

Glass

Glass

*"Recently in the capital snuff has been produced.
It is said to be able to improve one's sight, especially to exorcise epidemic diseases.
The snuff is put into glass bottles, which are of varying shapes,
in colours of red, purple, yellow, white, black, green and brown.
The white is clear as crystal, the red like fire.*

*What lovely things they are!
The spoon is made of ivory, used to extract the snuff out
of the bottle to be inhaled, and then put back into the bottle.
The snuff bottles are manufactured by the Imperial Court.
Snuff bottles are also imitated among the people but are far inferior in quality and design."*

Wang Shizhen
1702
(Minister of the Kangxi Emperor)

This statement, well known to all serious collectors of snuff bottles, was made by Wang Shizhen, a high-ranking minister of the Kangxi Emperor, in 1702. This is the earliest known reference to snuff bottles and confirms that glass was used for their manufacture ever since the introduction of snuff into China. Other materials may also have been used, of course, but it is obvious from this quotation that glass bottles, in a wide range of dazzling colours, were standard containers right from the beginning. The Chinese fascination with glass, both at Court and among the people, continued throughout the entire snuff bottle period.

Jesuit missionaries at the Qing Court were vitally involved in early glass production; in fact, the Kangxi Emperor's glasshouse was built near the Jesuits' house, on land given to them by the Emperor. Their influence was therefore great, and they taught the Chinese artisans several glass techniques (the making of aventurine glass, for example) previously unknown to them. It would seem that after 1760, however, only Chinese glassmakers remained.

Although most glass bottles were blown, usually into a mould, many early bottles were carved from a solid piece of glass. The carving of glass blocks as if they were hardstones was a common alternative to blowing the vessels, and often reserved for glass imitating precious stones, such as aquamarine, amethyst and beryl. After the bottle was created, either by blowing or by carving, decoration could take any of several forms. Some, of course, were left plain to show off the beauty of their colour. Others were enamelled or engraved, both processes learned from the Europeans. Those made of cased or overlay glass would be carved and polished.

1. Glass, in the form of a peach, sharply tapered towards the foot, the mouth revealing the 'sandwich' method of blowing the glass into a mould, the base opaque white with a layer of opalescent clear glass suffused with pink flecks and finished with a clear layer.

Beijing Glassworks, 1736-1795

Height: 5.5cm

Provenance: Mike Kaynes

Robert Kleiner & Co

An English Gentleman

A similar example is published by Robert Hall in *The Maxwell Collection of Chinese Snuff Bottles*, No 15. Peaches are associated with the garden of the Queen Mother of the West where they ripen once every 3,000 years and grant immortality.



2. Glass, single overlay of blue on a snowstorm ground, carved on one side with a leaping carp exhaling a cloud of vapour upon which rests a pavilion, with a crane carrying a counter above and a bat to one side, the reverse with a second crane above fantastic rocks with *lingzhi* and numerous bats, the base formed by lapping waves.

Palace Glassworks, Beijing

1750-1820

Height: 6.5cm

Provenance: The Janos Szekeres Collection

The Monimar Collection

The Kobacker Collection

As well as being exquisitely carved, this snuff bottle is also full of hidden meanings. The image of a crane carrying a counter near a pavilion in the sea forms a wish 'May you live to a ripe old age'. The pavilion is the abode of immortals. Bats hovering above waves or sea means 'May your blessings be as deep as the Eastern Sea'.



3. Glass, a single overlay of red on a translucent bubble-suffused ground carved as a dragon coiled around the body of the bottle, its tail forming the base.

Palace Glassworks, Beijing

1736-1795

Height: 6.4cm

Provenance : John Ault

Published: Robert Kleiner, *Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Collection of John Ault*, no. 13

To cope with the increased demand for glass during the Qianlong Emperor's reign, several private glass-making workshops were established in Beijing. According to the late Qing Scholar, Zhao Zhiqian (1829-1884) three families were pre-eminent in this field, the *Xin*, the *Le* and the *Yuan*. The products of the *Xin* family were said to be predominantly in red overlay on an arrowroot or clear bubble suffused ground, a style to which the bottle above relates.



4. Glass, the colourless body overlaid with pale yellow, carved with a fan-tailed carp on each side, the foot rim also carved from the yellow overlay.

1780-1850

Height:6.8cm

Provenance: The Coerwinkel Collection, The Netherlands

5. Glass, green and white, blown and manipulated into the form of a Buddha's hand citron.

1770-1860

Height:6.3cm

Provenance: The Coerwinkel Collection, The Netherlands

Manipulation of molten glass characterizes a distinctive group of glass-wares made during the Qing period. In this case, the glass has been stretched a little to create the fingers of the fruit. The Chinese value this non-edible citrus fruit principally for its fragrance and the symbolism evoked by the name. Phonetically, the name *foshou* (Buddha's -hand citron) stands for blessings (*fu*) and long life (*shou*).

6. Glass, translucent yellow, the lateral sides carved with a design of bamboo, the panels on the front and reverse flat and the foot rim carved in oval form and with a flared neck.

1780-1850

Height:6.4cm



7. Glass imitating realgar, the deep red outer layer carved on one side with the cowherd on his ox below the line of the heavenly river with magpies flying above, and the weaver girl to the top right corner; the other side carved through with Liu Hai, enticing the three-legged toad with his string of cash.

1720-1840

Height: 5.4cm

Provenance: Charles R. Johnson, Toledo, Ohio

The tale of the cowherd and the weaver girl is a love story between Zhinü (織女; the weaver girl, symbolizing the star Vega) and Niulang (牛郎; the cowherd, symbolizing the star Altair). Their love was not allowed; thus, they were banished to opposite sides of the heavenly river (symbolizing the Milky Way). Once a year, on the 7th day of the 7th lunar month, a flock of magpies would form a bridge to reunite the lovers for one day.

Liu Hai was a Minister of State in the 10th Century and was a proficient student of Daoist magic. He is often depicted with one foot on the mythological three-legged toad and holding in his hand a ribbon upon which 5 gold cash coins are strung. This design is known as 'Liu Hai sporting with the toad' and is regarded as very auspicious and conducive to good fortune.



8. Glass, translucent yellow with opaque yellow overlay carved with a curled dragon at the base emitting a vapour containing a pavilion with waves around the base, the reverse with a stork holding a tablet in its beak flying above a rock emerging from the waves with a bat flying above.

1780-1850

Height: 6.5cm

Provenance: Collection of Tuyet Nguyet and Stephen Markbreiter

9. Glass, translucent amber with opaque yellow overlay carved in great detail with a curled fish with the bewhiskered head of a dragon chasing a pearl, the body of the fish/dragon curling round to form the base.

1780-1850

Height: 7.1cm

Provenance: The Coerwinkel Collection, The Netherlands



10. Glass, the single plane of four-coloured overlay carved with nine lively *chi* dragons with various types of heads in different attitudes, on an oval foot with a flared neck.

1736-1795

Height: 6.8cm

Provenance: Collection of Tuyet Nguyet and Stephen Markbreiter

In Chinese mythology the dragon is a good-natured and benign creature symbolizing male vigour and fertility. It is also a symbol for the Emperor.

From earliest times, nine has been a potent number in China: the Book of Rites enumerates nine rites, the country had nine provinces; nine tripods indicated Imperial power and there were nine grades of officials during the Qing dynasty.



11. Glass, deep ruby-red overlay on a translucent bubble-suffused ground, carved with a large lotus forming the base of the bottle, on which a frog sits sheltering under another leaf, and the other side with a fish lying on its back.

Beijing, 1736-1795

Height: 6cm

Provenance: Private Collection, Belgium

12. Glass, clear with a deep blue overlay carved with water lily plants with large flowers and lush leaves forming a beautiful design around the body of the bottle, the foot and neck rim also carved from the overlay.

1736-1795

Height: 5.9 cm

Provenance: The Coerwinkel Collection, The Netherlands

13. Glass, ruby-red overlay on a bubble-suffused ground, carved with curling dragons, one with a flattened bewhiskered head with a *lingzhi* in his mouth and a pearl above, the other side with three animated prancing dragons.

Beijing, 1736-1795

Height: 6.6cm

Provenance: The Albemarle Collection

Published: Robert Kleiner: *Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Albermarle Collection Part 1*, no. 21



14. Glass, caramel, painted in *famille rose* enamels with a grasshopper hovering over asters and chrysanthemum, the reverse with a grasshopper on peony, with three bees hovering on the shoulder; the base with a faint mark in iron-red, *Gu Yuexuan*.

Height: 5.7cm

Provenance: Bob Stevens

Blanche Exstein

The Fragrant Snow Collection

Published: Bob C. Stevens: *The Collector's Book of Snuff Bottles*, New York, 1976, p. 266, no. 952.

Sold at Sotheby's New York, Fine and Important Snuff Bottles from the Collection of Bob C Stevens, Part II, 26 March 1982, lot 80. Sold at Christie's New York 21 March 2002, Blanche Exstein Collection, lot 27



15. Glass, opaque white with a layer of deep brown and then another double layer on one plane of yellow, brown, pink, green and cinnabar red, exquisitely carved in continuous relief with a flowering prunus tree and a butterfly above, the sides with two exotic long-tailed birds in the place where mask and ring handles might more often be found; the base formed from rockwork resting on an oval foot rim.

Beijing Palace Glass Workshops

Qianlong Period 1736 – 1795

Height: 5.3cm

Provenance: Sara Jo and Arthur Kobacker Collection, USA

This double overlay snuff bottle is extremely rare. It is a most unusual colour combination and is very delicately executed. It is of such fine quality and has such auspicious motifs that it would have made the most perfect gift for a loved one.

The blossoms of the plum tree are emblematic of perseverance and purity. Blooming on withered old branches, the plum is not only a welcome sight in winter but also a symbol for vigorous old age. As the first flower to bloom each year, it represents renewal and heralds spring. The five petals of its blossoms represent the Five Blessings: old age, wealth, health, love of virtue and a peaceful death.

In China, the butterfly is an emblem of joy and a symbol of summer. It is also a sign of conjugal felicity. The origin of this is to be found in the writings of Zhuang Zi who, as a young student, was running after an exotic butterfly and intruded into the private garden of a magistrate. In the garden was a beautiful girl (daughter of the magistrate) with whom he became instantly besotted. In order to capture her heart, he strove to do well in his exams. He was successful in this and rose to high rank and fame. Also, the characters for the word butterfly (*hudie*) can serve as two separate puns. *Hu* is pronounced *Fu* in some Chinese dialects which is homophonous with blessings and riches. The second character *die* is a pun for 'age seventy to eighty' and for the verb to 'accumulate' or pile up i.e., accumulating good fortune.



16. Glass, single overlay of brownish-black on an opaque white ground, carved in low relief with a cat chasing two butterflies fluttering near chrysanthemums with an inscription above reading *Bi de qi shou* the other side with a deer reclining beneath a pine, *lingzhi* fungus, and a bat, below a seal (Ziran); the foot rim also carved from the overlay.

Yangzhou school, 1800-1880

Height: 5.4cm

The word for cat (*mao*) is a homonym for the age 70, and the word for butterfly (*die*) is a homonym for age 80, so cat and butterfly together form a rebus to express the wish that the recipient will have a long life. Deer, pine, *lingzhi* and bat are also symbols for longevity.

The inscription may be translated as: *Bi de qi shou* 必得其壽 '[The person with superior virtue] will assuredly attain the long life to which he is entitled'].

The seal reads Ziran 自然. This term has many nuances and meanings, but here and in the context of the other side of the bottle it probably means that the person of virtue will naturally attain long life.



