

Jade

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Jade is the quintessential Chinese stone and it has occupied a place of importance in China for several thousand years. Valued far above gold or precious stones, it is held not only in admiration and affection, but even in reverence by the Chinese.

Although nephrite and jadeite are both correctly called “jade”, they are actually two different minerals. Nephrite is usually of an opaque, creamy colour, and is most prized when it is pure white or yellow, although it is also found in other colours, ranging from pale grey to shades of green and black.

Nephrite has been worked by the Chinese from their very earliest recorded history, and it is the material from which most ancient jade artefacts were made. The main source for nephrite was the Kunlun mountains which form the boundary between Chinese Turkestan and Tibet where it was traditionally found in river beds. In 1759 the Qianlong Emperor conquered that region so jade was more readily available.

Jadeite is slightly harder than nephrite and tends to be translucent, with an icy, crystalline structure. Jadeite’s variety of colour is almost as great as that of nephrite but it is renowned for its apple-green and emerald-green tones which are of gem quality. It can also be found in shades of blue and lavender which are not found in nephrite. Although long considered a typically Chinese stone, no records have been discovered showing that jadeite is indigenous to China; it has been available to the Chinese only since the Qianlong period when it began to be imported from Burma.

Jade snuff bottles were made in the Palace Workshops in Beijing, as well as in other places involved in the production of jade carving. The best known was Suzhou, a southern town, long famous for the skill of its hardstone carvers.

Snuff bottles are usually between two and three inches tall, and were meant to be held in the hand and examined closely. Jade seems to demand touching and tactile appreciation. The variety of colours, as well as the imperfections in the stone, provided inspiration to the craftsman, motivating him to create a masterpiece.

17. Nephrite, carved from a pebble, with an ochre area of skin on one side highly polished, the reverse mutton fat hue with a bat carved to the left shoulder and two *lingzhi* fungus above with rocks protruding from waves on the lower corners; all hollowed through a narrow opening to the mouth and standing on an oval foot rim.

1750-1840

Height: 6.3cm

Provenance: Charles R. Johnson, Toledo, Ohio

18. Nephrite, olive-green with an ochre skin, carved on one side with the figure of Shou Lao (god of Longevity) seated on a stag, accompanied by a monkey with a peach spray, the sides carved with mask and ring handles.

1750-1820

Height: 5.9cm

Provenance: Elsa Glickman Collection

The God of Longevity is a benevolent gentleman - his distinguishing feature is his prominent cranium; also he carries a tall staff and peach of immortality. He is sometimes accompanied by a crane or a deer.



19. Nephrite, white with occasional flecks; well hollowed with a recessed foot; carved to simulate a woven basket containing the bottle, which emerges at the neck.

1770-1880

Height: 6.5cm

Provenance: The Fragrant Snow Collection

Sometimes the basketweave pattern is so fine it resembles rice grain, but the plain neck would indicate that this example is following the basketweave motif.

The technical ability required to carve this design is formidable and it is probable that the majority of these bottles were carved in the Palace Workshops in Beijing.

The popularity of baskets in general, and this design in particular, may arise from the probable symbolism of the basket (*lanzi*) which may suggest male children (*nanzi*), one of the three desires close to the Chinese heart. These are *duofu* ('plenty of happiness') *duoshou* ('plenty of years to live') and *duonanzi* ('plenty of male children').

20. Jadeite, spinach-green with darker flecks, of flattened rectangular form, sitting on a well carved foot.

1760-1850

Height: 6.6cm

This beautiful spinach-green material is dated to after the conquest of Chinese Turkestan by the Qianlong Emperor in 1759.



21. Nephrite, white, of oval form with flattened lateral sides and a flared neck, a raised panel on each face, one enclosing a flowering prunus branch, the other a flowering peony branch; the base indented.

1780-1850

Height: 5.6cm

Provenance: The White Orchid Collection

Published : Robert Hall, *The White Orchid Collection* no 40

Prunus blossoms are emblematic of perseverance and purity. 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.

Blossoming peonies *fuguìhua* bring prosperity or the wish 'May you be prosperous' . The Peony is known as the flower of wealth and honour.

22. Nephrite, white, carved in the form of a lychee with trailing leaves.

1780-1850

Height: 6.9cm

Provenance: Private Collection, East Coast USA

Like chestnut (*lizi*) the word for lychee (*lizhi*) is homophonous with 'establishing a son' meaning to have a son in order to continue the family name.

23. Nephrite, white, carved on each side with a central *shou* medallion in a circular panel, surrounded by scrolling floral motifs, sitting on a flattened foot and hollowed out through a small mouth.

1780-1850

Height: 4.8cm

*Shou*, meaning longevity, is a popular, auspicious character on a birthday gift and often appears as a decorative motif in Chinese art. This bottle is well hollowed through a very narrow mouth.





24. Nephrite, spinach-green, of unusual cylindrical form, with a matching and original stopper carved in the form of a *chilong*.

Possibly Imperial, perhaps Palace Workshops, Beijing

1780-1850

Height: 7.1cm

Provenance: Charles R. Johnson, Toledo, Ohio

The spinach-green material indicates that this piece dates from after the conquest of Turkestan in 1759 when this distinctive dark green nephrite became available. Another example of the same material is illustrated in Moss, Graham, Tsang *Treasury* no 152, p 398. That example is of similar material with darker green flecks in a lighter green body, but of octagonal form and with the Xingyouheng Tang mark which dates it to 1800-1854. One would have to place the two bottles together to see if they are of the same material but they do look very similar. The mouth of the Bloch example is fairly wide, but not as wide as this one. The wide mouth means that the bottle could be well carved out to hold as much snuff as possible ! It also shows that the piece was made by a master carver as it is technically a very difficult thing to do. The foot rim is also extremely finely carved and the matching and original stopper completes this wonderful sculpture. The stopper in the form of a curled *chilong* would give the piece an imperial attribution.



滿紙經書

孝子下生