

Collecting Chinese Snuff Bottles



Susan Page





Green Park House, 15 Stratton Street, London W1J 8LQ (By appointment only)
T: +44 (0)203 036 0044 | M: +44(0)7721 747153 | E: susan@snuffbottlepages.com
www.snuffbottlepages.com



Collecting Chinese Snuff Bottles



Contents

Acknowledgements	7
Foreword	8
<i>Collecting Chinese Snuff Bottles</i> - An introduction by Susan Page	10
I Glass	15
II Jade	41
III Hardstone and Organics	52
IV Porcelain	63
V Inside painted	71
<i>A Cartographic Connection: Maps of China and Chinese Snuff Bottles During the Qing Dynasty</i> an essay by Andrew Singer	78
Selected Bibliography	93

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following who helped in the production of this catalogue and the organisation of the accompanying exhibition.

Thank you to Alice Williamson for persuading me to join Asian Art in London, and to Sophie Kempson the person who puts it all together for that organisation. It is wonderful to be part of this positive group.

Thank you to Daniel Crouch and Nick Trimming of Daniel Crouch Rare Books for lending me their gallery. I have used the images of the maps with permission from Daniel and Nick and I thank Qi Sun for researching maps and books in their gallery which would go well with the subject of snuff bottles. Thank you to Priestley & Ferraro for lending their cabinets for the exhibition, all the better to display the bottles.

Thank you to Andrew Singer for his essay 'A Cartographic Connection'. He is a writer and speaker on China, a traveller, a history lover and collector of books and Chinese snuff bottles who lives on Cape Cod. I met Andrew first in Philadelphia when he attended a snuff bottle society meeting and we have become good friends. Andrew researched the maps accompanying the exhibition to put them into our snuff bottle context. He recently presented the lecture 'Sailing to Cathay: Maritime Trade Routes to Asia before and after the arrival of the Europeans at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century' to the International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society.

Thank you to Robert Hall, the photographer, for his excellent photographs and thank you to Simon Page for his design of the book and encouraging me to do this project. Gayle Gray Laverlochere is a constant help with grammar, spelling and also with research. Stuart Sargent did the translations of the Chinese Texts. Thank you to Robert Hall, snuff bottle dealer extraordinaire, for his collaboration and also to Hugh Moss who always answers my many questions promptly and with great insight.

Foreword

I have known Susan Page since 2010 when we exhibited at TEFAF Maastricht together. Nick Trimming and I are delighted to welcome her to exhibit in our gallery, and also to find that our subject matter and interest overlap.

Daniel Crouch

Qing Dynasty

Shunzhi	1644-1661
Kangxi	1662-1722
Yongzheng	1723-1735
Qianlong	1736-1795
Jiaqing	1796-1820
Daoguang	1821-1850
Xianfeng	1851-1861
Tongzhi	1862-1873
Guangxu	1874-1907
Xuantong	1908-1912

Collecting Chinese Snuff Bottles

I am delighted to be part of Asian Art in London - October 28th to November 6th 2021, and to exhibit a collection of snuff bottles assembled over the last year to show art enthusiasts how fascinating snuff bottles are. I am pleased to be showing in the gallery Daniel Crouch Rare Books and to have the opportunity to include in the exhibition some fine maps which show cartographically what China looked like in the snuff bottle period.

Snuff bottles are beautiful and they are tactile. They are small enough to hold in your hand and holding them feels good. You can also get up close and personal with life in China during the 18th and 19th Centuries - literally - it's painted onto or carved into that piece of art you are looking at. Collecting bottles gives you the impetus to learn about the iconography, rebuses and myths and legends of Chinese culture. You also learn about identifying different materials as bottles are made from a multitude of minerals and semi-precious stones as well as glass, porcelain and organic material. Another reason to collect snuff bottles is that they are readily available at an affordable price for the collector of Antiques.

Just as snuff taking in Europe was primarily a habit of the elite, so it was in China. As early as 1684, the Kangxi Emperor-on the first of his six great Tours of Inspection to the South- was presented with gifts, including snuff, by two Jesuit priests in Nanjing. The Emperor decreed, "We have received your gifts. However, these gifts are rare even in your own country. We bestow you [i.e., return], with the exception of the snuff, the acceptance of which meets our approval." He kept the snuff but gave back all the other tributes.

The Kangxi Emperor also conferred presents of both snuff and snuff bottles on worthy recipients. Records for 1703 and 1705 detailing such gifts are widely published. The Yongzheng Emperor (a son of the Kangxi Emperor) whose reign was only 15 years was constantly seeking the best craftsmen and artists to employ and a number of extremely fine snuff bottles were produced during his brief reign. The large number of artworks commissioned by the Qianlong Emperor (a son of the Yongzheng Emperor) during his lifetime is well recorded. Among those that have survived are snuff bottles of wide-ranging materials. A comment by the French Jesuit priest Amiot in 1774 suggests that at that time, snuff taking was still very much centred in the capital. A wealth of evidence points to a rapid expansion of the habit across the empire within twenty years. As officials were sent out into the provinces from the court they took their snuff bottles with them. References to snuff and snuff bottles, particularly in the writings of traveling Westerners, are numerous from the 1790s onward. Lord Macartney, the first envoy of Great Britain to China, whose first meeting with the Emperor was in 1793 said in his writings about the Chinese, "They also take snuff, mostly Brazil, but in small quantities, not in that beastly profusion which is often practiced in England".

Many more raw materials became available as the Empire expanded under the leadership of the early Qing Emperors. In 1689 Kangxi secured the border with Russia and attempted to unify the Xinjiang area. The Yongzheng Emperor advanced his authority into Tibet and the adjoining regions. The Qianlong Emperor oversaw the conquest of Xinjiang in 1759 (when the Zunghar Mongols were subjugated). It also meant that the supply of jade increased; in fact, the Qianlong Emperor ordered twice yearly tributes of vast amounts of jade. Other materials also became available either through trade or by conquest, such as lapis lazuli, malachite, tourmaline, turquoise, puddingstone, and inkstone making lovely bottles to collect. In 1790 Qing troops were mobilized to defend Tibet from assault by the Gurkhas of Nepal and in 1792 Nepal became a tributary state.

The arrival of the Jesuits during the late Ming Dynasty left a lasting legacy for art in the Imperial courts. Matteo Ricci (1583-1610) was an Italian priest and was part of the Jesuit mission to China. Their goal was to seek influence in China before becoming evangelical so they set about making themselves 'useful' to the Ming court. Ricci brought with him maps, scientific discoveries and examples of Western art including images showing perspective. The Jesuit priests became increasingly influential at court due to their sharing of scientific and artistic knowledge. Father Matteo Ripa wrote in his diary in 1716: 'His majesty (the Kangxi Emperor) having become fascinated by our European enamel, and by the new enamel painting, tried by every possible means to introduce the latter into his imperial workshops which he had set up for this purpose within the palace'. Some of the finest examples of this group of Enamel snuff bottles remain in the Palace Museum in Beijing and also in the National Palace Museum in Taipei.

By the mid-nineteenth century, snuff taking had become commonplace throughout China. The scholar and merchant classes replaced the court as the most important consumers. The result was a greater demand for bottles and the growth of regional workshops to meet it. This mass interest led to mass production, and the Jingdezhen kilns cranked up their firings and churned out thousands and thousands of bottles. Glass production and enamelling at Yangzhou evolved. The end of the Qing Dynasty also saw the end of the great snuff bottle producing era. An interesting coda is that the art of painting inside snuff bottles continued in China through the turbulence of the revolution and there are today wonderful examples of this art form.

There are many rebuses associated with snuff bottles, and some snuff bottles display the myths and legends popular in Chinese culture. Another reason to collect snuff bottles are the resources available to the collector. There are some very good reference books on the subject, starting with Lilla Perry's *Chinese Snuff Bottles: The Adventures and Studies of a Collector* first printed in 1960. Other notable books are *The Collector's Book of Snuff Bottles* by Bob C Stevens and *Snuff Bottles of China* by Hugh M Moss. There are bottles on display in many museums including in London at the V&A and the British Museum, in Liverpool at the Lady Lever Gallery in Port Sunlight, in Edinburgh at the Museum of Scotland and one of the best collections on display is at Burghley House, in Stamford, Lincolnshire. The USA has collections in many museums and galleries. The International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society based in Baltimore Maryland was founded in 1969 and is still going strong today with at least 300 enthusiastic members who have conventions each year in different cities around the world and who receive a journal three times a year to promote research and education about snuff bottles.

Susan Page
14 October 2021

Measurements of bottles are given in cm and are the height of the bottle without the stopper

