid-Qing palace glass piece. However, such European influence was by no means confined to Beijing and there is at present no solid evidence for such a provenance.
18. Nephrite, of flawless, pure white colour; the flattened, circular bottle with a flared neck; carved in low relief on one side with two swallows swooping above blossoms which float on the breeze above formalized waves; the other side with orchids growing from a sloping bank; the base simply recessed leaving the two characters Xiang Su (see below) in low relief seal script.

1750 - 1850
Height: 6.0 cms
Stopper: coral with pearl finial

Xiang Su may be a name or, if the character ‘su’ is taken in its meaning of ‘uncle’ (as a term of respect for an adult rather than as a description of particular family relationship), then it means ‘Uncle Xiang’. In either case whether it is the name of the maker or the owner is not clear.

Regardless of the relationship between Xiang Su, or Uncle Xiang and this bottle, he was a man of refined taste who could produce or appreciate purity of material and superb and delicate carving.
19. Jadeite, of speckled emerald green colour diffused through a snowy-white stone; the bottle of plain, flattened form with a neatly carved foot.

1760 - 1880
Height: 6.4 cms
Stopper: tourmaline
Provenance: Dr and Mrs Stephen Weisz

This particular colour of jadeite was apparently known as ‘pine needles in snow’, presumably because of the crystalline and rather snowy appearance of the whitish material through which the green colour suffuses. It was a popular stone during the mid-Qing period. Different colours of stone were mined at different periods and in different locations, and certain large deposits might have lasted some time in the marketplace before being exhausted. Bottles of this type, where the colour is the chief delight, the form and decoration secondary, and the identifying inscriptions or decoration virtually non-existent, are extremely difficult to date. To a snuff bottle loving society, however, it is not difficult to imagine the vogue that might grow for such a material once it was introduced into the marketplace.
20. Nephrite, of pure white colour with a rich, golden-russet skin on one side; carved in the round with a highly formalised chi dragon connected to the basic container only by its four feet and by its whiskers.

1730 - 1850
Height: 5.5 cms
Stopper: coral, carved with a chi dragon

The affinity between this extremely unusual bottle and Qing jade double belt-buckles is obvious. Where a bright, contrasting colour exists, it is used in both cases to create a flat, upper plane which stands clear of the lower, functional plane. Chi dragons of this type are also a popular belt-buckle decoration. It is conceivable that this bottle was designed to be worn on the belt with the dragon facing outwards. This is the same manner in which the Chinese sword scabbard was worn. It would presumably, however, have been rather impractical since it would be less convenient to remove snuff from a bottle attached at the waist, or to remove it from the belt each time for use in the normal manner. Perhaps it was the product of a workshop which specialized in belt-buckles and was intended as no more than a playful reference to another Qing art form.
21. Nephrite, of creamy-white colour with deep russet-brown skin; the bottle of pebble form carved as fruiting lychee branches using the brown pebble skin effectively; the bottle well-hollowed.

1750 - 1850
Height: 6.0 cms
Stopper: jadeite, carved in the form of leafy sprig

The earliest sources of nephrite for the Chinese carver were river beds where pebbles and small boulders were washed down from jade-bearing areas in the north west. Such material, having been exposed to the elements for millenia, was covered with a skin where the surface had decomposed and altered in texture and colour over the ages. Impurities would also seep through any flaws in the stone, often veining the material deep into the pebble. These dark colours became highly valued, particularly pebbles with black, to the point where pebbles were stained in order to enhance or completely simulate the effects of nature. In the Qing dynasty, the staining of nephrite was a fairly standard practice, well established by centuries of tradition, and this bottle is a good example. Probably a natural brown skin has been further stained to enhance it, allowing the carver greater emphasis for his lychee fruits and leaves.
22. Jadeite, of translucent, mottled, pale green colour with a rich, golden-russet skin on each face; carved in relief on one side with two birds in the branches of a fruiting pomegranate tree and on the other with three monkeys, one helping a companion to an eccentric, rocky outcrop, in order to join another who is precariously in pursuit of a spray of two big, juicy peaches which hang from a branch and which appear to be hotly contested by a swooping bird; another spray of similarly healthy looking peaches grows from another branch above the rocks.

1820 - 1920
Height: 6.3 cms
Stopper: tourmaline

A rare combination exists in this bottle of a most unusual material and a high degree of imagination and control in its use. To find jadeite with a richly coloured skin on both sides is in itself unusual, and the vividness of the golden-russet skin on both sides here is exceptional. However, material alone does not make a fine work of art and it is the carving and use of the material here that lift the bottle far beyond the ordinary. The side with the two birds in the pomegranate tree is fairly predictable—pleasant relief carving on a second plane of the separate colour; but on the reverse, two distinct tones of the surface colour have been superbly and subtly used to add depth to a delightfully realized and most amusing subject of three cheeky monkeys in search of peaches.
23. Glass, transparent; the plain flattened form painted on the inside with a circular vignette on each face; one with a European pastoral scene of a woman and child reclining beneath an overhanging tree; the other with an amusing scene of two Chinese children dressed in Western clothing, the finger of one child pointing outside the circular frame of the vignette, giving it the appearance of a moon window through which the children look; signed on one edge Zi Yici.

Beijing, 1899 - 1907
Height: 6.25 cms
Stopper: coral, carved with a chi dragon

Zi Yici was one of the most talented and individual artists working in Beijing at the turn of the century. He had an artist’s confidence in pursuing his own distinctive style at a time when the art was dominated by that of Zhou Leyuan in the dying years of the last century. He was also clearly fascinated by European photography, and a standard feature of his portraits is the oval or circular frame so typical of Victorian era portrait photography. Here, however, there is an amusing twist: on the side depicting two Chinese children in a European setting, he has transformed his usual European frame into a Chinese moon window by extending the hand of one child beyond the picture frame. This is an extremely rare subject for the artist.
24. Glass, transparent; of plain, flattened form, painted inside with a different scene on each face; one side with Huang Chengyan riding on a mule and followed by a pedestrian attendant holding a gourd on a branch of plum blossom over his shoulder, approaching a small bridge in a snow covered landscape; the other side with a moonlit crane standing on one leg on an eccentric, rocky, flowery bank beside a pine tree; inscribed in the upper left corner 'made by Chen Zhongsan at the capital in the jiuyu year' followed by one characteristically illegible seal of the artist.

Chen Zhongsan, Beijing, 1909
Height: 6.2 cms
Stopper: glass set in a copper collar
Provenance: Xaviere and Jean Pigoreau
Published: Arcade Chaumet, Catalogue, Paris, June 1982, no. 142

Cf. nos. 28 and 30 for two further examples of this popular subject by Ye Zhongsan; and Kleiner, Robert W. L. Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Collection of Mary and George Bloch, exhibition, Sydney L. Moss Gallery, London 1987, no. 292 for one by Ma Shaohuan. The subject, popular as it was with other artists, was an unusual one for Chen Zhongsan, as, indeed, was the moonlit crane. Chen was a commercial painter who tended to repeat a limited, popular repertoire of subjects with which he was familiar. In this unusual example, the colourful robes of the figure contrast effectively with the bleakness of the snowy landscape; the balance of these colourful robes, the brown brickwork of the bridge support and the gourd carried by the attendant form a diverting abstract formal pattern which so often comes as second nature to the Chinese painter, at whatever level of commercial involvement he may have been working.
25. Quartz; crystal, transparent with icy swirls; painted on the inside on one side with an idyllic riverside landscape, with four ducks flying over an enclosed summer retreat beneath a variety of trees, including a weeping willow, beneath which a scholar sits contemplatively in an open fishing boat; the reverse with the date 'mid-Spring of the bingshen year' followed by a long poetic inscription:

'Mountains need not be tall to become famous if there are Immortals who dwell there. Waters need not be deep to become magical if there are dragons living there. Because of virtue my humble home is fragrant. Green moss encroaches on the stairs and the colour of the grass is reflected in the curtains. Great scholars chat and laugh, and of my visitors, none are uneducated'.

All in neatly disposed kaishu (official script), with the signature Ma Shaoxuan and the seal Shaoxuan in negative seal script.

Ma Shaoxuan, Beijing, mid Spring, 1896
Height: 5.8 cms
Stopper: jadeite
Provenance: Edmund Dwyer

Ma Shaoxuan was technically one of the most proficient of all the artists in this medium and often rose above an obviously commercial output to achieve truly great painting. He had a repertoire of subjects, as did so many of the commercial artists in Beijing at the zenith of the art, which included a series of landscapes. Occasionally, however, as in this case, an unusual subject seems to have inspired him to excel. Here again, the literati ideal of a simple rustic existence is espoused, but the inherent snobbery of the influential minority is hinted at by the irony of combining this ideal with the desire to people its outward manifestation; the simple country cottage with none but the educated and worthy. One suspects that the simple fisherman, who epitomized the simple life, would not perhaps have been a welcome guest in this particular home.
26. Glass, transparent; the plain flattened form painted on the inside on one side with the two legendary sisters of the Qiao family, seated on an elaborate couch reading a book together; the other side with a descriptive poem in neatly inscribed kaishu (official script) which describes the scene; followed in the same script by the signature Ma Shaoxuan and with one seal of the artist, Shaoxuan in negative seal script.

*Circa* 1905-1915
Height: 6.1 cm
Stopper: tourmaline set on an amber coloured glass collar
Provenance: Dr and Mrs Stephen Weisz

Ma Shaoxuan painted this well-known subject many times as part of his repertoire of popular themes. They vary only in minor details of scale, colouring and minor adjustments of detail. The scene is taken from the *San Guo Yanyi* (The Romance the Three Kingdoms) and shows the two sisters, Daqiao and Erqiao, celebrated beauties of their day who married heroes in the story. This is a late but extremely delicate example in pristine condition with unusually subtle colouring and fine detail. The faces are particularly well painted, and the picture is complemented by an equally well-inscribed poetic description of the scene.
27. Glass, transparent; the plain, flattened form painted on the inside with
a continuous subject of a strutting peacock amidst vibrant peonies grow-
ing around an eccentric rock formation; inscribed in the upper left corner
of the front 'Made by Liu Baojun in mid-Spring of the jiachen year' in
rambling kaishu (official script) followed by one seal of the artist, jian in
negative seal script.

Liu Baojun, Beijing, 1904
Height: 6.25 cms
Stopper: stained walrus ivory
Provenance: Michael Kaynes-Klitz
Similar example: Li, J. & J. 100 Selected Chinese Snuff Bottles from the
J & J Collection, exhibition, Christie's London, October 1987, no. 37

Liu Baojun, like Zi Yici, was one of the confidently individual artists of
the turn of the century. His output appears to have been very small, and
extant examples of his work are rare—in fact, as few as ten. As a painter
of snuff bottles, he was an extremely interesting phenomenon because his
style was derived from the so-called 'boneless' style of Chinese painting,
or perhaps from the European water-colour style with which it is in
consonance. This style, popularised by the great early Qing artist, Yun
Shouping (Yun Nantian), departed from the traditional, overtly outline-
orientated basis of literati painting in favour of building up the subject
primarily with washes of integrated broader strokes. Liu and Zi Yici,
perhaps drawing on different influences, are the only two painters of snuff
bottles from the period who employed this technique. This is unques-
tionably one of Liu's more impressive examples.
28. Quartz; crystal, transparent with slight flaws and icy inclusions; the plain flattened form painted inside with a continuous snowy landscape scene in which, on one side, the popular figure of Huang Chengyan is depicted on his donkey, followed by an attendant on foot carrying a large gourd on a staff across his shoulder; while on the reverse a mounted Manchu bowman is shown bringing down a flying goose with an arrow; inscribed in the upper right corner ‘Written by Ye Zhongsan at the capital in the twelfth lunar month of the renjin year’ in xingshu (draft script); followed by one seal of the artist yin (seal).

Ye Zhongsan, Beijing, 1902
Height: 6.75 cms
Stopper: jadeite set on a blue glass collar
Provenance: Edmund Dwyer
Published: Journal, ICSBS, Autumn 1982, ‘The Apricot Grove Studio’, Part II by Hugh Moss, page 32, no. 73/73a

This was one of the favourite subjects of Ye Zhongsan prior to training his children to paint under his signature and thus beginning the studio years. It contrasts the two cultures which held sway over China between 1644 and 1911: the one, the barbarian culture of the invading Manchu, and the other, the pure Chinese culture of the Han people. Even though one was subsumed within the other to a very great extent by the end of the nineteenth century and even, arguably, considerably earlier, there was still a nationalistic current running through Chinese society that considered the Manchu to be barbarians, despite their accomplishments and cultural absorption, a phenomenon not unknown to us in the West today.

Edmund Dwyer was one of the California collectors of Lilla Perry’s coterie in the mid-century. He collected with more enthusiasm than discernment, but acquired in an eclectic group some superb bottles. His name is one of those which carries with it the weight of the early pioneers in our field, and as such adds resonance to an already excellent example by Ye Zhongsan in his finest years. Cf. no. 30 for an earlier example of the same subject by Ye Zhongsan; and no. 24 for another by Chen Zhongsan.
29. Quartz; crystal, transparent, the plain flattened form painted inside with a continuous scene of a group of nine naughty school-children playing and teasing their teacher who has nodded off during class; inscribed above the sleeping teacher ‘idea painting of Ye Zhongsan, made at the capital in the mid-Summer of the bingshen year’ in xingshu (draft script); followed by one seal of the artist, huayin (‘painting seal’) in negative seal-script.

Ye Zhongsan, Beijing, 1896
Height: 5.6 cms
Stopper: tourmaline

Some of Ye’s finest works from the period between 1895 and 1900 bear the Huayin seal. Here, Ye has included the unusual information that the painting is in the xieyi (literally, ‘idea painting’) style of the literati tradition of painting. This implies that the painting is allowed free reign; that it is expressive of a deeper emotional level of perception and expression, and comes from the inner spirit rather than being pieced together on the surface of the work of art at whatever level of accomplishment. This is an extremely rare claim for an inside painted snuff bottle, regardless of the level of spiritual meaning from which it is drawn. However, it should be taken lightly in the case of Ye, who was essentially a commercial painter, not a member of the literati, and who probably had little to do with them other than as clients. It is possible that this example represents an attempt by a commercial painter, who would have been scorned to some degree by all literati of his day, to aspire to their levels of perception and expression, or at least to pretend to do so. However, bearing in mind the exquisite painting, the use of a seal reserved for his finest works, and the possibility that even a commercial artist can aspire to fine art in a society ultimately governed by a level of comprehension beyond rules, it is possible that this work represents Ye’s highest aspirations as an artist.
30. Glass, transparent; the plain flattened form painted inside with the same two scenes as no. 28; the side with Huang Chengyan on his donkey with a lengthy inscription above:

One evening the northern winds arose; for ten thousand miles the reddening clouds thicken. In the vast expanse of sky, snow falls haphazardly; and the ancient rivers and mountains are transformed. Ye Zhongsan at the capital on the double ninth of the yiwei year.

All in delicate xingshu (draft script) followed by one seal of the artist, huayin ('painters seal'), in negative seal script.

Ye Zhongsan, Beijing, 1895
Height: 6.0 cms
Provenance: Hugh M Moss private collection
Dr. Paula Hallet
Published: Journal, ICSBS, Autumn 1982, p. 17, no. 24/24a; Moss, Hugh M. Chinese Snuff Bottles, No.1, 1963, p. 36, no. 10.

It is interesting to note minor variations between this example and no. 28. In each case the same basic subject fills the picture in the foreground, but the positioning of the legs of the donkeys and the attendant, facial details and setting are altered. Seven years separate these two paintings and clearly, although a basic pattern book was established for Ye’s popular subjects, they evolved as the artist repeated them. This example, which is the earlier work, is as fine a painting of the subject as is known, exhibiting far greater subtlety in line and shading, particularly noticeable in the distant banks of the frozen river. Formally, however, it could be argued that the setting of the figures is more effectively set off against the simpler background of the later example, where the snowy ground is a less confusing setting than the foreshortened bank, grassy verge and bridge of this painting. Cf. no. 24 for a similar subject by Chen Zhongsan.
31. Glass, transparent; the plain flattened form painted inside with a continuous landscape scene; one side with a two-storied pavilion, perhaps a monastery, with an elaborate multi-roofed entrance, set beyond a group of trees of various species, including pine, and with a distant back-drop of towering mountains and a long waterfall; inscribed above:

‘Lofty green mountains set in white clouds; Villages in the evening sun, chickens and dogs. The river is empty, no sign of the fisherman’s arrival; The last peach blossoms have fallen and I close the door.’

The reverse with a tree clad hill in the foreground, on which stands an open-sided shelter and the prow of a fishing boat showing in the river beyond; the distance with high mountains and drifting clouds; inscribed above ‘made by Ye Zhongsan in the mid-Summer of the biwu year at the request of respected second elder brother Zhongsan for his pure enjoyment’; followed by one seal of the artist yin (‘seal’).

Ye Zhongsan, Beijing, 1906
Height: 6.35 cms
Stopper: amethyst

The inscribed poem is a lament by the famous poet Tao Yuanming (AD 365 - 427) in which a woman awaits in vain her fisherman lover. It is an interesting coincidence that the bottle is painted for someone who shares the same given name as Ye himself, although the reference to a ‘respected second elder brother’ is not intended to be taken literally, but merely as a mark of respect for one who is a second elder brother in another family.
32. Glass, transparent; the plain flattened form painted inside with two scenes; on one side with a swallow flying over a fish-pond in which three fan-tailed carp swim beneath towering white lotus in full bloom; the other side with a buffalo herdboy astride his charge, reaching for his hat which has just blown off in the wind which strains a group of three willow trees on the far bank of the river across which he wades; inscribed in the upper left corner ‘painted in the capital by Ye Zhongsan in the mid-Autumn month of the jihaí year’; followed by one seal of the artist, huayin (‘painter’s seal’).

Ye Zhongsan, Beijing, mid-Autumn, 1899
Height: 6.35 cms
Stopper: tourmaline

The first decade of Ye Zhongsan’s artistic career was particularly inventive. Although he took many of his subjects from the better-known repertoire of the already famous Zhou Leyuan, they were transformed into his own subjects. Both scenes shown here are from Zhou, but the style has become unmistakably Ye’s own. The painter’s seal which accompanies the inscription attests to the fact that the artist also considers this to be one of his finer early works.
33. Glass, transparent; the plain flattened form painted inside with two scenes; one side with the demon-queller, Zhong Kui, astride a black donkey, accompanying his sister, who is pushed in a wheel-chair by an attendant demon, while another holds a parasol over their heads, the trunk and lower branches of a pine tree on the grassy bank behind them; the reverse with nine children playing in a garden with a plantain and ornamental rockwork; inscribed in the upper left corner ‘made by Ye Zhongsan at the capital in the winter month of the jihai year’ followed by one seal of the artist, luayin (‘painter’s seal’).

Ye Zhongsan, Beijing, winter, 1899
Height: 6.5 cms
Stopper: jadeite

Two of Ye’s popular subjects from the early years are unusually combined here.
34. Quartz; crystal, transparent and flawless; the plain flattened form painted inside with two scenes taken from the popular book of love and ghost stories Liaozhai zhiyi; one side with two men in a garden setting, looking through the window of a pavilion at a lady eating; the two characters Huangying, written in the upper left corner in neat kaishu (official script) identifying the story; the other side with a man holding a candle and a lady a mirror up to the face of another lady who has been playing the guqin which is on a table in front of her, all in an interior setting, with a garden scene visible through a large square window; inscribed in the upper left corner with the title Huainian in neat kaishu followed by ‘made by Ye Zhongsan in the ninth month of the kuilai year’ in xingshu (draft script); with one seal of the artist yin (‘seal’) in negative seal-script.

Apricot Tree Studio of the Ye family, Beijing, 1923
Height: 6.6 cms
Stopper: glass with white glass finial

These two subjects are discussed at some length by Virginia Mead in ‘A Guide to Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Liao Chai Chih I’, Journal, ICSBS, Autumn 1980, pp. 1 - 37. The Ye family, particularly during the Apricot Grove Studio years, drew extensively upon this popular work of fiction to add to their already extensive repertoire.
35. Glass, transparent; the plain flattened form painted on the inside with two scenes; on one side a fisherman negotiates a fishing boat in a high wind through the reedy waters of a lake, with distant foothills disappearing into mist; four characters inscribed above in neat kai shu (official script): ‘The boat returns in the rain and wind’; and on the other is a still-life scene of an ornamental rock set in front of two vessels, one a squat vessel with ring handles holding a spray of blossoming prunus, the other a tripod incense burner and cover, the exterior decorated with the eight trigrams; inscribed in the upper left corner in xing shu (draft script) ‘respectfully made for the pure enjoyment of respected elder brother Yizhai, in the ninth, Autumn month of the wuzi year, following the brush-style of Nantian laoren’; followed by two seals of the artist, yin (‘seal’) in negative seal-script, and Leyuan in positive seal-script, the latter set below the rock in the lower left corner.

Zhou Leyuan, Beijing, 1888
Height: 6.0 cms
Stopper: coral carved with a chi dragon on a dark green glass collar

Zhou Leyuan was unquestionably one of the masters of the inside painted medium during its zenith at the turn of the century in Beijing, ranking alongside Ding Erzhong in terms of consistent high quality, artistic integrity and knowledge of the artistic traditions of his culture, reference to which was a prerequisite for communicating through art. The art was essentially a commercial one, with the exception during this period of Ding Erzhong, and Zhou excelled over his contemporaries in artistic achievements, apparently never compromising his art with lesser works pandering primarily to the marketplace. His scholarly subjects come closest to bridging the gap between the literati tradition which he emulated and the commercial market which sustained him. Here, he works in the brush-style of Nantian laoren, the early Qing master, Yun Shouping. Style was an important language in Chinese painting, where references to earlier artists in subject, brushwork or even just the general spirit, were a powerful force in artistic communication.
Glass, transparent; the plain flattened form painted inside with two scenes; one side with a landscape in the orthodox tradition, with an open pavilion set beneath towering pines against a background of distant, cloud-enshrouded hills with a long, dividing waterfall tumbling into an unseen gorge; the reverse with four fan-tailed carp and five smaller fish swimming in a shallow pond among aquatic plants; inscribed in the upper left corner ‘painted at the capital by Zhou Leyuan at the beginning of winter of the gengjin year’ in elegant xingshu (‘draft script’); with one seal of the artist yuan yin (‘seal of yuan’) in negative seal-script.

Zhou Leyuan, Beijing, 1890
Height: 6.5 cms
Stopper: coral, set on a yellow glass collar
Provenance: Hugh M Moss private collection

Another of the features which separates Zhou Leyuan from the many artists who followed him was his fluency in calligraphy. His style is confident, elegant and individual (within the accepted mainstream style of the fourth century giant of calligraphy, Wang Shizhi, whose domination of the calligraphic tradition of China was almost complete until the late Qing dynasty). It is in the calligraphy, for instance, that it becomes easy to recognize the works of the Ye family when they exactly copy Zhou’s style and use his name for commercial purposes. The Ye’s came closest to being able to imitate the master, but they never achieved his fluency of calligraphy.
37. Glass, transparent; the elongated, plain flattened form painted inside with two scenes; one side with a solitary figure in a fishing boat approaching a small dwelling on a tree-lined river with distant mountains; the other side with a still-life scene with an eccentric rock formation in the foreground, and three vessels behind, one a tapering rectangular vase with cracked surface and ring handles holding a spray of peonies; one low container with an incurving lip containing grass, and a third a tripod incense burner, tapering towards the mouth, with its original top; inscribed in the upper left corner ‘this immortal stone is of first class quality, its whole body is delicate and clear; peace and prosperity; fire in the furnace and purity. Made by Zhou Leyuan at the beginning of summer of the gengyin year’ in elegant xingshu (draft script); followed by one seal of the artist, yin (‘seal’) in negative seal-script.

Zhou Leyuan, Beijing, 1890
Height: 6.6 cms
Stopper: bone, set on a silver collar
Provenance: Hugh M Moss private collection
Xaviere and Jean Pigoreau

The inscription here refers to the various elements of the still-life scene. The first part refers to the rock; the next to the peony representing peace and prosperity, and the last to the ceramic vessels. Ornamental rocks, which Zhou here lauds, were highly valued by the influential minority since well before the Song dynasty. They were an essential part of a scholar’s gardens and interiors and, polished and set on stands, figured predominantly in his studio. In a culture which recognized the combination of the human mind and nature in absolute union as the highest conceivable attainment, such rock sculptures were the equivalent of the works of our great Western sculptors, and the results were accorded similar respect, granted similar value, and were capable of the same high level of aesthetic communication. Zhou Leyuan’s command of the formal languages of painting is of the highest order. However often he may have repeated a subject, quite acceptable in the sophisticated world of Chinese painting, each painting was invented anew in its formal languages, keeping it vital where lesser artists became merely repetitious.
38. Glass, transparent; the plain flattened form painted with a continuous scene of pines and other trees in a landscape with distant, towering mountains; one side showing two scholars seated in conversation in a substantial, open pavilion, with the roofs of the house to which it is attached showing above foliage beyond; the other side with three scholars in a skiff on a boating trip; inscribed in the upper left corner 'painted by Zhou Leyuan and written at the capital in the mid-Autumn of the xinmao year in flowing xingshu (draft script); followed by one seal of the artist yin ('seal') in negative seal-script.

Zhou Leyuan, Beijing, 1891
Height: 6.5 cms
Stopper: coral with integral finial
Provenance: Mr and Mrs B Wald

By the 1890s Zhou had settled into a style of landscape painting based loosely upon that of the early Qing master, Wang Hui, (Wang Shigu—one of the famous ‘four Wangs’ of Chinese painting). It is a distinguishing feature of Zhou’s work that, when blown up in photographic projection and thus separated from its miniature and functional format, his painting stands independently as excellent within the broader tradition of Chinese painting. This can be said of few artists. It is apparent here in the subtlety of line in the depiction of the trees, and in particular noticeable in the way line is used to depict the three figures in the boat. Dark and light, wet and dry strokes are harmoniously balanced to allow both rich characterization of the subject and independent fascination and satisfaction of brushwork. Indeed, Wang Hui himself was often rather boring in his orthodox expression, repeating formulae that were becoming rapidly exhausted of spirit even in his day—Zhou, on the other hand, is never boring and this is a superb example of his mature landscape painting.
39. Glass, transparent; the plain, flattened form painted inside with two scenes; one side with a lone figure seated in meditation on the prow of a boat which is moored in the shade of a foreground bank with overhanging trees, the distant bank with similar trees giving way to mist-enshrouded hills and distant mountains; the other side with a still-life scene of a delightfully eccentric natural rock-sculpture set in front of three vessels, one a tall tapering vase with loose ring handles in which a spray of prunus grows, another a rectangular low container of grass, and the third, a teapot, probably intended to depict Yixing pottery, from its colour and form; inscribed in the upper right corner 'made by Zhou Leyuan in the brush-style of Xinle shanren', in flowing xingshu (draft script); followed by one seal of the artist, yin ('seal') in negative seal- script.

Zhou Leyuan, Beijing, circa 1885
Height: 5.8 cms
Stopper: reddish-brown quartz

By the mid 1880s Zhou was already a mature artist, consistently creating a high quality of work in his own distinctive style—a style which was to revitalize and popularize the art of painting on the inside of snuff bottles, bringing it to new heights. Although we can see the beginnings of his later style of landscape painting in this example, the style is not yet based largely upon that of Wang Hui—at this early period, Zhou seems to hint rather at the style of the Song and pre-Song masters (albeit probably seen through later eyes). Although the style differs quite markedly between this and the previous example, the subtlety and power of his later works exist already and his brushwork is mature and forceful. A comparison of this still-life scene and the later examples in nos. 34 and 36 show how Zhou consistently varied his compositions of a similar subject in order to keep them vital, both for himself and for his audience. Although undated, the style of landscape places this work clearly in Zhou's early period (from 1882-1886) and the calligraphic style suggests the latter end of that period.
40. Glass, transparent; the plain, flattened form painted inside with two scenes; on one side a landscape, with two scholars seated on a grassy bank outside a thatched, open pavilion nestling in shrubbery beyond a grassy bank with two mature pine trees, the distance revealing a mountainous range with a long waterfall beyond a misty valley left unstated; the other side with a characteristic still life, with a delightfully formed natural rock-sculpture in front of a tapering rectangular vessel full of plum blossom, and an Yixing teapot; inscribed in the upper left corner and lower left margin ‘One should not leave ink overnight in an ancient inkstone; in a simple vessel, I freely place some fresh flowers. Mid-autumn of the dinghai year, Zhou Leyuan’, all in expressive xingshu (draft script); followed by one seal of the artist.

Zhou Leyuan, Beijing, 1887
Height: 6.1 cms
Stopper: tourmaline

A comparison of this landscape with those of nos. 38 and 36 demonstrates again how Zhou reinvented his subjects every time, never slipping into repetition as his contemporary artists frequently did with their standard design.

The poetic inscription accompanying the still-life scene acts as communication between scholars. The ancient inkstone, and the admonition not to leave ink in it overnight, are shared experiences and knowledge of the literati, and the free, spontaneous placing of freshly blooming prunus in a suitable vase represents the unfettered ideal of the scholar in everything undertaken: having trained the spirit, the literatus aspired to doing everything with spontaneity and naturalness, be it the placing of flowers or the management of Empire.
41. Glass, transparent; the plain, flattened form painted inside with a continuous landscape scene with various mature trees, including pines, set in a mountainous setting with a tumbling waterfall; one side with a figure punting a boat close to shore where a small house stands beneath the trees; the other side showing a sage strolling with his walking staff followed by a young attendant; inscribed in the upper-left corner Painted by Leyuan of the Zhou family in the seventh month of the gengyin year in elegant xingshu (draft script); followed by one seal of the artist, Le in negative seal script.

Zhou Leyuan, Beijing, 1890
Height: 6.2 cms
Stopper: coral, carved with a floral motif with a pearl finial, set on a green glass collar
Provenance: Hugh M Moss private collection
Dr. Paula Hallett

This is one of Zhou's later masterpieces which, by fortunate circumstances, has remained almost untouched by use, leaving the original colours and subtlety of expression as close to the original condition as could be expected.

It is interesting to note that Zhou quite naturally seems to have taken his artistic integrity sufficiently seriously to vary the shapes of his bottles as subtly as he varied their content. From the excellent group of his works gathered here, this additional subtlety of expression is obvious. Although all are of plain, flattened form, there are no two alike and in each the painting is perfectly matched to the different form.
42. Quartz; chalcedony of pale brownish-grey colour with inclusions of dark brown and paler golden-brown; carved on one side to show the silhouette, enhanced by some very low relief carving, of a one-horned, mythical beast (xiezhai) with two bats flying in the visible vapour which emerges from the beast’s mouth.

1760 - 1860
Height: 6.6 cms
Stopper: coral, set on a gilt-bronze collar
Provenance: Dr and Mrs Stephen Weisz

With the popular series of so-called ‘silhouette’ chalcedonies, a piece of stone is cut to leave on the surface thin slivers of contrasting colour which run through the stone. This thin layer then either forms a purely natural design of some sort, which is rarely the case, or, much more commonly, a design suggested by the natural markings is enhanced by very low relief carving, as in this example. Here the two-dimensionality of the silhouette concept is ingeniously enhanced by the clever use of a second, paler layer of colour beneath the mythical beast, giving the design considerable depth. The small, pale irregular ‘holes’ in this lower layer, close to the beast’s paws are also fortunate, resembling pebbles and providing a ground upon which the beast exists, adding considerably to the impression of three-dimensionality.

The xiezhai, with its single horn, was a popular mythical beast and a symbol of justice. With its single horn it was thought to be able to balance questions of right or wrong, good or evil, etc. and so became the emblem of imperial censors and judges. The bats are ubiquitous symbols of good luck. Perhaps the implication here is that from a state of justice in the land will come manifold good luck. Of course, on the other hand, the little brute may be breakfasting on a couple of bats.
43. Quartz: chalcedony of pale, slightly brownish-grey colour with inclusions of agate striations and mottled patches of dark brown colouring; carved to reveal on one side an almost natural silhouette design of two birds in an abstract setting.

1750 - 1860
Height: 6.2 cms
Stopper: turquoise, carved with a reclining water buffalo
Provenance: Mary and George Bloch

One of the delights of this art form is the positive inclusion of the audience as creative partner in the artistic process—essential in all art, but recognized in China for millenia and efficiently aimed at in selective formats and materials. To the Chinese, abstraction in our Western sense (of attempting to isolate the languages of art in order to deal with them—eliminating subject matter and concentrating on form, for example) was as unnecessary as choosing which leg to walk on. The Chinese mind simply abstracted the languages of art as a syncretic exercise without rejecting any. Thus, in the high art of painting, they have been painting magnificently abstract and abstract expressive, etc., paintings made up entirely of representational detail for more than a thousand years. In all their high arts, a great deal is very intentionally left to the audience, and because of this the arts became esoteric as the subtlety of what was included as a guide and what was left out as unnecessary (as the audience honed its aesthetic techniques over the centuries) increased. This aesthetic is reflected throughout the arts of China, which are all informed at some level by the high arts of the influential minority. Here, the two birds are clearly delineated, but their setting is entirely abstract. It could be interpreted as the branches of a tree; a rocky grotto; even the banks of a stream. This constant discovery of new possibilities in the arts of China keeps the works vital indefinitely. As we are drawn into the arts, they seem to grow in stature: every time we re-approach a fine work of art, we are able to see something fresh in it. The Chinese have simply understood for more than two and a half millenia that as we do so, we discover, more importantly, something new in ourselves. Art, at the highest level, is a profoundly civilizing act of communication which is ultimately with the self.

Cf. Hall, Robert Chinese Snuff Bottles II, October 1989, no.41 & 42.
44. Quartz: chalcedony of pale, brownish-grey colour with dark brown inclusions; carved on one side in very slight relief to enhance a partly natural design of a hawk dispensing with its prey, a smaller bird, on the ground while the luckless victim’s mate looks on helplessly.

1780 - 1880
Height: 5.8 cms
Stopper: coral, set on a silver collar
Provenance: Gordon Armsby
Published: Moss, Hugh M. Chinese Snuff Bottles of the Silica or Quartz Group, London: Bibelot 1971, p.39, no.90

Birds, of various sorts and in an endless variety of combinations and situations, are the most popular subject for the silhouette chalcedony group. This is, presumably, partly due to their relatively simple outline which made it easier to make sensible natural markings in the stone with a minimum of carving. However, it may also have been a matter of fashion. Certain subjects, once established, tended to be repeated in certain art forms. In Chinese aesthetics, subject matter, one of the five languages of visual art, along with form, line, colour and texture, tended to become less important the higher the art form. It acted in the high arts as little more than a key to the doors of perception: once these doors were opened the other languages took over. The constant repetition of subject, therefore, rather than making the art boring often tended to make it comfortably familiar, thus granting even easier access to the important languages of communication in which the real meaning was couched. As a friendly face smiling welcomingly at the door encourages one to enter; so a popular subject welcomes one to the art form.
45. Quartz; chalcedony of rich, caramel-brown colour with darker inclusions and some paler mottling; carved in relief with a continuous design, concentrated on one side, of a woodcutter, his backpack of firewood strung across his shoulders, standing on a rock and chatting to a fisherman seated in the prow of his sampun, having just hooked a large fish from a lotus-filled lake, while a bat flies overhead.

1760 - 1860
Height: 6.7 cms
Stopper: coral mounted with a jadeite finial, set on a yellow glass collar
Provenance: Jack Rose
Published: Moss, Hugh M. Chinese Snuff Bottles of the Silica or Quartz Group, London: Bibelot 1971, p.55, no. 141

An amusing irony arose in Chinese society between the influential minority who governed and the vast majority of peasants who were governed. Unless one was born into the imperial family, the highest social state of any who could sensibly aspire to it—and the envy of all those who could not—was recognized scholarship. The scholar who passed the various state exams was rewarded by high position and commensurate wealth and power. However, the ultimate aim of the scholar was wisdom, which tended to bring with it aspiration to the simple life, which was epitomized in an idealized manner by the simple life of the peasant. In this irony a strangely harmonious balance is perceivable which fits comfortably with the whole of Chinese life, with its highest ideal of absolute and harmonious union made manifest in duality: yinyang—the mighty and the lowly each an essential part of each others’ lives and aspirations. Here two representational rustic pursuits, those of wood-gathering and fishing, represent the rustic ideal for the literatus so that, seated in his sedan chair, surrounded by servants, he can be reminded of the idealized harmony of the simple, country life.
46. Quartz; chalcedony of pale, slightly brownish-grey colour, with varied inclusions of warmer, golden brown and speckled dark brown; the colours ingeniously and delightfully used with a little very low relief carving to bring out a natural design concentrated on one side of the bottle of three bats emerging from a gourd in a swirl of vapour; the natural markings in the stone lending a misty air to the entire background most effectively; an incised, curving, rectangular cartouche in the left margin inscribed 'great blessings throughout the ages'.

1740 - 1860
Height: 5.5 cms
Stopper: coral, carved with a chi dragon
Provenance: Eric Young

Quite apart from its many functional roles, the gourd in China assumed various levels of symbolic meaning. One of these relates to the Daoist, or mystical, concept of a reality beyond the everyday world of the senses. Stories abound in Chinese mythology of Daoists disappearing into this alternative reality as a metaphorical, physical act (which made the concept more acceptable to the intellectual faculties of mind). As the Daoist was believed to have been capable of disappearing through the neck of the gourd to arrive at a paradisaical realm of reality, so from within the gourd could come physical manifestations of this other realm. Here, three bats—an auspicious number but also the lowest number that implies an indefinite quantity (from the Daoist Classic Daode jing 'The Dao gives birth to the one; the one to the two, and the two to the myriad phenomena')—represent manifold happiness or blessings. This is as fine an example of the subject that is known, with a richly coloured stone brilliantly used to create a delightful picture with the infinite capacity to reveal meaning to which all great Chinese art aspires.
47. Quartz; chalcedony of warm, pale brownish grey colour with faint agate striations and varied darker markings ranging from a warm mid-brown, to a darker tone; the plain flattened form with a design on one side of what, for consistancy, we should perhaps now call a Beijingese cavorting with two doves, with a very definite elongated marking above which is open to interpretation; the bottle extremely well hollowed.

1780 - 1860
Height: 6.1 cms
Stopper: jadeite

While this beast appears to be somewhat similar to that depicted in 42, here the obvious single horn is missing, and the face reveals the features of a Beijingese. This identification is confirmed by its conjunction with two doves. The Beijingese with doves first appears to have become a very popular motif during the first half of the nineteenth century, from which period this bottle probably dates.
48. Quartz; chalcedony, of slightly brownish-grey colour with golden- and dark-brown inclusions; the bottle carved to reveal a completely natural, continuous abstract pattern in which it is easy to see a duck feeding at the edge of a pond; the bottle extremely well-hollowed.

1760 - 1860
Height: 5.5 cms
Stopper: coral, set on a black glass collar
Provenance: Dr. and Mrs Glenn W. Gordon

In this delightfully abstract pattern, it is possible to see several different scenes—for instance, gourds hanging on a vine. However, as all art has been said to aspire to the state of music in the West (since it is the least intellectually inhibited by its medium of expression), so in China all arts aspired to the highest possible role: that of transcending the intellect in search of a higher order of understanding. The arts, therefore, were constantly cross-references, and the distinctions between them at a given level of audience comprehension began to dissolve. To the highly trained aesthete, the brushwork of Ni Zan might be seen in a natural marble panel, or the music of the qin heard in the pines of one of his paintings. Here, the natural markings have been left to speak for themselves because of the powerful and natural language of line inherent in the material. The swirling, twisting, 'brushwork' of nature provides a wonderful dance to the initiated viewer—even 'ink-tones' are present in the changes in colour, echoing dry and wet, dark and light, ink markings in a single flourish of the brush.
49. Quartz; chalcedony of varied, pale, brownish-grey colour with darker brown, speckled inclusions and dark brown dendritic markings; a natural design concentrated on one side of trees and shrubs growing along a bank; the bottle extremely well-hollowed.

1740 - 1860
Height: 5.4 cms
Stopper: coral, set on an imperial-yellow glass collar
Provenance: Galia Baylin
Hugh M Moss private collection
Dr. and Mrs Glenn W. Gordon

This is one of the better-known and subtler evocations of landscape in this art form. What appears at first to be no more than random markings begins with familiarity to assume the form of distinct landscape elements. At first the trees, which are the most obvious elements, are seen; then the banks upon which they grow; then the lake, bridge and distant mountains enshrouded in mist. The flying bird, it must be admitted, might have been more believably interpreted as a far distant tree, thus enlarging the size of the lake, but anyone who has seen a cormorant or a king-fisher dive at the surface of the water while fishing will perhaps forgive the present interpretation.
50. Quartz; chalcedony, of rich caramel-brown colour with inclusions of brilliant white agate striations; the colours excitingly used to create a continuous, low-relief design of a hawk in the branches of a flowering prunus tree.

1780 - 1880
Height: 6.2 cms
Stopper: coral, set on a green-stained bone collar
Provenance: Bob C. Stevens, Dr and Mrs Glenn W. Gordon

The harmonious balance between abstraction and representational reality in the highest pictorial arts of China is epitomized here, where a recognizable subject is transformed into a vital and exciting abstraction using the natural markings in the stone. Neither is emphasized, neither rejected, and because of this the combination equals a sum far greater than its parts. In art, two and two make five: in high art, they make an infinite number; in the highest exchange with art, where artist and audience join in creative harmony with the cosmos, they dissolve into union beyond all definitions and their limitations.
51. Quartz; chalcedony of varied, caramel-brown colour with pale, beige-brown opaque markings and translucent very pale, almost white-beige inclusions; carved in relief, using all the natural colours with imagination, with two scenes; on one side two mandarin ducks swimming in formalized waves beneath lotus, with one group of lotus leaves carved from a whitish patch of stone which runs around one edge of the bottle and a patch of millet growing close to the other edge; the other side with what appears to be a mythical beast crouching behind two large lingzhi fungus heads watching a bat flying above a small, curly cloud formation.

1760 - 1880
Height: 6.5 cms
Stopper: amethyst
Provenance: Dr and Mrs Glenn W. Gordon

This is one of a distinctive group of quartz carvings where this characteristic type of chalcedony was used to great effect at some time during the mid- to later-Qing period. Cf. 50
52. Quartz; chalcedony, of pale, mottled, grey-beige colour with a separate layer of dark brown concentrated on one side and used to form a high relief design of a horse beneath a pine tree.

1820 - 1900
Height: 6.7 cms
Stopper: bronze, chased with a reticulated and freely moving dragon
Provenance: Alice B. McReynolds
Dr and Mrs Glenn W. Gordon
Illustrated: Journal, ICSBS, September 1975, p.16

Although one or two early snuff bottles may exist of large size, the general trend towards larger bottles appears to have been a later development, perhaps beginning in the mid-Qing period and becoming exaggerated by the end of the nineteenth century. The early concept of large bottles being used for storage from which little ones were filled seems rather unlikely in the light of the manner in which snuff was imported and stored—in large glass bottles with suitably wide necks for access, and firm, decanter-like stoppers to seal in the freshness. To shift snuff from this ideal storage facility through a funnel, into the narrow neck of a large snuff bottle, so that the whole process could be repeated every time a smaller one was to be filled would have been impractical and unnecessary. It is more likely that larger bottles were simply made for more snuff—perhaps for the home or studio where it was intended to serve several people and not be carried about on the person. As such, from the known examples, this tended to be a later development in snuffing paraphernalia. In terms of the chalcedony group represented by this bottle, it is becoming rather large, although by no means as large as some that are known. That, the subject matter and manner of carving would suggest a mid-nineteenth century date as likely for this carving.
53. Quartz; chalcedony of pale, warm grey colour with opaque milky areas and various tones of brown inclusion, ranging from a pale yellowy-beige to deep almost black-brown; carved in varying relief using every last nuance of colour to great effect with a continuous rocky landscape design with a pine tree and swirling clouds, in which on one side appears to be a military figure kneeling on a rocky ledge, while what is presumably his horse, although it is uncaparisoned, stands on a ledge above him, its head turned sharply downwards towards the figure; on the other side Liu Hai is shown with his familiar three-legged toad, and a gourd, from which emerges a swirl of mist reaching up a rocky gorge and entwining with the vapour emerging from the toad’s mouth to join the clouds encircling the shoulders of the bottle.

Suzhou, 1750 - 1860
Height: 6.00 cms
Stopper: tourmaline set on an emerald-green jadeite collar

The Suzhou school of carvers, working in however many workshops throughout the snuff bottle period, is legendary for its superb carving and imaginative and all encompassing use of colour. Here, these qualities are epitomized in an example where a rich variety of colours was naturally available in the stone to begin with—a feature which has often brought the best out of the Suzhou carvers.
54. Quartz: chalcedony, of mottled pale beige, light and dark brown colouring, suffused with icy opacity; carved in varied relief with a continuous rocky landscape scene with a pine tree and swirling clouds through which turbulent waters flow; one side showing a sage seated watching a wild horse frolicking beneath a bat in the wilderness; the other with a fisherman on a rocky ledge, pulling forth a giant carp from the formalised waves of the rushing river, to the lower left edge of which is carved a bee in flight; three characters incised above the fishing rod in xingshu (draft script) reading 'picture of obtaining profit'.

Suzhou, 1750 - 1860
Height: 5.2 cms
Stopper: jadeite with a separate jadeite finial of more intense colour
Provenance: Eric Young

Here again, with the legendary imagination and quality of the Suzhou school, a delightful and varied material has been transformed into an evocative scene using the infinite variety of markings with great skill. The inscription refers to the analogy between catching a carp and the broader metaphor of gaining profit, thereby, at levels far exceeding its value as food. Other levels of meaning are implicit in the yang or male nature of the carp.

This material probably also carried a weight of meaning not obvious to the casual observer. One of the most highly valued stones in China was the humble soapstone, from which we, in the West, make talcum powder and little else. A variety of these stones attained special value because of their colour and particularly because of their softness and suitability for seal-carving, an art form which the literati could accomplish with a simple carving tool (the 'iron brush' of the literatus); and some were worth immense sums of money, far in excess of much more obviously precious materials such as gold or harder and, in the West, more priceless stones. One feature which was highly valued in such stones was a pattern of icy markings, which greatly enhanced their perceived value. It is possible to find such markings in certain other stones, particularly in the quartz family, and it is reasonable to expect that such markings would have linked a humble agate to the most valued stones in the Empire and lent them great meaning. This is as fine an example of such icy markings as can be found in quartz. In soapstone such material were eulogised as 'ice' stones and it is not fanciful to impart a similar level of value to other materials which refer to this esoteric aesthetic.
55. Quartz; chalcedony, of mottled pale grey-beige and varied brown; carved with a continuous rocky landscape scene with pines in which, on one side, two monkeys play with lingzhi fungus which gives way to the scene on the reverse via a seated scholar, low on one edge, who looks out on a pine clad bluff against which a bird flies above a branch, with clouds encircling the shoulders of the bottle.

Suzhou, 1750 - 1860
Height: 6.1 cms
Stopper: tourmaline
Provenance: Mme Nel and Xaviere and Jean Pigoreau

Early in the eighteenth century the Suzhou school settled into a preference for continuous rocky landscape scenes in which a variety of evocative subjects drawn from everyday life, mythology and legend, are depicted. Swirling clouds usually encircle the shoulders and necks of the bottles in this manner. An interesting feature here is the delightful abstraction, so prevalent in the high visual arts of China, of the pine needles which, while recognizable as representational detail, serve a higher, abstract function in accentuating a plain area of rockwork and using a band of colour which runs up its perimeter.
56. Quartz; transparent with inclusions of densely packed, black tourmaline needles, of the variety known as 'hair-crystal'; the elegant, plain, flattened spherical form undecorated to allow the fascination of the inclusions to be enjoyed without surface diversion; the mouth concave.

1730 - 1860
Height: 6.5 cms
Stopper: blue beryl, set on a lipped, coral collar
Provenance: Mrs R. Tucker

'Hair-crystal' was a favourite material for the snuff bottle carver, and strangely, extremely rare in any other format. The Chinese love of natural materials which echo the human arts is well-known, and in the finest of such bottles there is a language of line which evokes the texturing strokes of the height of Chinese brushwork painting—and, to the Western eye, the aesthetic of isolated line of Jackson Pollock, who was so influential in the modern Western revolution in painting of which he was one of the last giants. The revolution is now largely over, and the giants of the present and future will not be revolutionaries, but evolutionaries. This distinction, between revolution and evolution in art, has not yet been grasped by the vast majority of Western artists with the echo of revolutionary strife still ringing in their ears, but has been understood in Chinese art for centuries.
57. Quartz: crystal, transparent with a densely packed, fine, black tourmaline needles of the variety known as ‘hair-crystal’; the elegantly formed bottle, with neatly indented foot, undecorated.

1750 - 1860
Height: 6.4 cms
Stopper: coral, with a pearl finial, set on a green glass collar
Provenance: Dr and Mrs Glenn W. Gordon

A high elegance of form was often attained by the snuff bottle maker in materials which were allowed to speak for themselves without further decoration. The concentration and care which it would have required to accomplish this is worth considering. Each bottle was carved by hand, with very primitive tools which remained largely unchanged over the centuries. To achieve the perfect symmetry of form over the contours of a complex shape, such as this tapering oval, must have taken many hours of dedicated lapidary work, but far beyond this, a considerable skill. Any junior lapidary could make a cube fairly easily, but to maintain perfect integrity of form over the infinite variety of possible snuff bottle shapes was a remarkable feat. With plain, undecorated bottles, this formal integrity becomes one of the main languages of the art form, along with material, and in this field it defines a difference in desirability equal to the distinction between an imperial ivory and an anonymous, lesser work.
58. Quartz: crystal, transparent and flawless; carved as a simple, flattened sphere, slightly tapering towards the shoulders, which are carved in relief with mask and ring handles; the mouth concave.

1750 - 1880
Height: 6.0 cms
Stopper: tourmaline

Crystal was an extremely popular material for the Chinese lapidary, particularly for the snuff bottle carver. The difference between it and the glass which closely resembles it for most practical purposes may be the reason for its popularity. In China, the high arts were always directly and efficiently aimed at allowing the individual to transcend the limitations of the intellectual realm of understanding, and experience directly, without the preconceptual filter of memory and concept, a higher realm of consciousness. Because this higher realm is ineffable and, in practical terms, during our present evolutionary stage, accessible only to a minority, it has always been seen by the majority as a mysterious, esoteric realm. So, inevitably, the arts were tailored to suit: they became mysterious, esoteric and forbidding. In the difference between crystal and glass is a hint of how this subtle, in-group understanding worked in Chinese society even at a relatively low level. The two look the same to the untrained eye, and those who did not know would make no distinction. Those who could tell the difference, however, would grasp the significance of crystal. Without, perhaps, a word being said, the implications of its finite supply deep in the earth, its hardness to the lapidary’s tools, and the fact that both owner and guest were united, however slightly, by knowing the difference, were recognized. It was a subtle act of communication. It was not, perhaps, on so high a level as being able to read the character in literati brushwork or follow the labyrinthine allusions in poetry back to their source, but it fulfilled the same function.
59. Porcelain; covered with a white glaze; the bottle simply moulded in
two parts, with added mask and ring handles on each shoulder above
raised square panels; each side finely incised; one side with a scene from
the legendary Lanting Gathering, showing one of the forty-two attending
literati seated on a mat by the side of a river, along which float cups of wine
attended by young servants; the background with enclosing rocks; the
reverse with the entire text of the Lanting Preface, followed by in minutely
incised xingshu (draft script), with one seal of the artist; the incising all
filled with black ink.

1880 - 1920
Height: 5.5 cms
Stopper: amethyst, set on an ivory collar

The art of minutely incising snuff bottles, predominantly of glass and
porcelain, seems to have flourished at the very end of the Qing dynasty.
Here the text of the most influential piece of calligraphy in the entire
history of the art is reproduced. In AD 353, a Spring Purification Festival
was held at the Lanting (Orchid Pavilion), in Zhejiang province. Forty two
scholars attended and played a drinking game of poetry. Wang Shizhi, the
premier calligrapher of his day, and since canonized by the culture as the
virtual patron-saint of calligraphy, wrote a preface to the poems collected
in the game, which was his masterpiece, and has since echoed down the
centuries and become the cornerstone of the art of calligraphy in China.
For further information on this festival and the preface (including a full
translation), see Moss, Hugh M. Arts from the Scholar’s Studio, pp. 66-69
no 28.
60. Porcelain; decorated with *famille rose* enamels on a white, glazed ground; the flattened, tapering bottle painted on each side with almost identical panels of a butterfly hovering near flowering roses and chrysanthemums above a leafy plant painted only in iron-red enamel, as are the formalised floral designs which fill the flared-neck, shoulders and edges; the base inscribed *Qianlong niangzi* ('made during the Qianlong period') in neatly written seal script, also in iron-red enamel.

Imperial kilns, Jingdezhen, 1736 - 1795
Height: 7.6 cms.
Stopper: contemporaneous, matching porcelain, moulded as formalised chrysanthemum petals surmounted by a simulated coral finial, and enamelled in iron-red, turquoise and gold.

This is one of a large group of bottles first produced in the late Qianlong period at the imperial kilns at Jingdezhen for the court at Beijing. Once designs were approved, orders would have been placed in considerable numbers, although few survive other than in the imperial collections. The type of stopper is original, and may have been intended for this particular bottle, but again, they were mass produced at the time and this might be an example from another bottle. Qianlong examples are relatively rare. The vastly greater number known from the following Jiaqing reign suggest that the art began only in the dying years of the Qianlong period, and flourished during that of his successor. Thereafter, others were made with spurious Qianlong marks which have tended to obscure the rarity of the genuine examples, but differences in quality of enamels and style make them distinguishable.
61. Porcelain; painted in iron-red enamel with gold and black details on a white glazed ground; the simple, flattened spherical bottle, with slightly flared cylindrical neck, painted on each side with an identical design of a dragon medallion, the imperial, five-clawed beast with black pupils, clutching a pearl in its right foreclaws, the pearl being the only detail in gold enamel; the medallion completed with formalised flames surrounding the dragon; the base inscribed, also in iron-red enamel, Guangxu nianzhi ('made during the Guangxu period') in kaishu (official script).

Imperial kilns, Jingdezhen, 1875 - 1908
Height: 6.2 cms
Stopper: brown-stained quartz, set on a green glass collar
Provenance: Ko Family Collection
Dr and Mrs Stephen Weisz
Published: Ko Family Collection of Chinese Snuff Bottles, Part I, (1971), no 100

Imperial porcelain bottles become increasingly rare from the Daoguang period onwards as interest in, and administrative control over, the various imperial workshops around the country waned, and other more novel types of snuff bottle caught the flagging attention of the snuff-taking public. This example, however, demonstrates the capacity even at the very end of the Qing dynasty, for the production in the porcelain metropolis of China of finely formed and exquisitely enamelled snuff bottles.
62. Porcelain; biscuit with isolated areas of white glaze; moulded in varying relief with a continuous design of nine Buddhist lions playing with two beribboned, brocade balls against a ground of formalized clouds; the neck with a band of leiwên ('thunder pattern') above a shoulder mantle of formalized lingzhi lappets; the foot with a formalised chrysanthemum petal border; the base, lip, brocade balls and other small details glazed.

1830 - 1880
Height: 6.6 cms
Stopper: glass, with a separate glass finial
Provenance: Dr and Mrs Stephen Weisz

Although the vast majority of fine moulded porcelain snuff bottles date from the period between the last part of the Qianlong period and the beginning of the Daoguang era (from perhaps the 1770s through to the 1820s), the art form continued throughout the nineteenth century. As a rule, this continuing production relied upon copying earlier models and adding spurious marks, but occasionally honest, or unmarked examples occur and one is even recorded with a Tongzhi reign mark (Mary and George Bloch collection). This example probably dates from the mid-nineteenth century and is a novel example, using glaze in an unusual manner as minor emphasis.
63. Porcelain; covered with a white glaze and painted in famille rose enamels; the plain, flattened globular form covered in white enamel which is incised through to the glazed ground with a formalized wave design which is painted on each side with a deity; on one side a female, holding a vase, and riding a leaping stag; and on the other with another female, holding a feather fan, and riding on the back of a rather more sedate mythical beast; the base incised in white enamel with the mark Daoguang niánzhi ('made during the Daoguang period') in precise seal script.

Imperial kilns, Jingdezhen, 1821 - 1850
Height: 6.4 cms
Stopper: Quartz, hollowed out and painted green from inside, mounted on a gilt brass collar
Provenance: Dr and Mrs Stephen Weisz

During the Daoguang period, the court continued the intense interest in ceramic snuff bottle production of the previous several decades. Taste, however, changed radically, generally favouring painted enamels over moulded porcelain; and surface decoration over elaborate form. This extremely rare combination of subject, enamelling method and mark is the result of explorations during the Daoguang period of the various possibilities of painted enamels on porcelain. The incised enamel ground was also a popular decorative format during the first half of the nineteenth century, although not so much on snuff bottles as on other wares.
64. Porcelain; covered in a white glaze and decorated with *famille rose* enamels; the flattened, panelled form painted on one side with an elaborate mountain dwelling, divided by clouds, with birds flying amidst pine trees and towering peaks; the reverse with a poetic inscription:

'A delicately balanced nest on the crumbling, ancient ramparts; Still it returns in due season to the front of the shrine. The high buildings reach the clouds, yet there is nowhere I can dwell; Whose home shall I fly to next?'

all in *kaishu* (official script) in black enamel; followed by two seals, *Qian* and *long* in positive seal script and iron-red enamel; the panels reserved in a surround of formalized flowers in iron-red enamel; the base with the four characters *Qianlong nianzhi* in iron-red enamel seal script.

Imperial kilns, Jingdezhen, 1736 - 1795  
Height: 5.4 cms  
Stopper: contemporaneous, matching porcelain stopper of the same type as no. 60, and probably the original  
Provenance: Mrs R. Tucker

The poem refers to the wandering nature of the unfulfilled self, here epitomized by the swallow. The first of the two seals following the inscription appears to be the character *san* ('three') but it is also the first of the Eighth Trigrams of Daoism, which is pronounced *qian* and was used by the Qianlong emperor as a homophonous alternative to the first part of his reign title. Here the poem would probably have come from the many thousands that he wrote on a variety of subjects.
65. Porcelain; covered with a white glaze and decorated with famille rose enamels; moulded in the form of a reclining lady, her left hand reaching down and holding her right foot as she reclines in a provocative pose; her elegantly coiffed hair set with pink flowers; her upper garment pale blue with fine black detailing and incised white enamel collar; her inner garments and trousers in iron-red enamel; bracelets on each arm in gold enamel; the left foot removable to form the stopper.

1800 - 1850
Length: 8.8 cms
Stopper: porcelain and original
Provenance: Mrs R. Tucker
Published: Hugh Moss *Chinese Snuff Bottles*, No.5, 1969, front cover and p. 63, no. 55
Similar example: Ko Family Collection of Chinese Snuff Bottles, Part II, no. 7

This extremely rare mould was probably produced in the first half of the nineteenth century—note the similarity between the white, incised enamel collar on the robes here and the work on no. 63 which dates from the Daoguang period. This group of reclining ladies with their feet removable as stoppers were almost certainly intended to be mildly, perhaps even wildly erotic. In China, the female foot, crunched from youth into tiny slippers and never seen uncovered unless in the most intimate of circumstances, was as erotic to its culture as a glimpse of thigh would have been to a Victorian gentleman.
66. Porcelain; covered in a white glaze and decorated with famille rose enamels; moulded in relief with a continuous garden scene in which various ladies disport themselves; on one side are three centred around a rock on the banks of a stream; a guqin set on the rock, and a distant male figure on an ox improbably descending a staircase; on the reverse are seen three more ladies on the terrace of the house which the garden serves, an elaborate doorway behind inviting access; the neck and foot painted with a scrolling, floral motif in black enamel; the base inscribed Qianlong nianzhi ('made during the Qianlong period') in iron-red enamel seal-script.

1840 - 1880
Height: 8.0 cms
Stopper: porcelain, moulded and enamelled in imitation of an original

This is an example of the typical later output of moulded porcelain snuff bottles made at some time during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. High quality and inventiveness of subject matter, which would have qualified them as highly innovative works within the medium in their own right had they been honestly marketed, are mildly tainted by the act of pandering to the marketplace in using a spurious reign mark. One can only assume that the connoisseurs of the day were easily fooled, or that the spurious marks were not intended to deceive but merely indicated respect for a well-established, earlier zenith of the art.
67. Porcelain; covered in a white glaze, with black enamel detail; moulded in the form of a Buddhist lion with a brocade ball in its open mouth and between its front paws, its eyes picked out in black enamel; the stopper set into the ball with its ribbons curling underneath the beast.

1796 - 1820
Length: 7.3 cms
Stopper: coral

This is perhaps the most delightful, and probably the earliest of a series of reclining Buddhist lion bottles of this design which were made throughout the early nineteenth century. It is characterized by its superb modelling and exuberant and confidently carved detail, which prompted the makers to leave it undecorated other than for the details of the eyes. This detailing of the eyes is probably significant. The dragon, in the famous and impossibly noisy dragon-dance of China, is brought to life when its eyes are painted in at a ceremonial moment in the dance by a guest of honour, and there may be some connection.
68. Porcelain; decorated in underglaze cobalt-blue; the flattened, circular shape resembling a Western watch, and painted with panels on each side; one side decorated with a scholar, holding a qin under his arm, strolling along a path in a landscape with a pavilion behind trees and distant mountains; the other with a similar scene, lacking the qin and the hint of a house; the surrounding area with bats and clouds reserved in white against the blue ground; the neck with a single band of formalized lingzhi.

1830 - 1880
Height: 6.5 cms
Stopper: coral

This is a most unusual example of the wide range of underglaze blue-and-white porcelains which figure so prominently in the latter part of the snuff bottle period, from the late eighteenth century onwards. This same shape sometimes occurs with a Western watch face painted in the circular panel and was certainly derived from the introduction to the Qing court of such novel toys. The Qing emperors were highly intrigued by Western watches and many were sent as tribute through the Jesuit missionaries in their attempts to curry favour on behalf of their religion. Ironically, the Chinese had forgotten that it was they who invented the mechanical clock centuries earlier, and simply lost interest in its development because of their general lack of interest in the technological, materialistic realm.
69. Porcelain; covered with a white glaze and painted in famille rose enamels; the flattened, spherical form with a recessed panel on each side moulded in bold relief with amorous scenes; one side with an interior setting in which a lady reclines on a day-bed in a distinctly uncomfortable pose awaiting what promises to be an interesting encounter with a bald-headed suitor who is positioned to impress—and is well suited to the role; that the lady is not his wife is indicated by the fact that he has kept on his shoes in case a quick get-away is necessary—unless this is a gentlemanly gesture at a semblance of decency; the other side with a similarly accessible lady positively vibrating with expectation as an equally bald lover approaches her with a still more formidable reason; clearly, he is prepared for an even quicker exit than the previous gentleman, as he has retained not only his shoes, but carries his clothing over his left arm as he prepares to impress; the significance of a ripe finger citron with two improbably large peaches beyond a distant railing is left to the imagination of the viewer; the surrouds gilt.

1790 - 1840
Height: 6 cms
Stopper: glass

70. Porcelain; decorated in underglaze cobalt-blue with iron-red and gold enamels; the flattened, panelled circular form decorated on one side with a rustic dwelling in a lake-side landscape; the other side with a similar scene with two standing figures; each panel enclosed within a thin gold line; the surrounds decorated with a continuous, interlocking swastika pattern; the neck with a formalised diaper of circles enclosing dots, the foot gilt; the base with a two character mark Zhuren ('to dwell in benevolence') in neat, iron-red enamel seal script.

1916 - 1930
Height: 4.5 cms
Stopper: gilt-enamel porcelain
Provenance: Count Kurt Blucher von Whalstatt
Mrs R. Tucker
Published: Moss, Hugh M. Snuff Bottles of China, London: Bibelot 1971, p.132, no.326
Similar example: Journal, ICSBS, March 1975, front cover; from the Collection of Edward Choate O'Dell; Stevens, Bob The Collectors Book of Snuff Bottles, John Weatherhill Inc., New York 1970, no. 312

The Zhuren Tang ('Hall for dwelling in benevolence') was the hall name adopted by Yuan Shikai, who proclaimed himself emperor in 1916 and ruled for a matter of months in a last desperate attempt to retrench from republic to empire. The imperial kilns were re-opened and a late florescence of the ceramic art occurred which lasted for some time after the short-lived reign. Several porcelains from this period bear this mark (see for instance Brush and Clay: Chinese Porcelain of the Early Twentieth Century nos. 154/5.) The association of the mark and the quality of the underglaze-blue suggest that this bottle was made either during, or probably shortly after the reign when the briefly established marks were continued. Perhaps the omission of the character for 'hall', indicates a date of production shortly after the end of the reign when respect for the Emperor was still sufficient for his hall name to be avoided, but the popularized name to continue to be meaningful commercially.
71. Porcelain; covered with a textured, dark-brown glaze; moulded in varying relief with a series of literati accoutrements including various vessels of lotus, peony, prunus, and orchid; a teapot and cup; an incense burner and water vessel; a ruyi sceptre and a fan; and various auspicious fruits; the shoulders with small mask and ring handles in high relief.

1820 - 1870
Height: 7.5 cms
Stopper: bronze, reticulated with a design of fruiting peach branches

The decoration on this bottle is from a mould which is otherwise unrecorded. It depicts the various trappings which might be found as functional and decorative playthings of the scholar in his studio. Formally and technically, the design is of top quality, evoking the scholar in his studio, surrounded by decorative, symbolic, functional and artistic playthings at a level that would certainly have made this bottle one of them. A fine moulding is lifted into a magical class, however, by the extraordinary glaze, or perhaps enamel, which completely covers the vessel. The textural quality of the surface adds immensely to the overall work of art, with its citrus-fruit stippling, and where it thins out on relief edges a fortuitous depth is added to the formal elements. The intention may have been to imitate iron, which is the most likely case, but leather is another remote possibility. There is, in the imperial collection now in the Palace Museum in Taipei, a moulded leather brushpot, so imitation in porcelain is not out of the question. However, beyond the surface imitation, which is relatively incidental to the work of art, the use of this richly textured, dark-brown, overall colour is a masterly stroke of subtlety in its own right.
72. Porcelain, covered with a white glaze and decorated with iron-red and gold enamel; inset with panels of *laque burgaute* with abalone shell inlaid on a black lacquer ground; the flattened, oval bottle with raised panels on all four sides; front and back inset with *laque burgaute*, one side with a deserted waterside pavilion beneath trees; the other with two scholars strolling in a rocky garden scene with overhanging trees; the edge panels each with rococo *chi* dragons; the surrounds, neck and foot with formalised floral designs in iron-red and gold enamel.

1750 - 1850  
Height: 6.9 cms  
Stopper: glass  
Provenance: Mr and Mrs Neil Henderson

This combination of porcelain and *laque burgaute* is extremely rare. It is found, occasionally, on larger ceramics where the porcelain vessel merely forms the base for an overall inlaid lacquer decoration, but this marriage of the two arts in equal partnership was a very rare occurrence indeed.
Porcelain covered with a caramel-brown enamel, with black and white detail; carved in varying relief and reticulated—the inner body of the bottle superimposed with a free-standing decorative surface which is pierced through—with a continuous scene of a four-clawed, fierce-looking dragon, disposed mainly on one side of the bottle as he chases a flaming pearl against a ground of formalized clouds; the eyes in white with black pupils.

Attributed to Wang Bingrong, 1820 - 1860
Height: 6.0 cms
Stopper: porcelain with carved, formalised chrysanthemum petal design
Provenance: Dr and Mrs Glenn W. Gordon

Wang Bingrong produced a series of bottles of exactly this type, some reticulated, some not, in a variety of colours. Others exist in pale powder-blue, yellow, green and white, and bear his signature. Wang, in the tradition of well-established craftsmen in China, probably had relatives trained to augment the output under his well-known name and to carry on after his death. Wang and his contemporary individual porcelain carvers, all of whom signed their names, represent a rare phenomenon in Chinese potting. As a rule, and for many centuries, potters had been almost totally anonymous. Occasionally, a famous superintendent of the imperial kilns was recorded, and more rarely still an individual potter would gain sufficient fame to be noted and prompt him to sign his works. The first time this happened on any serious scale, however, was in the first half of the nineteenth century, when the gradual enlargement of the high arts of China began to encompass all sorts of endeavours previously considered to be mere crafts. The once clear distinctions between the influential minority of aesthetic leaders, and the trailing train of craftsmen followers began to break down. During the nineteenth century many craftsmen rose to become recognized as artists by the literati elite, thus encouraging them to assume an individual identity in their works. This was the case with the Wang Bingrong / Chen Guozhi phenomenon of the first half of the century.
74. Yixing stoneware; covered with polychrome enamels; the flattened bottle with recessed panels front and back, decorated with charmingly exaggerated landscape scenes in boldly brushed enamels; the surrounds covered with a plain, cobalt blue enamel; the base covered with a cracked white enamel.

Yixing, 1800 - 1850  
Height: 6.25 cms  
Stopper: original Yixing stoneware with a green enamel  
Provenance: Ko Family  
   Dr and Mrs Stephen Weisz  
Published: Ko Family Collection of Chinese Snuff Bottles, Part I, no. 50  

But for the pink sun on one side of this bottle, the palette would pass for traditional. As a rule the Yixing potters were not governed to quite the same extent as their Jingdezhen colleagues by the distinction between the traditional, so-called famille verte palette and its replacement, the Qing palette referred to as famille rose. The Yixing potters were rather less industrialized in their output and, with their scholarly connections through tea-wares and literati trappings, maintained a generally freer artistic attitude to their output. At the height, Yixing wares were recognized as being a higher art form than the output of Jingdezhen. The enamelling of Yixing first seems to have begun in the late Kangxi period, when blank Yixing pieces were sent to the court to be enamelled in Beijing, and this seems to have inspired the use of enamels locally at Yixing. However, the period of florescence of enamelled Yixing appears to have been during the first half of the nineteenth century, from which period this bottle dates.

An original Yixing stopper is an extreme rarity, and we may assume that this is an old one, if not the original.
75. Pottery, of dark-brown colour with green and crackled pale beige enamelled decoration; the elongated, flattened pear-shaped bottle painted with enamels; on one side a branch of blossoming prunus in beige is offset by a green enamelled signature 'painted by Mr. Han Qing' in loose kaishu (official script); the other side with a poetic inscription in lishu (clerical script):

'Certainly one must strive for heavenly favour; Then good fortune will stay forever. Once attained, nothing is inappropriate.'

One edge inscribed in beige enamel 'painted by Mr. Shitian'; the other inscribed 'first winter [month] of the kuizi year', both in the same loose kaishu of the maker's signature; the base with an impressed, two character seal of the maker, one character de ('virtue') the other clearly impressed but unreadable as any known character, in positive seal script.

Attributed to Beijing, 1833 or 1893
Height: 7.5 cms
Stopper: carnelian, set on a silver collar

Although this material closely resembles Yixing stoneware, and the enamels are also similar to those used in this potting area, it is more likely to be a similar looking, highly refined pottery or stoneware which is thought to have been a product of Beijing. It resembles a series of very similar cricket vessels (cages, fighting pens, etc.) which are traditionally attributed to Beijing, and which bear the signatures and impressed seals of the makers in a similar manner to that of the Yixing potteries.

The poem inscribed here refers to the highest level of consciousness recognized by the Chinese: that level of absolute harmony of self and universe from which all things flow naturally—the enlightened state. One strives for it, and once attained in an enlightening moment of comprehension, everything falls into place and the resulting sage is incapable of inappropriate behaviour. It is the most highly respected state of consciousness of the Oriental approach to life.

The unreadable character of the base seal may suggest that the potter, although aspiring to literati pretensions in his output and decoration, lacks the necessary literacy and understanding of obscure scripts to carry off his pretensions. Either that or his level of literacy far outweighs our own, and those of the scholarly experts to whom this seal has been shown, and he knows of a script we have been unable to find. The double signature, one
identifying the maker and the other the painter has various possible meanings. Either the potter was different from the enameller, and both are identified by the latter; or the maker and enameller is Han Qing and Shitian (‘stone field’) is the sobriquet of the famous early Ming dynasty artist Shen Zhou and it is to him the prunus design refers.

It is not clear when this group of wares flourished, and both above dates are possible. From the point of view of enamelling, if we are to equate it to the Yixing potters, which is tenuous connoisseurship at best, the earlier date is more likely.
76. Duan stone, of even, dark-brown colour; the bottle of tapering, flattened shield-shape; carved in low relief on one side with a chi dragon breathing from its mouth a flow of vapour, which forms into the clouds amidst which it flies; the other side with a poetic inscription in neatly incised kaishu (official script) which may be translated as: 'Fragrant snuff, in powder form as if ground by stone; touches the nose. Vapours are nourished in the hand and rise like the clouds and mist of deep gorges.'

1750 - 1850
Height: 5.4 cms
Stopper: tourmaline set on a gilt bronze collar
Provenance: Dr and Mrs Stephen Weisz

Duan stone, mined in Guangzhou province, has been the preferred inkstone of the literati for at least a thousand years. It is ideally formed by nature to be sufficiently hard to grind the solid inksticks of the literatus, while being soft enough to allow a minute quantity of the material itself to enter the ink, granting it magic properties—partly, of course, psychological, like all magical properties. A fine Duan stone could attain, through these and its decorative properties, a value far beyond gold or precious stones by weight. Although the vast majority of Duan stone was used for inkstones, hence the alternative appellation of 'inkstone' for the material, it was also made into other literati trappings, including snuff bottles. The association would have been immediate amongst the literati, and it would not be possible to take snuff from such a bottle without making it.

The poem here refers in an obliquely allusive manner to the qualities of both the stone and the snuff it was intended to contain. It also refers to the fact that the higher the level of understanding one achieves in the Chinese hierarchy of consciousness, the less the apparent distinctions between different phenomena have real meaning. Gorge, mist, psychological vapours of the mind, and material all blend into a single experience. It is this esoteric, multi-levelled hierarchy of consciousness in Chinese culture which makes poetry so difficult to translate adequately into the languages of a more precisely descriptive culture. As the Daoist have said, over and over, what can be expressed is not ultimate reality—that is reserved for a realm of direct experience alone.
77. Albite, of even, mahogany-brown colour; the simply flattened form with a flared neck and neatly carved, oval foot.

1780 - 1880
Height: 5.8 cms
Stopper: coral, set on a gilt-bronze collar
Provenance: Bob C. Stevens
Published: Stevens, Bob The Collectors Book of Snuff Bottles, John Weatherhill Inc., New York 1970, no. 625

Bob Stevens had access to gemmological experts in California and tested many of his snuff bottles for material, and we presume that he had this one tested. Otherwise, it might reasonably have been called chert, which is the matrix in which flint is found.
78. Fossiliferous limestone, of very dark-grey colour, with grey and white inclusions of various water-bed fossils; the plain form elegantly carved in a tapering, flattened ovoid shape; the base with a neatly carved concave foot.

1780 - 1880
Height: 6.75 cms
Stopper: mother of pearl, set on a coral collar
Provenance: Bob C. Stevens

As sediment settled, millenia ago, in river-, lake- and sea-beds, the denizens of the deep were trapped in it, and became fossilized. These endlessly fascinating and never repetitive materials were highly valued for their natural resonance, and were frequently made into snuff bottles during the later snuff bottle period. The material is soft, and ideally tactile for a tactile object such as the snuff bottle, adding the resonance of individual patination to that of nature—again the combination of the human hand and the might of nature epitomizes the harmony of humankind and its environment.
79. ‘Puddingstone’, with pebbles of various colours of brown and grey set in a speckled matrix; the fascination of the material allowed to speak for itself in an elegant, plain form; the base flat, the mouth concave.

1780 - 1880
Height: 5.5 cms
Stopper: tourmaline, set on a blue glass collar

‘Puddingstone’, a much harder stone conglomerate than the sedimentary fossiliferous material of the previous example, was valued for the same reasons of endlessly different fascination in the materials of nature. Here flint pebbles are contained in a sedimentary matrix. This example is distinguished by the even and satisfying distribution of a series of small flint pebbles, cut through at the surface to reveal their cross-sections.
80. Painted enamels on metal, decorated in the famille rose palette; the tapering and round-shouldered cylindrical body painted with two foliate panels, one with an aged, bearded European in flowing robes, in an architectural setting with a young boy; the other side with a European lady in a similar setting holding the shoulders of a young girl; the surrounds with formalised floral motifs on a yellow ground; the base inscribed in neat, blue enamel kaishu 'Qianlong nianzhi' ('made during the Qianlong period'), on a white enamel ground; the neck and footrims gilt.

Guangzhou, 1736 - 1795
Height: 5.9cms
Stopper: matching and original, decorated with a stylised floral design on a yellow ground

The dual development of the painting of enamels, under European supervision in its earlier years, at Beijing and Guangzhou (Canton) during the eighteenth century, led to the production in the south of wares to suit the taste of the court at Beijing. Such wares were sent as tribute to the court and are well recorded. Stylistic analysis has reached a point today where the differences between the two are largely resolved. This is a very rare example of such a southern production made for the court during the Qianlong period, and although subtle details of style suggest its Guangzhou origins, it sets out to be, in terms of weight, quality and floral border style, a northern product in all but place of manufacture.
81. Bronze, of well-patinated, yellowish colour; the slightly flattened oval form with integral snuff dishes on each side surrounded by an incised design of dragons in clouds and flaming pearls; the edges each with raised oval panels with simply incised floral motifs; the base inscribed ‘made by Chen Rongzheng in the third year of the Shunzhi period’, in incised, characteristically scruffy kaishu (official script) with an oval cartouche.

Attributed to North China, 1646
Height: 5.6 cms
Stopper: coral, set on a silver collar
Provenance: Lilla S. Perry
Bob C. Stevens
Mary and George Bloch

This is one of the best known, and certainly best illustrated, examples of this early group of metal bottles from the beginning of the snuff taking tradition in the north of China. The integral snuff dish provided a practical alternative to the later fashion for separate snuff dishes to reduce the amount of paraphernalia to be carried by the snuffing Manchu who, as a horseman and warrior in those early days, needed a simple and convenient set of paraphernalia for his newly acquired habit.
82. Iron, damascened with heavy gold; the flattened, pear-shaped body with flared neck set upon a flaring, rectangular, deep foot; decorated with a design of heavy gold beaten onto the roughened surface, each side with a panel echoing the shape of the bottle with a Buddhist lion, one seated, one prancing, set amidst formalized clouds and surrounded by a band of still more stylized cloud design; all contained within a wide panel border of continuous *leiwen* (thunder pattern); the surrounds with a formalized, scrolling lotus design; the foot with a ring of lappets set above a border of raised dots which is echoed at the neck.

Tibet, 1700-1800
Height: 8.6 cms
Stopper: original, decorated with a design to match the foot decoration

In recent years, with crumbling respect for the political system of China imposed on the Tibetan people, a small trickle of fine works of art leaving the country has grown to a torrent. This is an outflowing matched by that of the mainland of China herself, where archaeological artefacts have been pouring out in quantities unseen since the early years of the century. Previously unknown masterpieces have appeared in the Western market, often re-defining our perception of various art forms. This unusually fine snuff bottle falls into this category, along with a group of superbly damascened iron pieces of other forms which have recently turned up in the marketplace. Extensive contacts between Tibet and China were maintained during the eighteenth century, and Tibetan Buddhism, together with its esoteric trappings, was popular at the Qing court. References to snuffing by travellers in Tibet and Mongolia are sufficient to suggest that the habit was by no means confined to China, even during its early years, and where the habit existed, the manufacture of snuff bottles would soon have followed. According to experts on Tibetan culture, this example dates from the eighteenth century, and is among the finest pieces of its kind. It is possible, of course, that it was made in Tibet as tribute to the Qing court, but there is no evidence to suggest this over it being a purely local product for local use.
83. Jet, black; the plain flattened form, carved on each shoulder with mask and ring handles.

1780 - 1860
Height: 6.4 cms
Stopper: tourmaline, set on a turquoise collar
Provenance: Dr and Mrs Stephen Weisz
84. Jet, black: the flattened, elongated bottle carved in high relief with two chi dragons, curling around the foot and shoulders of the bottle to face each other across one side; the other side with a four character inscription in relief seal-script 'Commanding the wind and clouds'.

1780 - 1880  
Height: 6.4 cms  
Stopper: jadeite  
Provenance: H.G.Beasley  
Miss M.A.Beasley  
Dr and Mrs Glenn W. Gordon

Finely carved jet snuff bottles are rare and no other exists comparable to this example. The shape and carving of the chi dragons suggests a date in the mid-nineteenth century, which is also the period from which several of the finest jet bottles known come. Perhaps there was a late vogue for the material, with its delightful tactile qualities and ink-like surface which would have appealed to the literatus to whom ink was a precious treasure — the yeast in the fermentation of high art.

H. G. Beasley, a pioneering collector of Oriental art in England and one of the earlier collectors to be attracted to snuff bottles, bought this bottle on 6th May, 1936, according to his records which have been kept.
Lacquer, black, inlaid with slivers of abalone shell and gold foil, of the variety known as *laque bourgatte*, on a wood base; of plain, flattened form, tapering towards the base; decorated on one side with a bird flying beneath a fruiting grape-vine; and on the other, an exotic, long-tailed bird in the dangling branches of a flowering tree, each set in a foliate panel reserved in a surround of elaborate, formalized floral motif; the neck with a band of floral diaper pattern.

Japan, 1860 - 1930
Height: 6.8 cms
Stopper: original, with a matching formalised floral design.
Provenance: Alex Cussons
Edmund Dwyer

This delightful example of the Japanese production of *laque bourgatte* for the Chinese market was the finest of a fairly large group owned by the legendary English collector Alex Cussons. Cussons, the manufacturer of cosmetics and the eponymous soap, was a man of generous appetites, fed with great gusto when it came to collecting. A charming contradiction of a man, he would switch off his engine for long downhill stretches to save petrol, and then buy snuff bottles by the dozen without so much as a murmur about price. In his substantial home in Cheshire, where he lived for years before retiring to South Africa, the massive dining room was surrounded by more than a dozen cabinets, each arranged for maximum colour impact, and each holding perhaps thirty to forty bottles. One cabinet was filled entirely with coral and emerald-green jadeite. Were he alive today, any one of the latter could now be sold for enough to buy the road in South Africa along which he cruised to save petrol.
86. Wood, of warm, brown colour; the compressed, oval bottle carved on each side with a cloud-shaped panel in which is set on each side a similar scene of three figures in houses with open terraces; the vignettes surrounded by superimposed layers of cloud-like lingzhi heads; a divider running between these two layers at each edge carved with parallel lines of continuous leiwen (thunder pattern); the foot with a formalized border and concentric rings, the neck and upper shoulders also with concentric ring borders.

1760 - 1900
Height: 6.0 cms
Stopper: glass, set on a gilt bronze collar
Provenance: Dr and Mrs Stephen Weisz

Wood snuff bottles are surprisingly rare. Considering the superb selection of fine woods available to the Chinese and used in their furniture and other scholarly trappings, it is surprising that there are so few bottles of fine quality in the material. The superimposed layers of lingzhi heads to form a cloud-like effect is particularly inventive here, giving the impression of looking down through a break in the clouds, through a cloud-like panel, into an interior scene. This lends a fairy-like, rather magical quality to the scene, and suggests clouds while still retaining the auspicious symbolism of the fungus form.
87. Coral, of pale, striated material; the globular bottle carved in relief with a design set on both sides, and divided by mask and ring handles, of scholarly vessels and playthings, including a series of vessels with flowers, including lotus and prunus and a lingzhi fungus, a ruyi sceptre, and other scholarly trappings.

1780 - 1880
Height: 5.2 cms
Stopper: jadeite, set on a gilt bronze collar
Similar example: Stevens, Bob Chinese Snuff Bottles and Dishes, An Exhibition of Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Bob C. Stevens Collection, October 1978, Mikimoto Hall, Ginza Tokyo, p. 85, no. 237; Moss, Hugh M. Chinese Snuff Bottles, No.1, 1963, p. 19 for a very similar bottle, presumably carved in the same workshop and by the same hand, from the Alex Cussons collection.

Cf. no. 71 for a similar subject. Pale, often striated and sometimes imperfect, coral (with flaws filled with red wax or separate inlays) was typical of the earlier period of coral carving in China. During the present century a more vivid, less flawed material has become available to the Chinese, but such fine colour was very much the exception to the rule prior to the end of the Qing dynasty.
88. Amber, of transparent, reddish-brown colour; carved as an undecorated, double rectangular bottle, with well-defined and indented feet.

1750 - 1860
Height: 5.4 cms
Stoppers: coral, set on a gilt bronze collar
Provenance: Dr and Mrs Glenn W. Gordon

Double bottles, which appear in certain materials more often than others, are very rare in amber—perhaps because of the relative weakness of the material where the two bottles join. This unctuous and sensual piece of material has been wisely allowed to speak for itself without decoration, permitting the elegantly tapering forms to join with the material in being the main languages of artistic communication.
89. Ivory, inset with panels of red and green lacquer; the tapering, flattened, rectangular ivory bottle inset with four panels of lacquer, each with superimposed layers of red, on green, on red; one side carved with a boating scene, with a dignitary holding a ryūi sceptre and standing on the prow of the boat, while a lady sits behind him, and a boatman manoeuvres the vessel from the back towards a rocky shore, overhung by a willow tree, and with a youth respectfully offering a dish of fruit; the other side showing Xi Wangmu, the Goddess of the Western Daoist Paradise, riding on a prancing stag and holding a basket full of the peaches of immortality on a staff across her shoulder, while an acolyte stands in the foreground, amusingly placed right on the frame of the panel, holding a scrolls on a similar staff over his shoulder; the two edges with narrow panels of a lady, on one side, and a youth on the other in a landscape setting; the ivory surround carved with a formalized floral diaper; the foot incised with the four character mark Qianlong nianzhi (‘made during the Qianlong period’) in seal script filled with gold lacquer.

Japan, probably Kyoto, 1860 - 1940
Height: 5.5 cms
Stopper: Japanese ivory stopper with lacquer reserve decoration of a floral motif, also made in Kyoto but probably not original to this bottle
Provenance: Dr and Mrs Stephen Weisz

Technically, some of the finest lacquer carving in the snuff bottle field was done in Japan, in Kyoto according to Bob Stevens’ research. This began at some time after the 1860s, and seemed to have been largely in response to imperial ivory and lacquer bottles introduced to Japan at the time. However, the Japanese soon exercised their national genius for borrowing, absorbing and then refining at the surface the culture of China, and an independent Japanese art form evolved. Many of these works, in lacquer, ivory, laque burgaute and lacquer reserve, bore spurious Qianlong reign marks in seal characters, however unlikely and purely Japanese the art form had become, suggesting that the mark was no longer intended to deceive but acted merely as a reference to ancient origin.
90. Ivory, of well patinated, golden yellow colour, with traces of original polychrome lacquering; the elongated, pear-shaped bottle, carved on each side with a recessed panel, set within a quatrefoil frame; one side with a landscape scene showing a charming estate on the edges of a lake, a fisherman in a boat, towering rocks, and trees with distant mountains; the other with various flowers growing beside an ornamental rock; the neck with a single band of single-unit leiwen (thunder pattern).

1730 - 1800
Height: 6.0 cms
Stopper: bronze, chased with a floral design

Fine early ivory snuff bottles, other than the revered imperial ivories of Beijing, are relatively rare. The vast majority of ivory bottles seem to have been made during the later Qing period when the habit spread south and production in Shanghai, Guangzhou and other southern centres began to flourish. There was also, apparently, considerable demand from an increasing tourist industry for such wares late in the Qing dynasty, and much southern ivory ended up in European and American homes, brought home by sea-captains and their crews, and other visitors to the Middle Kingdom. Among this vast output of ivory, it is often difficult to see the rarity of early ivory snuff bottles, but the number which can be excluded from the imperial output of the north, and attributed confidently to the eighteenth century and the earlier phase of the snuff taking habit, is very small indeed. This is one of the more appealing and finely carved examples, bearing a natural patina which immensely enhances its charm.
China Institute in America, Chinese Snuff Bottles of the 17th & 18th Centuries from the Collection of Mr & Mrs Martin Schoen, Catalogue, New York, 1952


Detroit Institute of Arts, Chinese Snuff Bottles, The Bai Shi Collection, Catalogue, April-August 1986


Hall, Robert Chinese Snuff Bottles I, October 1987

Hall, Robert Chinese Snuff Bottles II, October 1989


Hong Kong Museum of Art, Chinese Snuff Bottles, Catalogue, October-November 1977

Hong Kong Museum of Art, Snuff Bottles of the Ch’ing Dynasty, Catalogue, October-December 1978, by G. Tsang and H.M. Moss

Journal of the International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society (referred to as Journal ICSBS)

Jutheau, Viviane Tabatières Chinoises, Denoel, Paris, 1980


Krug, Johanna Prisen aus kleinen Tabakflaschen, Munich, 1967

Galeries Lafayette, Les plus belles collections privées de Hong Kong, exhibition, 30 March - 28 April 1990, Paris

Li, J. & J. 100 Selected Chinese Snuff Bottles from the J & J Collection, exhibition, Christie’s London, October 1987

Moss, Hugh M. *Chinese Snuff Bottles of the Silica or Quartz Group*, London: Bibelot 1971

Moss, Hugh M. *Snuff Bottles of China*, London: Bibelot 1971

Moss, Hugh M. *Chinese Snuff Bottles*, No.1, 1963; No.2, 1964; No.3 1965; No.4, 1966; No.5, 1969; No.6 1974


Stevens, Bob *Chinese Snuff Bottles and Dishes, An Exhibition of Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Bob C. Stevens Collection*, October 1978, Mikimoto Hall, Ginza Tokyo