

**From Micro to Macro:  
Jade Snuff Bottles in Qianlong Era**

by

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## Foreword

Emperor Qianlong, whose original name is Aisin Gioro Hongli, was the sixth emperor of the Qing Dynasty. Qianlong was one of the most famous emperors in Chinese history. As the word “Qianlong” means in Manchu, he was truly blessed by the god: the Qing Empire was already very strong when Qianlong came into power; meanwhile, Qianlong had a relatively stable outside environment. It allows Qianlong to be able to focus on pushing his own governing policy. Qianlong’s policy of agricultural development and tax reduction was very effective, under sixty years of reign, the empire has expanded its territory, and the economy was growing in fast paces as well. Apart from his military and economic achievement, Qianlong has also earned a reputation as one of the greatest connoisseurs in history. Inherited a court collection that was already impressive, Qianlong revaluated, cataloged, and graded the whole collection. For pieces he liked, Qianlong will comment on, or even inscribed poems on those pieces. One of the most famous pieces he inscribed was a Southern Song Ru ware bowl (Figure 1). Among all different categories of court arts, Qianlong was particularly in favor of jade wares. Instead of being just a collector, Qianlong was an accomplished connoisseur of jades. He has written many books on the connoisseurship of jades. Of course, jade ware has become the most popular place where Qianlong inscribed his poems. There are over 800 pieces of jade wares that have Qianlong's poem inscribed<sup>1</sup>. No matter the wealth, no matter the social status, Jade always stands on an unshakeable position in the Chinese culture. For thousands of years, the Chinese have been particularly obsessed with the material, and emperors are no exception. Being a Manchu emperor, Qianlong knew the importance of understanding the Chinese Han culture. Thanks to the effort of Qianlong, Jade has welcomed its third golden age since the Warrior States and Western Han.

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<sup>1</sup> Zhang Wei, *Jades of the Qianlong*

Snuff bottles, on another hand, didn't appear before the Qing Dynasty; however, it took over Qing emperors' favor like a whirlwind. Since the Kangxi period, Qing emperors have begun to give snuff bottles as gifts to the ministers. As an emperor known for the love of jade, hordes of jade snuff bottles were produced directly from the imperial order. From different carving schools, materials, shapes, and motifs, this thesis will discuss the archeological and aesthetic value of Qianlong jade snuff bottles. Meanwhile, this thesis will use the auction results from major auction houses to analyze the market preference and make predictions for interested readers. Through these handly jade snuff bottles, we can explore the inner world of this great emperor and the rationale behind his obsession with this delicate work of art.

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## Introduction

In thousands of years history, Chinese people have put their wisdom into countless fascinating art pieces: from Hongshan Culture jades to Shang Dynasty's bronzes, to Han Dynasty's lacquerwares, to Song Dynasty's Ceramics, to Ming Dynasty's furniture, to Qing Dynasty's snuff bottles. The artistic accomplishment was closely associated with economic strength. For example, the best blue and white porcelain come from "Yongle Prosperity". Among all the great prosperities, Qianlong is one of the greatest in many different ways. On the one hand, China's economy was already one of the tops in the world when Qianlong succeeded it from Yongzheng. Under his long-term reign, China became one of the, if not the most powerful country in the world. From a personal perspective, Qianlong's contribution to court art was very astonishing. Combined with Qianlong's favorite material and favorite subject, jade snuff bottles became very popular within Qianlong court. Generally speaking, Khotan nephrite can be divided into two categories: pebble jade and mining jade. Pebble jades are weathered jade stones that have been through the erosion of the running water. The erosion of the running river smoothes the skin of the jade, removes extra dirt and adds a particular delightful glaze on the pebble stone. Pebble jades are generally better than the mining jade and they are often used for small decorative jade wares such as rings, snuff bottles, or plaques. In contrast, mining jade stones or "mountain jade" didn't go through the process of weathering and water erosion. They are usually larger in sizes and often used for bigger pieces such as furniture, vases, or other ceremonial wares. Pebble jade snuff bottles were considered precious wares since they can only be made from the top three grades of jades (Appendix 1). Good quality pebble jades were monopolized by the Qing court before 1740. Some bottles were made specifically for Qianlong use, while some others were meant to be given as imperial gifts.

The popularity of jade snuff bottles continued till the end of the Qing Dynasty (Table 1). Wealthy merchants and officials started to order jade snuff bottles from master craftsmen at the later period of Qianlong when Khotan nephrite mining became available to the Chinese jade merchants. Some of them could have the same or even more superior quality than those made from imperial orders. These all add the difficulty of determining whether the bottle was made for Qianlong himself, for court gifts, or for other elites. During the sixty years of Qianlong reign, over 20,000 jade snuff bottles were made in the imperial workshop. Due to the big number of jade bottles made, jade snuff bottles became the perfect entrance to learn the characteristics of Qianlong jade carving. From the base to the finial, we will break apart the entire bottle to see their connections with other jade wares (Figure 2, 3, 4). The relatively affordable price has lower the market entrance for jade and snuff bottle lovers.

In this thesis, we'll first organize the known bottles by carving schools. Then, summarize the characteristics of those imperial bottles. We'll figure out the court style and the changes in Qianlong's personal preference. Finally, we'll dig into the real market to see how to form a jade snuff bottle collection and provide collecting suggestions for interested readers.

## **Overview**

This thesis is constructed with five chapters. The first chapter includes a brief introduction of subjects, illustrations of research methodology, and explains the limitation of the method used.

The second chapter will discuss the origin of jade snuff bottles. I will provide a specific guideline to different locations of imperial workshops; meanwhile, explain the characteristics of

each location. Then, a private workshop study will be performed through known examples. To categorize more specifically and provide better guidance, we will explore the motifs and carving techniques for those workshops. We'll use a lot of examples, including non-snuff bottle jade wares. By studying and comparing those examples, we will understand the characteristics of Qianlong jade snuff bottles. This will also explain the historical importance of jade snuff bottles. At the end of the chapter, we will talk about a new category of snuff bottles to show the popularity of jade snuff bottles in the Qianlong era.

Beginning in the third chapter, we'll be heading into a guideline for building a successful Qianlong jade snuff bottle collection. Mary & George Bloch formed one of the most significant snuff bottle collections in history. Their collection includes a large group of Qianlong jade snuff bottles, each of those bottles has its representativeness. Ultimately, we'll figure out their collection logics, therefore, provide readers an insight into the market. As a conclusion, we'll have several specialists commenting about the collection and the overall market for Qianlong jade snuff bottles.

The fourth chapter discusses the market potential of Qianlong jade snuff bottles. First, we'll collect data from major auction houses, including Christie's, Sotheby's, Bonhams, Poly Auction, and China Guardian. A 10-year period is set to observe the price movements. We'll compare the price movement with other jade wares from Qianlong. Then, summarize the market preference based on the categories we discussed before and make a market prediction.

The final chapter concludes the historic significance of Qianlong jade snuff bottles, clarifies the links between jade snuff bottles and other jade carvings in the Qinglong era. Finally, the thesis will suggest the category that has the most investing potentials.



## **Methodology**

This thesis will be divided into two parts: the first part will talk about the historical significance of jade snuff bottles. The other part will discuss the category from the market side.

The sources for historical research come from past books, literature, and articles published in journals and Asian art magazines. Sources can be either Chinese or English. The categorization will be based on known examples of different carving schools, those examples mainly come from museum catalogs, books, or past auctions.

For the marketing research, our sources mainly come from major international auction houses, such as Christie's, Sotheby's and Bonhams. As a comparison, we'll have some data sources from gallery dealers as well.

## **Limitations**

There're two major limitations researching about the topic. As a very niche topic, there are not a lot of books and articles talking about jade snuff bottles during the Qianlong era. Qianlong jade is a very small part compared to over 6,000 years of jade history, jade snuff bottles, as a niche topic for Qianlong jades, is even harder to find reference articles. Usually, it will appear in a jade reference book as only one or two paragraphs without a lot of details. In snuff bottle reference books, it would have several individual examples, it's very hard to analyze them systematically as a group or find a book that categorizes those examples well.

The second limitation is that although a lot of jade bottles exist, there're limitations on judging whether the bottle is made for the emperor himself, or for the officials, or for rich

merchants. Qianlong, unlike other emperors, allowed some topics usages for common people, for example, the five-clawed dragons. During the Qianlong era, the atmosphere for collecting jade snuff bottles has already been established among officials. A lot of high-ranking officials ordered directly from Suzhou and Yangzhou workshops that made jade wares for Qianlong. This could cause trouble when we attribute the bottles to different categories.

## Emperors' Taste – from Europe to China

### History of Snuff Bottles

Talking about jade snuff bottles, we have to bring up the history of snuff bottles and how this fascinating art won the favor of generations of picky Qing emperors.

It all begins with snuff. Snuff, or ground tobacco, was originated in America. Indians have a long history of using tobacco, which can be traced back to 1400-1000BC<sup>2</sup>. However, tobacco was not introduced to the rest of the world until Columbus discovered the New World. There's no specific time recorded when "sotweed" got into Europe; however, it was only after several decades tobaccoists have spread the plant across Europe (Figure 5). Upon arrival, tobacco quickly became important economic merchandise. In the sixteenth century, Europeans believed that smoking could link a human's soul with God. In the late sixteenth century, however, the continuous popularity of smoking has raised controversies about using tobacco: Scientists and doctors started questioning the medical effects of tobacco. People realized the harmful side of using tobacco. Both churches and government has sought reforms and published laws against smoking. One of the most famous opposes came from England's King James I. Not only did the King write laws to fine heavily on imported tobacco, but he has also written and published the first anti-smoking book "A Counterblaste to Tobacco" in 1604. In the book, the King described smoking as "a custome loathsome to the eye, hatefull to the Nose, harmefull to the braine, dangerous to the Lungs, and in the blacke stinking fume thereof, neere resembling the horrible Stigian smoke of the pit that is bottomelesse"<sup>3</sup>. King James I wasn't the only European royal who opposed smoking at the time: In 1634, Michael, the czar of Russia, ordered that the first

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<sup>2</sup> Goodman, Jordan. *Tobacco in History and Culture: An Encyclopedia* (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005)

<sup>3</sup> King James I of England, *A Counterblaste to Tobacco*, 1604, reprint by G. Putnam and Sons, London, 1905

offense smokers were to be whipped and the second time executed<sup>4</sup>. The attempt to banish tobacco was a failure: it caused the price of tobacco to be very high. People had planted tobacco plants secretly, smuggled them from other countries. Even royal family members were often caught using tobacco. In addition, the government realized it has lost a prominent tax source. Under that circumstance, the banish law was removed only after a few years. The harsh laws didn't stop people from smoking but resulted in encouraging a more elegant way of taking tobacco – snuffing.

Snuff was first introduced to Europe by the Spanish monopoly “Case de Contratacion” in the early sixteenth century<sup>5</sup>. In the beginning, snuff was just made of fined, fermented tobacco powder. Later, snuff producers have added herbs and flower powder to increase its fragrance. The fermentation process will take at least one year. The decorated box used to contain snuff is called “snuffbox”. People said only the finest tobacco leaves can be used for snuff production. Doctors believed that snuff has the medical effect of relaxation and raise spirits. The finished snuff is very delicate; it will get damp easily and cannot be used after then. The snuff price was very high due to the complexity and limitation of snuff production. Compared to smoking tobacco, snuff has the advantage of being convenient and easier to carry. More importantly, snuff takers won't worry about the trouble caused by passive smoke. Because of these characteristics, snuff has quickly made its way and popularized itself among privileged elites in Europe, including the royal families. The earliest record for royal snuff taker was Catherine de' Medici, the queen of France and wife of King Henry II<sup>6</sup>. When French diplomat and scholar Jean Nicot introduce snuff to her, Catherine was so impressed with snuff's effect on her headache that she

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<sup>4</sup> Bob C. Stevens, *The Collector's Book of Snuff Bottles*

<sup>5</sup> *History Today*, The Casa De Contratacion Established in Seville

<sup>6</sup> International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society, *THE HISTORY OF SNUFF BOTTLES AND SNUFF*

has declared tobacco as Herba Regina (the Queen's Herb)<sup>7</sup>. The word nicotine comes from Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus when he recorded the plant using a Latinized Nicot's name.

Figure 6 showed one way of taking snuff: take some snuff from the snuffbox, put it onto your thumb, and sniffing gently into your nose. Snuffing was considered elegant and fashionable. In contrast, smoking was considered rude and offensive. After taking snuff, it was proper to sneeze in polite societies. People believed that only the rich and the idle had the time and money to buy snuff and to sneeze<sup>8</sup>. Interestingly, after the popularity of snuff, the act of sneezing became a part of communication, to express a lack of interest in the subject under discussion. Today, if we say anything "not to be sneezed at" means that it was worthwhile<sup>9</sup>.

The popularity of snuff has brought up the collecting of snuffboxes. These lovely decorated boxes were so attractive that people who don't use snuff or snuff haters love collecting them. Without question, royal families have some of the best snuffbox collections in history. Louis XIV, also known as the Sun King, was known to detest snuff. However, it didn't stop his interests in snuffboxes. He even invented a style of snuffbox called "Boite-a-portrait" – a snuffbox that has a portrait miniature either incorporated in it or mounted on it<sup>10</sup>. Figure 7 is a 17<sup>th</sup>-century golden snuffbox with Louis XIV's enamel portrait in it. This kind of snuffboxes is often made of the King's order and is often given to foreign ambassadors as diplomatic gifts. Figure 8 is a French royal collection snuffbox decorated with tortoiseshell, gemstones, and diamonds. The snuffbox depicts the portrait of King Louis XV and Queen Marie Leszczynska. With the inscription "Gifts of the King", this Boite-a-portrait snuffbox was made to be gifted to

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<sup>7</sup> International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society, *THE HISTORY OF SNUFF BOTTLES AND SNUFF*

<sup>8</sup> Bob C. Stevens, *The Collector's Book of Snuff Bottles*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> Christie's Asia, *Gold Boxes: Dazzling Treasures That Desired by Stylish Men or Women in the 18th Century Europe*

the Holland ambassador. Not only did the French monarchs loved those delicate snuffboxes, European royal families in Austria, but British, German, Swiss, Italy and Russia have also built their own collection of snuffboxes with sharp differences in shapes and styles.

Documents have varies opinions about when tobacco got to China. The earliest record for planting tobacco in China was by Lv Yao, a local resident at Fujian in 1611<sup>11</sup>. In his book “Lu Shu”, Lv mentioned that farmers at Zhangzhou have already started planting and selling a Filipino plant called “tabaco”<sup>12</sup> back to the Filipinos. From that fact, we can infer the origin of Chinese tobacco to either Portuguese or Spanish: the Philippines were occupied by the Spanish at that time. Portuguese has started trading with the Southern islands of China since the 1500s and controlled Macau since 1553. One of the most popular theories was that tobacco was brought in by Portuguese (or Spanish) sailors, merchants, or missionaries when they come to Macao through the Maritime Silk Route (Figure 9). It was so profitable that “one acre of tobacco equals to ten acres of rice”<sup>13</sup>. By 1639, tobacco plantation has already been an important source of income in the area of Canton, Fujian, and Zhejiang.

Same as Europe, the Chinese also recognized tobacco as medicine for warming up the spirit. A famous doctor Jingyue Zhang has written “If smoke goes up, it could warm up the heart and the lungs. If smoke goes down, it could warm up the liver and the kidneys... When conquering Yunnan, every soldier got sick except the ones who smoke tobacco. Therefore, the habit of smoking has spread to everyone in the Southwest”<sup>14</sup>. However, despite the significant economic contribution, the government still put shackles on tobacco plantations. The main

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<sup>11</sup> Carol Benedict, *Golden-Silk Smoke: A History of Tobacco in China, 1550-2010*

<sup>12</sup> Spanish for tobacco

<sup>13</sup> Yang Shicong, *Yu Tang Hui Ji*, Ming Dynasty

<sup>14</sup> Zhang Jingyue, *Jing Yue Quan Shu*, Ming Dynasty

reason for that is the rulers are afraid that too many farmers will switch from growing rice to tobacco. Ming emperor Chongzhen issued the first anti-tobacco law in 1639, violators will be executed. Early Qing emperors have continued to put a restriction on tobacco. Emperor Kangxi, the grandfather of Qianlong, has written a poem called “Quit Smoking”: Jade bowl and delicious wine, quit drinking too much for the grand banquet. The heavenly banquet is over and the sky is clear again. I won’t let the smoke to pollute that. Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong have all issued banished on the trade of tobacco and yet all of them have particular favor of taking snuff. In 1684, Kangxi was presented with European gifts from two European missionaries: Jia Bi and Ruwang Wang. Surprisingly, Kangxi has returned everything except the snuff, saying “we have received your gifts; however, these gifts are rare even in your country. Therefore, we will just keep the snuff instead”<sup>15</sup>. This was the first time snuff appeared in the documentation. The reason why Kangxi only took snuff was unknown; however, since Kangxi was a diligent emperor, the uplifting effect of snuff would definitely help him.

Snuff bottles were believed to be invented as an improved version of a snuff container since most snuffboxes do not have very good sealing. Once snuff got damp, it was not usable anymore. The particular curvy shape was inspired by Chinese medicine containers (Figure 10) and it is perfect to fit in hands. Although many scholars believed the earliest snuff bottles were a bronze bottle done by artist Rongzhang Cheng in the Shunzhi era<sup>16</sup>, there are still arguments on whether the bottle was genuine or made by later craftsmen. Figure 11 is an incised bronze snuff bottle signed with Rongzhang Cheng’s name and date. Although it was dated 1652, the date was believed to be apocryphal. If we only took credit from the official record, the first snuff bottle was produced in the enameling workshop established by Kangxi. In 1718, Kangxi set up the

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<sup>15</sup> Qing Court Achieve, quoted from

<sup>16</sup> 1643-1661

enameling workshop to produce snuff bottles and other enameling wares. Figure 12 is a painted enamel snuff bottle with lacquer inlaid produced at enameling workshop in the Kangxi era. Next year when the Russian ambassador Ismanlov visited the imperial workshop, he recorded “the chief of craftsman in the imperial workshop is German missionary Green Stomulve. Many glassware, snuff boxes, and snuff bottles were being made here and brought back to Russia and many other countries in Europe<sup>17</sup>”. From Ismanlov’s record, we can infer that snuff bottles appeared before 1719, most likely before the establishment of the enameling workshop. Jade snuff bottles were also produced during the Kangxi era. Identifying the date of jade snuff bottles can be extremely difficult, especially those before the Qianlong era. According to Hugh Moss in his research of Mary & George Bloch Collection (no.117), a lot of jade bottles were made throughout the country in the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>18</sup>. There are some arguments on the category of the first imperial snuff bottle: whether it was a glass snuff bottle made at Boshan glass workshop, or an enamel-on-copper snuff bottle made directly from Beijing enameling workshop. What we know is that snuff bottles have already become very popular in the Kangxi era; and that Aisin Gioro tradition was surely passed on to his grandson, Emperor Qianlong.

Because of the favor of both snuff bottles and jade wares, Qianlong has personally commissioned to produce different kinds of jade snuff bottles. According to the record of the imperial workshops<sup>19</sup>, there were three different markings for jade snuff bottles. Except for the most common “Made in the year of Qianlong”, there was a special “Qianlong” mark appeared on ten white jade snuff bottles, five of them bear coral stoppers, and five others have agate stoppers, and a marking “Made by Qianlong Emperor” on several bottles. To get a glimpse of the

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<sup>17</sup> Zhu Peichu, *The Historic Discussion of Snuff Bottles*

<sup>18</sup> Hugh Moss, Victor Graham, Ka Bo Tsang. *A Treasury of Chinese Snuff Bottles: the Mary and George Bloch Collection*, Part I

<sup>19</sup> Including the Imperial Jade workshop, Ruyi Pavillion and Qixiang Palace



popularity of jade snuff bottles at the Qianlong era, He Shen, the renowned Prime Minister of Qianlong, had an enormous collection of over 800 jade snuff bottles<sup>20</sup>. Unquestionably, Qianlong owned a much larger collection of jade snuff bottles. To further break down his collection, we shall trace back to where those bottles were made from.

## **Imperial Workshops**

The imperial workshop was first established by Emperor Shunzhi inside the Hall of Mental Cultivation. It was a place filled with the best artists and craftsmen across the whole country. Since the establishment, the imperial workshop has gone through several expansions: the first expansion took place in 1691 when the imperial workshop was moved to the much larger Hall of Kindly Peace<sup>21</sup>. At that time, the imperial workshop has already got a scheme of one hundred and fifty-one houses<sup>22</sup>. In 1709, the workshop has expanded again with another one hundred houses. From then on, the scheme of the imperial workshop has continuously grown and reached its peak in the era of Qianlong.

The imperial jade workshop was one of the initial workshops when Shunzhi established the imperial workshop. In the Kangxi and Yongzheng era, the imperial jade workshop was solely responsible for fulfilling the royal need. There were only twenty-five workmen working at the imperial jade workshop, including seven craftsmen, one inlaying craftsman, and seventeen carvers<sup>23</sup>. However, the actual function of the jade workshop was very limited: its main duty was to repair and to renovate jade wares from previous dynasties. Although it was responsible for

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<sup>20</sup> National Palace Museum of Taipei, *Snuff Bottles in the Collection of the National Palace Museum*

<sup>21</sup> *Qin Ding Da Qing Hui Dian Shi Li* (Imperial Laws for the Great Qing)

<sup>22</sup> Zhu Yizun, *Qin Ding Ri Xia Jiu Wen Kao*, Qing dynasty

<sup>23</sup> Li Hongwei, *Qianlong yu yu*

producing jade wares for Kangxi and Yongzheng, there were not many jade stones for the court to make jade wares when Khotan was controlled by the Dzungars rebels. The battle between Qing and Dzungars broke out in 1690 when Kangxi decided to unify the Xinjiang area. This battle lasted till 1759 when Qianlong's army conquered Dzungars' capital Dzungaria. In 1760, Qianlong resumed the interrupted Khotan jade tribute. Two tons of selected Khotan Jade was sent to the court bi-annually. The jade tribute lasted till 1821 when Emperor Daoguang, the grandson of Qianlong finally put a stop to it<sup>24</sup>.

Ruyi Pavilion was established in the first year of Qianlong's reign<sup>25</sup>. At the Kangxi era, the Jade workshop has already faced difficulties in the production of some jade wares. As the economic and aesthetic development, the need for a more sophisticated jade workshop has become more and more realistic. Since the establishment, Ruyi Pavilion has taken over the production of most jade wares. Because of that, Ruyi Pavilion has gathered some of the best artists in the world: the infamous Jade masters Yao Zongren and Guo Zhitong both worked here for twenty years, and Giuseppe Castiglioni worked in Ruyi Pavilion for a long time<sup>26</sup>. Its responsibilities ranged from categorizing and grading, to drafting and making jade wares. Without question, Ruyi Pavilion had made a great contribution to the court collection and had a great influence on Qianlong's taste.

Qixiang Palace was another jade workshop established under Qianlong's order. It was established in the sixth year of Qianlong<sup>27</sup> and responsible for the production of some small jade wares. However, in the Qianlong era, Qixiang Palace and Imperial Jade Workshop were both

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<sup>24</sup> Dunnell, Ruth W.; Elliott, Mark C.; Foret, Philippe; Millward, James A. *New Qing Imperial History: The Making of Inner Asian Empire at Qing Chengde*

<sup>25</sup> 1736

<sup>26</sup> Li Hongwei, *Qianlong yu yu*

<sup>27</sup> 1741

considered as sub-workshops of Ruyi Pavilion as Ruyi Pavilion controlled the best jade and best carvers. In cases when Ruyi Pavilion was not able to finish wares in time, Qixiang Palace and the imperial jade workshop took some works. Because of that, both workshops have other duties to work on: Qixiang Palace was responsible for the making of Zitan furniture; the Imperial Jade Workshop was responsible for wares that made of other precious stones.

In the Qianlong era, the court controls the best jade resources. Since imperial workshops were responsible for most of the royal demands, they have the advantage of using the best jade material. Since they are producing jade wares according to the emperor's command, they directly represent the emperor's taste. One of the main characteristics of imperial-workshops-made pebble snuff bottles is that they will keep as much pebble's original form as possible. Figure 13 is a set of six Qianlong white jade embellished magnolia bottles in the collection of George & Mary Bloch. According to the research of Hugh Moss, only the court has ordered snuff bottles in sets, usually with ten or twelve snuff bottles<sup>28</sup>. In China, magnolia symbols for beautiful women, combining with the flawless pebble jade, it is very typical of royal tastes. This smaller set was probably a result of lost bottles. Bottles are made of flawless pebble jades, the petals are stained artificially. Each bottle is different in shapes and colors, that is, according to the original shape of the pebble. The petal, each has its own length and decorative style further extends the bottle's artistic variety. The same subject matter appeared on a similar set of snuff bottles at the National Palace Museum. Figure 14 is one snuff bottle in the set of nine bottles collected in the National Palace Museum of Taipei. Similar to the previous example, each of the nine bottles is different in its own way. The vein is also clearly visible on the petal, and stoppers are made of green-white jade that has the exact same color as the bottles. What different is, the petal was made of

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<sup>28</sup> Hugh Moss, Victor Graham, Ka Bo Tsang. *A Treasury of Chinese Snuff Bottles: the Mary and George Bloch Collection*, Part I, no. 71

transparent green jade instead of staining the original pebble. According to the record of imperial workshops, “Qianlong green-white jade eggplant shaped snuff bottle... the petal consists of four leaves, made of green jade, the stopper is made of green-white jade as well...”<sup>29</sup>. The example is probably a standard for what an “imperial jade eggplant shaped” should like. The artificial staining on the bottle confirmed Qianlong’s love of natural jade skin.

Besides naturalism, archaism is another style Qianlong appreciated. As we discussed, Qianlong will give very specific orders to the imperial workshops to make archaic wares. Figure 15 was an imperial white jade snuff bottle with a Qianlong seal mark. In a very elegant ovoid form, the bottle is covered with knotted bands rope pattern. The knotted rope pattern was widely used on Western Zhou<sup>30</sup> bronzes to imitate feather containers (Figure 16)<sup>31</sup>. Figure 17 is another example in the Palace Museum collection. This green jade snuff bottle also has similar “knotted rope” patterns on it. Besides, it has the same clerical script seal “Made in the Year of Qianlong” as figure 15. We can see Qianlong has a lot of passion for the archaic wares. The emperor was not satisfied with just being a student; he wanted to produce archaic wares with era characteristics. In fact, Qianlong has modified many antique jades into wares like snuff bottles. Figure 18 is a dragon-beast pattern jade snuff bottle with clerical script mark “Made in the Year of Qianlong”. This piece is currently collected by the National Palace Museum in Taipei and belongs to the court collection. The bottle is made from a spring-autumn period dragon patterned jade sword. It is well hollowed. The stopper was finished in Qianlong’s favorite way: guild bronze with opal attached on top.

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<sup>29</sup> Li Hongwei, *Qianlong yu yu*

<sup>30</sup> 1045 – 771 BC

<sup>31</sup> Carol Michaelson, *A Periodization of the Qianlong Emperor’s Jade Snuff Bottles*

The function of the imperial workshop has determined their aesthetic tastes. Despite the craftsmen came from different backgrounds, it's amazing how it managed to maintain the high quality for such a long time. Craftsmen have no official position, even the jade master Yao Zongyuan was considered as a “degrading servant” by Qianlong. The spirit of individualism doesn't exist much in the palace, however, the other center of jade carving in China, Suzhou, has a totally different atmosphere.

### **Eight Workshops outside Beijing**

Qianlong has very strict standards towards jade production. Although having an enormous stock of jade stones, the imperial workshop cannot use it at will. To produce a piece of jade, the imperial workshop needed to get the approval from Qianlong himself. Meanwhile, Qianlong will allocate specific kinds of jade stones to the workshop, while giving specific orders about the wares' color, style, grade, and finishing time. Despite added Ruyi Pavilion and Qixiang Palace, it was still very hard for the imperial workshop to fulfill Qianlong's demand for high-quality jade wares. Because of that, Qianlong appointed eight places to help the imperial workshop to produce jade wares: Suzhou, Yangzhou, Tianjin, Hangzhou, Jiujiang, Jiangning, Huaian, Fengyang. Except for Tianjin, all the seven places are located around Jiangsu, known as the center of economy and handicrafts. In fact, Jiangsu craftsmen counted for over 50 percent of the imperial workshop workers and they were often paid better than their colleagues from Northern China<sup>32</sup>. Different from the imperial workshops, tasks allocated to the workshop are distributed to local craftsmen. These local craftsmen also produce wares for merchants and each of these eight places has its own particularities. In this thesis, we'll discuss the characteristic of

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<sup>32</sup> Li Hongwei, *Qianlong yu yu*

jade works from Suzhou in particular, and see how the “southern center of jades” contributed to the imperial jade snuff bottle collection.

## **Suzhou**

In China, Suzhou was widely known as the “Heaven on Earth”. It is a city that has a splendid history of over 4,000 years. From the 1<sup>st</sup> century, Suzhou has already become the second-largest city in the country. In the period of the Three Kingdom, Suzhou was known to be the origin of Wu Nation... Through thousands of years of history, Suzhou has kept standing as one of the nation’s centers of economy and culture. Countless famous literati and prime ministers came from the city. From the cultural standpoint, Suzhou is the birthplace of Chinese literati painting, “The Four Scholars of Jiangnan” was to praise four top talents in Suzhou.

Suzhou became the jade production center since the late Ming Dynasty. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a famous Suzhou Jade carver Lu Zigang made his name as the “jade carver with a good hand”. Zigang’s works are highly favored by Ming and Qing rulers, many of his works were collected by the royals and collected in the Palace Museum. He was very famous for his vivid depicting of landscapes and poems. Lu has taught many students, later those students gathered around Zhuanzhu Alley, where it became the center of jade production since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Besides creating Suzhou School jade carving, Lu has made another great contribution: to set the trend for jade carvers to sign their names on their works. In feudal society, the spirit of collectivism was encouraged. It was dangerous to tribute signed works of art to the emperor, and yet Lu was the first carver to bear his names on his tribute works and to make it out safely. Later Suzhou carvers will sign Zigang’s name on their works to show respect to this grandmaster.

Figure 19 is a smoky quartz vase decorated by Lu Zigang at the Palace Museum. In a very elegant form, the master uses the natural white markings as prunus. On the other side, the vase was carved with a semi-cursive script “Shadow on the ground, floral in the air”. Many jade masters who worked for imperial workshops came from Zhuanzhu Alley, including the most famous Yao Zongren and Guo Zhitong. From a certain point of view, Zhuanzhu Alley represented the highest skills of jade carving throughout the entire Qing Dynasty.

Qianlong had a personal favor for the Suzhou School carving, not only did he appointed Suzhou jade carver Yao Zongren as the leading craftsman of the new Ruyi Pavillion, but he had also started commissioning jades for Suzhou weaving department as early as the second year of his reigning<sup>33</sup>. Due to the tradition set by master Lu Zigang, the Qianlong emperor has chartered Suzhou jade carvers to carve their names on their tribute. According to the record of the Qing imperial workshop, in 1765, Suzhou tribute six white jade snuff bottles to Qianlong. Qianlong has ordered the imperial workshop to make gilded bronze stoppers for those bottles<sup>34</sup>. In 1780, the Suzhou weaving department finishes the task of making nine jade snuff bottles, and Qianlong has ordered Ruyi Pavillion to sign “Made in the year of Qianlong” on them<sup>35</sup>. Figure 20 is a fine example Suzhou School black jade snuff bottle depicting a pine tree and human figures<sup>36</sup>. This magnificent black and white jade snuff bottle was part of the imperial collection. Black and white jade is a type of Khotan nephrite widely used by Suzhou carvers. Using Suzhou’s typical low relief technique, the bottle depicted an old man holding his stick, with a child playing under a pine tree. On the other side, the artist carved a poem in a semi-cursive script: “Barely see the sky surrounded by countless trees, the cloud looks like a virtuous teacher. If you ask the child

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<sup>33</sup> Li Hongwei, *Qianlong yu yu*

<sup>34</sup> Record of the Qing court imperial workshop

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*

<sup>36</sup> Database for the National Palace Museum, Taipei

how long has he waiting, he is going along with the elder and old pine tree to meet the immortals”. The artist signed his name “Fengchi” and a seal “Bing” after the end of the poem.

Subject matters are very important for Chinese court arts. Qing court has strict standards for the usage of auspicious motifs. Moreover, the shape and material of snuff bottles have also played important roles in the general themes and ideas they conveyed. For jade snuff bottles, they share some similar imagery with other art forms such as paintings and ceramics. The motifs are often imbued with ideas from Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. Daoism features had appeared frequently in the Qianlong period: pine tree is a symbol of longevity, the long-beard elder symbols for the immortals, and child is often considered as fertility. Such a Daoism subject matter is common on wares in the Palace Museum collection. Figure 21 is a Zitan brush container with typical Daoism features: cranes, pine trees, lingzhi fungus, and deer. This brush container has an identical low-relief carving as the black jade snuff bottle. This brush container was very likely to be produced at Qixiang Palace as it works on both small jade works such as snuff bottles and Zitan furniture and wares. Figure 22 is a Suzhou School white jade double earring immortal cup with bottom signed “Qianlong Imitation of Antique”. It was carved with many immortals gathering for a banquet. The cup’s earrings were carved as two fairy maidens in long dresses and sashes around their waists. A closer examine on the immortals revealed similar poses and clothing patterns as the elder’s in figure 20.

Another snuff bottle example can be found at a snuff bottle in Mary & George Bloch Collection (Figure 23). It was carved with an elder holding a stick on one side, and a scholar and a child on the other side. A scholar is writing on the carved mountain “Stone like Gold”, meaning the precious of jade stones. Lotus, pine trees and sycamore trees were carved on the side of the bottle, signs for a typical Daoism subject. The relief carving is very and the artist



perfectly separated the color layers of the pebble nephrite: the outer layer has the richest color; the carver utilized it as elders' clothes, the inscription on the bottle, and the lotus. The middle layer, in its purest white color, with a little bit of transparency, carved with the main characters on the bottle. The inner layer, with its irregular markings, was a perfect fit for the rocks on the background. Rocks were finished with dotting carve marks, which can be found at all the other samples we had. The three-dimensional carving has a very strong visual impact; the sharp contrast between the surface and nephrite has strengthened that impact to a new level. The carver has managed to integrate different layers into one piece of artwork.

If we compare figures 20, 21, 22 and 23, we can find a lot of similarities. Suzhou School carving often used a special technique called low-relief carving, that is, carving in definable layers and has a shallow look to it<sup>37</sup>. Suzhou carvers are particular fluent at low-relief carving, it could be seen through the smoothness of figures' cloth pattern. Both snuff bottles have uses jade skins to create contrast and natural feeling of the work. There are many other similarities, such as the dotting carving method of rocks, subject matter, etc. The fact that many Suzhou craftsmen working for the imperial workshop often causes confuses the origin of some jade carvings. However, with these comparisons, we can picture what it looks like for a "typical" Suzhou jade ware. In the end, a good snuff bottle is not only about extraordinary skills, but also about the quality of original jade pebbles.

### **Glass-Imitating Jade Snuff Bottles**

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<sup>37</sup> *High and Low Relief Carving*, [fundamentalsofwoodworking.com](http://fundamentalsofwoodworking.com)

Famous researcher Yang Boda summarized the development of jade culture into three periods: Witchery Period, King Period, and Folk Period<sup>38</sup>. Long before the first feudal dynasty was established, jade has earned its name “psychic stone”. Chinese people believe the aesthetic beauty of jade has represented certain social values. In the book of Shi Jing (1000 BC – 500 BC), jade was compared with a moral, wise man. We mentioned that simplism and naturalism have become one of the dominant trends at jade workshops in the Qianlong era. A classic Confucianism book “Li Ji” has described jade’s virtues as “benevolence, justice, propriety, truth, credibility, music, loyalty, heaven, earth, morality, and intelligence”<sup>39</sup>. In early China, due to the limitation of high-quality white jade, many imitation forms of art were created to imitate the beauty of jade.

Imperial Glass Workshop was established along with the Jade imperial workshop in the Kangxi era. After a hundred years of development, the glassmaking techniques have advanced to a peak in the Qianlong era. Compared to jade snuff bottles, glass snuff bottles are more like a royal tradition. According to the record of the imperial workshops, Yongzheng Emperor has ordered the Imperial Glass Workshop to prepare one hundred glass snuff bottles each year for the three major festivals: the emperor’s birthday, the dragon boat festival and the spring festival. Qianlong changed the order to sixty glass snuff bottles each year for the dragon boat festival and the spring festival each and one hundred for the emperor’s birthday<sup>40</sup>. Due to Qianlong’s favor of jade material, the Imperial Glass Workshop has made many glass-imitating jade wares for the emperor. Figure 24 is a fine example of the production of the Imperial Glass Workshop<sup>41</sup>. Carved on one side with the poem “Moon white and pure as ice, it keeps aromatic vapor and

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<sup>38</sup> Yang Boda, *Chinese Jade: Long History and Eternal Youth*, From *Yang Boda Discusses Jade*

<sup>39</sup> Jun Shan, *Important of Jade in Chinese Culture*

<sup>40</sup> Economic Information Daily, *World in the Sleeve: Snuff Bottles*

<sup>41</sup> Hugh Moss, Victor Graham, and Ka Bo Tsang. *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle*, no. 334

remains unsullied”, followed by mark “Qianlong Yuzhi” (made by imperial order of Qianlong Emperor). On the other side, inscribed “frost and snowflakes, it embodies the very essence of elegance”, followed by “composed in the year of Gengchen”(1760). Just as the poem described, the bottle was made of pure snowflake-white glass with two archaic ring handles carved on both sides. The icy whiteness and elegance are just like a very fine piece of nephrite. The archaic mask handles were symbolism for the past golden ages. The bottle perfectly represented Qianlong’s fantasy of perfect elegance.

Another example can be found in the collection of the National Palace Museum. Figure 25 is an opaque glass snuff bottle with a beast-head shoulder-ring design. The short neck and round shoulders are typical for a Late Qianlong- Jia Qing period of work. This kind of opaque glass was often used for imitation of jades. Although it didn’t have signed inscriptions as the previous example, the design of archaic rings and gild-bronze officer-hat design showed its imperial origin.

## Study from the Great – The Mary & George Bloch Collection

### Collection History

Who owns the greatest private snuff bottle collection in the history besides the emperors? Most people will say, He Shen, the famous prime minister at the Qianlong era. When he was arrested due to bribery, the official found over 2,000 snuff bottles in his house. That was the same scale as the Palace Museum collection. If you think that answer is tricky because He Shen has the power to run around the imperial warehouse, then you got the answer: Mary & George Bloch.

Mary's parents are from Warsaw, Poland. In 1917, her parents moved to Tianjin where Mary was born. Born in China, Mary had grown a strong interest in Chinese culture and arts. In her seventh year, Mary saw snuff bottles first time at the home of the consul of Belgium. The fascinating and colorful bottles deeply attracted young Mary. George Bloch was born in an Austria industrial family. In 1938, Nazi Germany annexed Austria as part of the Anschluss. Meanwhile, George's father passed away due to illness. The family business was taken over by the Nazis and George had to flee to Shanghai. In the beginning, George found work in a construction material company. In 1949, George moved to Japan to begin his business of selling watches to U.S. soldiers. In 1955, George came to Hong Kong and established his trading company Herald International, Limited. The couple met together in 1969 and began their journey of collection<sup>42</sup>.

Before forming the astonishing collection of snuff bottles, the Blochs have already owned one of the world's finest collections of modern western oil paintings and sculptures. Their initial

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<sup>42</sup> Du Ka, *Mary & George Bloch: 40 years of love reflected by snuff bottles*

interaction with snuff bottles was in 1984 when they met Robert Kleiner, then the cataloguer of Chinese snuff bottles at Sotheby's<sup>43</sup>. With their previous collecting experiences and the help of Hugh Moss, Robert Kleiner, and other specialists' help, the Blochs have quickly mastered the connoisseurship of this high-art of the Qing Dynasty, resulted in a very highly-regarded collection in the art history.

Their vast collection contains 1,740 snuff bottles. Prior to the sale, Hugh Moss had written a series of catalog for the Blochs. The catalog was made of 7 volumes: Jade, Quartz, Stones other than jades and quartz, Inside Painted, Glass, Arts of the Fire, Organic/Metal and Mixed Media. Without question, the Blochs collection topped almost all categories of snuff bottles. In a long time, the catalog was considered as the most systematic reference book in the field of snuff bottles collection.

### **Results & Highlights for Jade Snuff Bottles Collection**

The vast collection was divided into ten sales, with a total sale of HK\$437 million (US\$56 million). The first five parts were sold at Bonhams HK while parts six to ten were sold at Sotheby's HK. All ten sales were able to achieve "white gloves", and all the 1740 lots were sold. From Bonhams to Sotheby's, specialist Julian King was responsible for the whole ten parts of the sale. In combined, the sale set the record for the highest-value collection of snuff bottles ever auctioned<sup>44</sup>. It had also set the auction record for different categories of snuff bottles, including the most expensive snuff bottle ever sold at auction (Figure 26). In the fourth sale, a Qianlong period European-figure enamel on glass snuff bottle was sold for a whopping HK\$25,300,000

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<sup>43</sup> Hugh Moss, Victor Graham, and Ka Bo Tsang. *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle*

<sup>44</sup> Data from Sotheby's Auction House

(US\$3,230,000). On the first sale, a “Stone like Gold” Suzhou school pebble snuff bottle (Figure 23) was sold for HK\$6,032,000(US\$770,000), set the auction record for the category of jade snuff bottles at the time and held the record till July 2019.

Suzhou bottles have been sold exceptionally well. Except for the record-setting bottle, there were 4 other Suzhou bottles that were sold over HK\$1,000,000. A “Immortals at Play” Suzhou black and white jade snuff bottle (Figure 27) was sold for HK3,880,000, made it the 5th most expensive jade snuff bottles ever sold. This bottle is very special among its Suzhou comrades: it is very well hollowed, and only carved on one side instead of both sides. In addition, the Daoism subject is very classical of mid-Qing Suzhou carving. According to Hugh Moss, the bottle very likely comes from the 18<sup>th</sup> century: the master finish of the low carving and the impressing balance of the whole picture have all confirmed that.

Imperial workshops had also come up high for the Blochs. Except for the Imperial “magnolia” set of snuff bottles (Figure 13) that sold for HK\$2,080,000, 2 other imperial bottles were sold over HK\$1 million. Figure 28 is an imperial yellow jade snuff bottle with “linked-Bi” patterns. The bottle was sold for HK\$1.2 million at the second sale of Mary & George Bloch. From every standpoint, this bottle is a classical imperial bottle: material, shape, archaistic design, the mark... The bottle is designed with four “linked-Bi” pattern. The earliest jade Bi can be traced back to the Hongshan Culture about 7000 years ago. According to the research by James Watt, Qianlong was focusing on imitating ancient jades in the first twenty-five years of his reign<sup>45</sup>. Yellow jade was often used to imitate the color of ancient jade due to aging. This example is a perfect showcase of Qianlong’s archaistic taste.

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<sup>45</sup>James Watt and Michael Knight, *Chinese Jades from the Collection of the Seattle Art Museum*

Another important category that performed solidly was the Master of the Rocks School. Unlike Zhuanzhu Valley for Suzhou, there is no record when or where this school was evolved. However, this school of artists was known for the mastery usage of jade skin and scholarly subject, or fisherman (Yu), lumberjack (Jiao), farmer (Geng), scholar (Du), to be specific. Generally speaking, this school should be evolved after 1740, when the mainland merchants began to have access to Khotan nephrites. And lasted 120 years until the second opium war broke out and the Franco-British army burned down the royal garden Yuanmingyuan. Figure 29 is a master of rock school snuff bottle and sold for HK\$456,000 at the first sale of the Blochs. The bottle was carved from a piece of yellow pebble jade, with farmers and scholars carved on one side using the dark-colored skin. Only carved on one side with two of its traditional themes, we can infer that this bottle could be one in a pair. It has perfectly separated the skin with the nephrite body, and the details of the bottle were just as fascinating as Suzhou masterpieces. Two other bottles from the same school were offered and sold at similar prices.

The sale featured some jade works from a special imperial workshop of the Qianlong era: Palace Xifanzuo (Tibetan Workshop). We know the emperor had appointed eight workshops outside Beijing to help him produce jade wares, and Palace Xifanzuo was not one of them. There was no record where exactly Palace Xifanzuo was. One of the most commonly accepted theory was that Xifanzuo is located at Hindustan area, now around Pakistan and Kashmir. In 1758, a year prior to Qianlong conquered the Dzungars, the Qing army entered the Aksu City where most Hui tribes lived<sup>46</sup>. After the war settled, those Hui tribes began to trade with the Han people. Hindustan Hui people are crafts masters; Jadewares were important merchandise in the trade. Some high-quality jade wares were a tribute to the court by local officials. Qianlong was

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<sup>46</sup> Li Hongwei, *Qianlong yu yu*

impressed by those Hindustan style jades and asked the local officers to make more jade wares. In 1778, Qianlong made an order to the Xinjiang officer “Xinjiang Officers never tribute before. If you buy some jade wares from those Hui People and tribute, I will receive it”. The Palace Xifanzuo was a term refers to the Hindustan Jade wares tribute to the court or those court-produced Hindustan wares. Figure 30 is a Mughal style lotus pattern white jade snuff bottle. It is an imperial bottle and was attributed to Palace Xifanzuo (Tibetan workshop). The classical faceted form and the astonishing design are signs for its imperial origin. What separated it from other imperial workshop production is its unique “thinness” carving and the Mughal lotus design. The bottle was sold in the first part of the Blochs sale for HK\$504,000, a pretty high price for a Xifanzuo bottle.



## Market Performance and Prediction

The long history of China has resulted in a very sophisticated and complex Chinese culture, which has made Chinese arts one of the oldest continuous art forms in the world. At the same time, Chinese culture has influenced many other cultures in the world. Back in 138 BC, the ambassador of the Eastern Han dynasty, Zhang Qian, has commuted across Asia to establish a trade route with other countries. The communication never ended since then: from Japan, Korea to Persia, the Spanish and the British, Eurasia have been bonded together by the “Silk Route”. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch East India Company has reached Asia through the Mediterranean Sea to trade with countries in East Asia and established the Maritime Silk Road (Figure 9). Snuff was believed to be brought to China through the Maritime Silk Road, however, snuff bottles was an original creation of Chinese people. Snuff bottle, with its unique historical background and significance, has been appreciated by both Eastern and Western cultures. Since Jade snuff bottle sale counts for a solid percentage of 18% of the total sales of snuff bottles<sup>47</sup>, we can use the number of the total snuff bottle sale to determine the sale of jade snuff bottles. In this chapter, we will focus on the market performance of snuff bottle sales in the past 10 years. By categorizing data, we will be able to analyze the overall market changes and changes in the jade snuff bottle market. Factors that influenced the prices such as location and auction houses will be analyzed as well as a part of the price distribution. Market preference will be given as a conclusion to the 10-year market. At the end of the chapter, a prediction will be made for the future market and factors that could play important roles.

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<sup>47</sup> According to the research of the 2010, 2014, and 2018 data

## Overview of the Snuff Bottle Market Trend

Snuff bottles are one of the earliest categories of Chinese artworks that were accepted by western collectors. The earliest snuff bottle auction hosted can be traced back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>48</sup>, when the loots from Yuanmingyuan appeared frequently on the auction. In 1968, the Chinese Snuff Bottle Society of America was founded in Baltimore by Edward Choate O'Dell and was joined by hundreds of collectors from all over the world. It was the first society to “honor snuff bottle collectors and to publish scholarly articles about snuff bottles”<sup>49</sup>. In December 1969, a year after the establishment of the Society, the Parke-Bernet Galleries (Sotheby's New York) hosted a three-part auction from the collection of Mrs. Elmer A. Claar. The sales results were amazing. All lots were sold and the highest sold lot was a Qianlong Peking painted-enamel snuff bottle, sold for \$2,100 dollars hammer price in 1969, which is around \$14,000 dollars today<sup>50</sup>. In comparison, the average price for Qianlong painted enamel snuff bottle ranges from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 dollars now. The Society was grown in a very fast pace internationally, in 1974, the Society decided to change its name to International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society. It is, still, one of the most active and influential organizations in the field of Chinese art.

This brought a very interesting point to the demographics of snuff bottle collectors. Out of the 360 members, only 70 members are from mainland China. With the Chinese economy growing, more and more buyers from mainland China entered the market. This is actually becoming a driving force for the overall market for Chinese works of art. However, this trend had posted reverse effects for snuff bottles, since most Chinese buyers are interested in paintings

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<sup>48</sup> According to Specialist Clare Chu

<sup>49</sup> Home page of the International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society

<sup>50</sup> Data via Inflation Calculator

and ceramics. Before the Blochs sale, Hugh Moss warned that the continuous hot Chinese market could lead to the over-pricing for snuff bottles. According to the TEFAF report by Professor Kejia Wu, in 2011, the Chinese market has become the largest art market in the world<sup>51</sup>. However, the market faced a sharp drop of 52 percent in 2012, as the market became more rational and the economy facing pressure. Chart 9 showed the average price movement for different parts of the Blochs sale. A downward-slope line between the date and the average prices:

Figure 2 showed the annual snuff bottle sales hosted by major auction houses, to be specific, Bonhams hosted 9 sales out of a total of 10 sales before 2012, including 5 parts of Mary and George Bloch's sale. After 2012, auction houses decided to host more snuff bottle sales in New York instead of Hong Kong. For five years, Hong Kong disappeared from the list of snuff bottle auctions. Compared to the Hong Kong market, U.S. collectors focus more on the diversity of collection instead of the high quality of individual pieces. This also contributed to a drop in the average bottle price. After Bloch's sale, Christie's New York hosted a new series of snuff bottle sales from Boston collector Ruth & Carl Barron. The results of the Barrons sale is not nearly as good as the Blochs sale, with an overall average of \$5,691 dollars per lot.

In summary, there are several reasons behind the downturn: the first reason is the overall quality drop after the Blochs sale. The overwhelmingly low-quality bottles made auction houses to bid the bottles without reserve. These low-quality bottles have negative influences on buyers' expectations, therefore raising the bought-in rates (Chart 4). However, for similar quality bottles, the prices did not change that much. For example, in September 2017, Christie's New York hosted the fifth part of the Ruth & Carl Barron sale. The highest bid was a Master of the Rocks

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<sup>51</sup> Kejia Wu, *2019 TEFAF Market Report*

School snuff bottle (Figure 31) sold for \$47,500 dollars. Compared to \$57,000 for the same school, but better-carved bottle sold at the Blochs (Figure 29), the Barron bottle was sold pretty well. Another reason is that the North America region has over 2,000 bottles per year auctioned to the public, a number that is simply too much for the market to absorb, as more bottles are offered under a big sale, through smaller auction houses or simply brought to overseas. The third reason is that the snuff bottle market is still being underestimated by mainland China buyers. Despite the sharp drop in the market, the diversified collectors' base will provide strong support for the future market. With more and more Chinese collectors and auctioneers started to pay attention to snuff bottles, we have reasons to believe that the market would turn upwards soon.

### **Price Distribution and Market Preference**

As we discussed before, market trends such as time and location played an important role in price movements. However, besides these external factors, internal factors have more significant influences on the prices of jade snuff bottles: condition, rarity, material, quality, shape, motif, provenance, etc. In this section, we will take each factor into consideration and analyze how these factors influenced the market.

### **External Factors**

Compared to internal factors, external factors are considered more unpredictable and hard to control. In modern marketing theories, the external marketing environment can be divided into five parts: economic factors, political and regulatory factors, competitive factors, technological

factors, social and cultural factors<sup>52</sup>. For quality control purposes, we will use data from the Mary & George Bloch sale only.

Economic factors have been critical for any art market. A good economic statistic usually means more fluidity and high market growth. Chart 10 is a chart showing the annual GDP growth for the Chinese economy from 2011 to 2019. In 2011, China's GDP is still growing at a fast pace at 9.5%. However, in 2012, growth slowed significantly to 7.9%. "The economic situation facing China has been complex and severe", accords to Shang Laiyun from the National Bureau of Statistics<sup>53</sup>. The sharp drop in the art market was a market reflection of that situation. The average price for the Blochs after 2012 has halved compared to the sale before 2012.

The most significant influence from the regulatory standpoint came from the tariff changes. On September 1, 2019, the Trump government issued an additional 10 percent of tariffs on imported Chinese art and antiquities more than 100 years old. A month later, the trump government increased the rate to 15 percent. The new tariff would begin on December 15 and would definitely hurt the market. Compared to Chinese porcelain and paintings collectors, snuff bottle collectors may be less influenced considering a more rational price for the snuff bottle category, but still, the tariffs could demoralize new collectors from entering the market. However, the tariff didn't apply to auction and sales within the States. In the future, we could see more snuff bottles appeared on American regional or local auction houses.

In America, there are over 2,000 snuff bottles offered and sold annually through different auction houses and galleries. Without many high-quality bottles offered recently, auction houses are facing fierce competition from each other. The most significant result is the drop-down of

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<sup>52</sup> Karen Collins, *An Introduction to Business*

<sup>53</sup> Tania Branigan, *China's economic growth slows to 7.6%*, The Guardian, Jul 13 2012

average prices (Chart 11). We can see on the chart, the annual price was 29741 dollars per bottle in 2014, the number dropped to 9969 dollars per bottle in 2015, and in 2016, 5136 dollars per bottle. The competitive factor was the main contributor to the price drop after 2015: in 2018, an average bottle would sell only for 3896 dollars, a 24 percent drop compared to 2015. When fewer bottles were offered on the market, for example, the year 2019, the average price goes up to 5839 dollars per bottle.

In recent years, we have seen more online auctions at Christie's, Sotheby's and Bonhams. In fact, the auction house is not the sole player in the market. Shopping websites like eBay offered antique snuff bottles to their customers as well. eBay has 18,906 search results for snuff bottles, and the price ranges from 5 dollars to 32,000 dollars. Chinese online shopping giant Alibaba offered snuff bottles online as well, over 26,000 snuff bottles were offered on Alibaba's auction panel. Compared to the traditional on-site auction, online auction has the advantages of being more convenient and user-friendly. However, online auctions could also mean limited information sources compared with traditional on-site auctions.

We have talked about the diversified demographic for snuff bottle collectors and how snuff bottles are appreciated by both Eastern and Western collectors. A diverse collector base means a stronger ability to bear risks. According to Chart 6, New York and Hong Kong are still the favorite locations for auction houses to have snuff bottle auctions. In the past 10 years, Christie's, Sotheby's and Bonhams hosted 19 snuff bottle auctions in New York, the number is 12 in Hong Kong. San Francisco is trailing at 3 sales and Sydney has one sale as well. Lots of wise, they offered a total of 2,748 lots in New York and sold 2,459 of them (Chart 7). Hong Kong has the highest sold rate of 99.6 percent lots sold (1970 out of 1977). From the total sale standpoint, Hong Kong has achieved 60,919,211 dollars in the past 10 years, that is over 3 times

the number in New York (19,734,088 dollars) (Chart 8). This is largely due to the success of the Blochs sale. Another reason is that Hong Kong is more convenient for Asia buyers compared to New York, therefore Hong Kong gradually substituted New York and became the new center for Asian art.

### **Internal Factors**

Now we are talking about the “quality” of the bottles. It is not just about the condition, more specifically, factors such as the origin, the material, the shape could all determine a bottle’s price. By analyzing different factors, we would be able to see the market preference and be able to see the most potential category of jade snuff bottles. Sales information from the Blochs sale will be used to avoid the interruption from external factors.

From the carving school's perspective, Suzhou bottles have the highest average price of 146,338 dollars per bottle, followed by the imperial school jade snuff bottle, 40983 dollars per bottle (Chart 12). On the one hand, the school of carving has very identical characteristics: low-relief carving, the subject matters, etc. Suzhou bottles, On the other hand, there was only 17 Suzhou bottles offered at the Blochs sale. In comparison, the sales offered 69 imperial bottles, more bottles offered. Among the 69 imperial jade snuff bottles, there are 42 imperial bottles are “attributed to”, signs that quality control for imperial bottles can be difficult. In Qianlong era, many Suzhou carvers were working in the imperial workshops. Famous Suzhou carvers like Yao Zongyuan became the main contributor to the development of imperial workshops. Therefore, many imperial bottles were actually finished by Suzhou carvers, gave the imperial category a huge potential to go upward. The same rule can be applied to the Master of Rocks school, many bottles from the school can have imperial or Suzhou origin; however, due to the limited resource

to high-quality material, the growth potential could be limited. Xifanzuo bottles had a solid performance of 40094 dollars per bottle in the sale, but the sample is too small for a decisive conclusion for the market.

Not surprisingly, black and white jade claimed the spot for the most expensive material for Qianlong jade snuff bottles (Chart 13). Mostly used by Suzhou master carvers after 1740, black and white jade was a rarer kind of Khotan nephrite than white jade. In comparison, jet black jade, another rare nephrite mined at Khotan, was only one-tenth of the price of the black and whites. The main reason was that most jet black jade snuff bottles were finished plain and uncarved. We already know that skinned pebble jades were considered the highest quality jades in the Qianlong era, while master carving was also a sign of good quality. Characters such as plain and unskinned bottles can be perceived as made-for-peasants and lower quality. The data can be seen in Chart 15, the average for carved jade bottles was 51734 dollars, while the number for a plain bottle was only 28992 dollars on average. Yellow jades came at second with an average price of 48107 dollars per bottle. Yellow jades were widely used for imperial jade bottles to imitate the archaistic feeling of antique objects (Figure 28). Surprisingly, jadeite was the third expensive materials for Qianlong snuff bottles. Here is the problem: jadeite was not available to China before the treaty signed in 1770 allowing the export of jadeite to China<sup>54</sup>. Although jadeite has won Qianlong's favor very quick, it was the later emperors who formed a great collection of jadeite wares<sup>55</sup>. Although selling at high prices, it could be hard to allocate some jadeite bottles to Qianlong considering the relatively short period from the sign of treaty to the succession of Jiaqing Emperor.

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<sup>54</sup> Harvey, G. E. (1967). *History of Burma*. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd.

<sup>55</sup> Zhang Rong, *Jadeite and Royal Life of Qing Dynasty*, 2014



Another interesting area to bring up was the shapes of jade snuff bottles. There are clear connections between specific schools and bottle shapes. In fact, the shape is an important factor that was used to determine a bottle's origin. For example, imperial school carvers are favor of patterns like basket, gourd, and vase patterns. Plant patterns such as eggplant and bamboo shoots are also among the most used patterns for the imperial school. Master of Rocks school carvers are tended to have a more "formal" snuff bottle pattern. Chart 14 showed us the relationship between market prices and particular bottle shapes. Basket-weave designed bottles and plant shaped bottles were more popular in the market, with averages over 61,000 dollars per bottle. It brought up an interesting topic about the different auspicious motifs in Chinese court art (Appendix 2). Different auspicious motifs have particular meanings behind them and these motifs were used extensively through Ming & Qing Dynasty. Basketweave design is pronounced as "basket ware" in Chinese, which sounds similar to "male child". In China, male children were believed to be carrying the family tradition and brought good luck to the family. In addition, the dense pattern of basketweave also symbols for fertility. For a normal Chinese family, the more Children, the stronger the family is. For royal families, the number of children could determine the strength and steadiness of a country. In the Qianlong era, motifs symbol for fertility such as eggplants, pomegranates, and basket-weaves were widely used. It reflected Qianlong's wish for more children in the royal family, and the result confirmed with it: Qianlong had raised 27 children in total.

## **Future Market Prediction & Conclusion**

The main threat of the market comes from the uncertainty of the outside environment. On the one hand, with the Chinese economy continuously slowing down, how will the Chinese art market make an adjustment is remaining unclear. On the other hand, as the trade tension getting worse between the U.S. and China, tariffs could put an extra barrier on U.S. collectors trying to buy snuff bottles from outside of the U.S. If the situation lasts longer, it could hurt collectors' confidence.

Despite the jade snuff bottle market was taking hits from the recent economic slow down; the market was still indispensable and should not be ignored. First of all, Due to the large volume produced in the Qing court by imperial orders, jade snuff bottles have important archeological value for researching Qing arts. In addition, due to the large volume of jade bottles produced, the number of jade bottles in museum collections is large. There are over 400 pieces of jade snuff bottles collected in both Palace Museums, providing strong academic support for the category. Second, compared to regular snuff bottles, jade snuff bottles attract both jade collectors and snuff bottle collectors. The diversified collectors' base has given great elasticity to the market. Third, like other precious stones, jade has a high "material price" for the stone alone regardless of other conditions. In fact, most top lots of recent snuff bottles sales come from jade snuff bottles. The fourth reason is that there is a large number of high-quality jade bottles currently in private hands, give the market strong upward potentials. Last but not least, jade snuff bottles were often priced at a more moderate level compared to other categories of jade wares while having the same qualities. The current low of Chinese art market provides an excellent opportunity for new collectors to go for "small, beautiful, auspicious carvings", per Christie's specialist Vicki Paloympis.

The forecast for the market indicated the continues growth of the United States market. From 2015 to now, 14 out of 19 snuff bottle sales were hosted in New York by Christie's, Sotheby's, and Bonhams. It is worth notice that New York contributed most lots offered and sold among different locations. From collectors' standpoints, the United States has the largest collectors base: 187 out of 360 members in the International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society come from the United States. Besides the ICSBS, there are many regional snuff bottle societies that are influential for the market. In the foreseeable future, the United States could still be the strongest and most stable market for snuff bottles.

The market shift from the United States to Asia would very likely to continue. We can see auction houses have started making adjustments by arranging more sales at HongKong: on November 26, fine snuff bottles from the Angela Chua Collection from Bonhams; on November 28, Sotheby's Hong Kong will host another sale featuring a private collection of snuff bottles. The quality of bottles is not very high considering the market is still waiting for a good time to sell. Hong Kong has the best resources for high-quality snuff bottles. Recently, famous snuff bottle collectors like Robert Chang and Hugh Moss have put their snuff bottles on exhibition. Combined with the return of Hong Kong sales, we have enough reason to believe in the future of the Hong Kong market.

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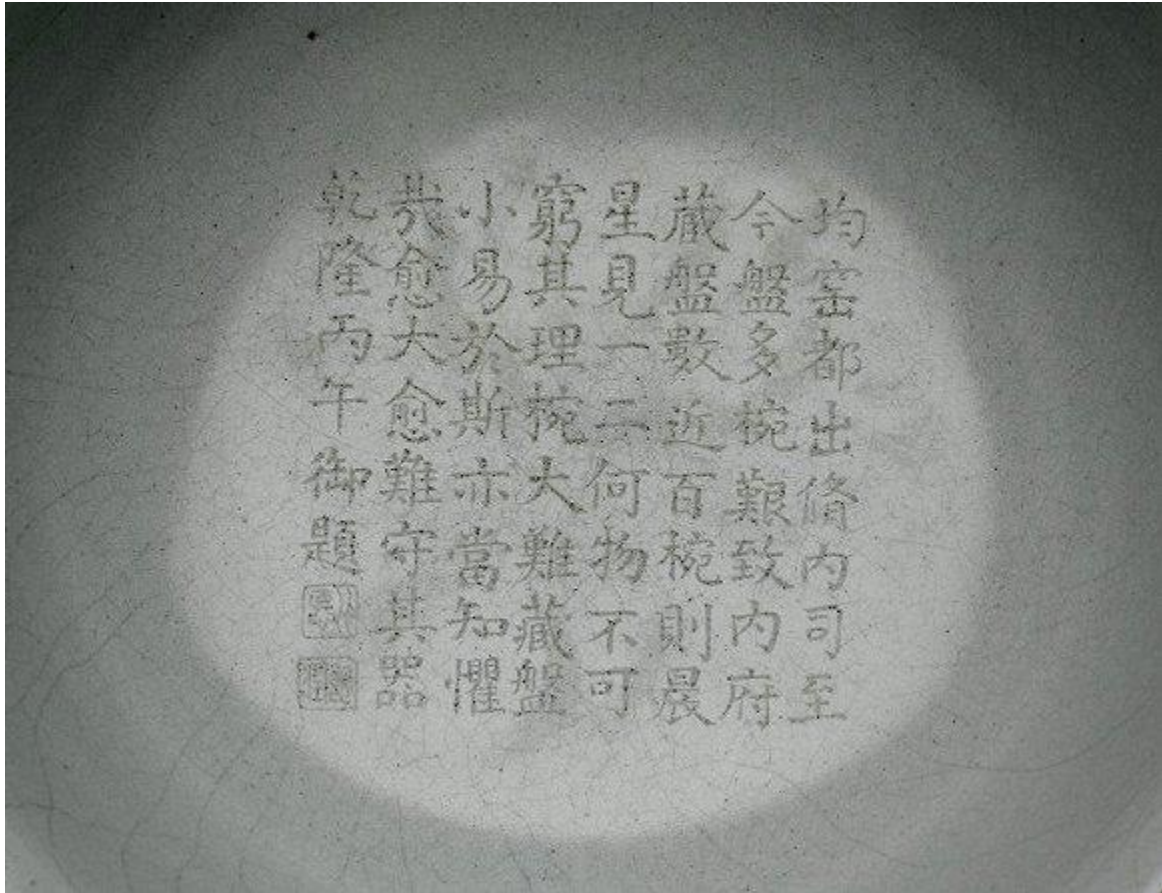


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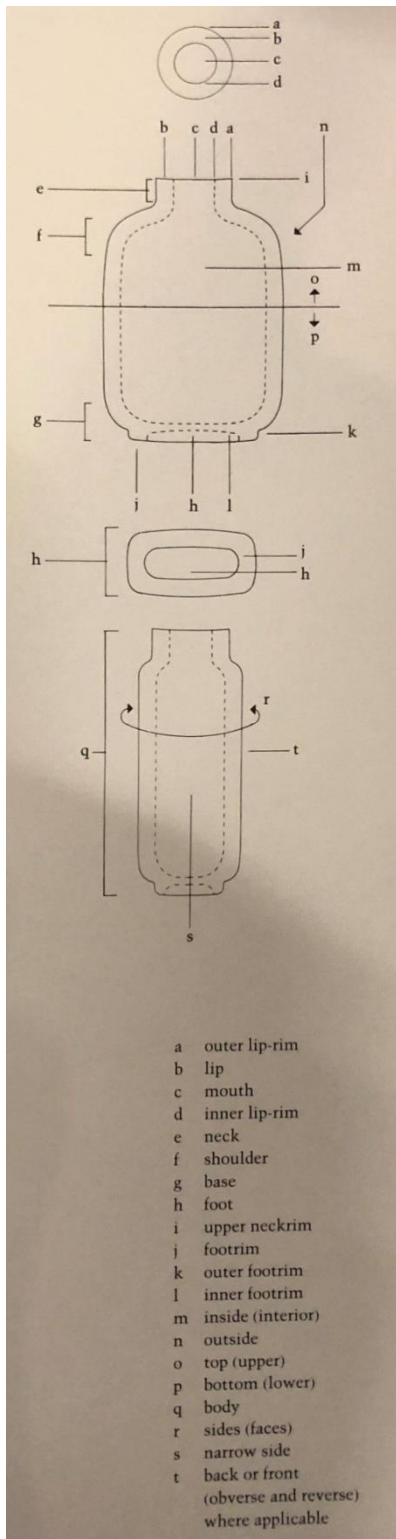


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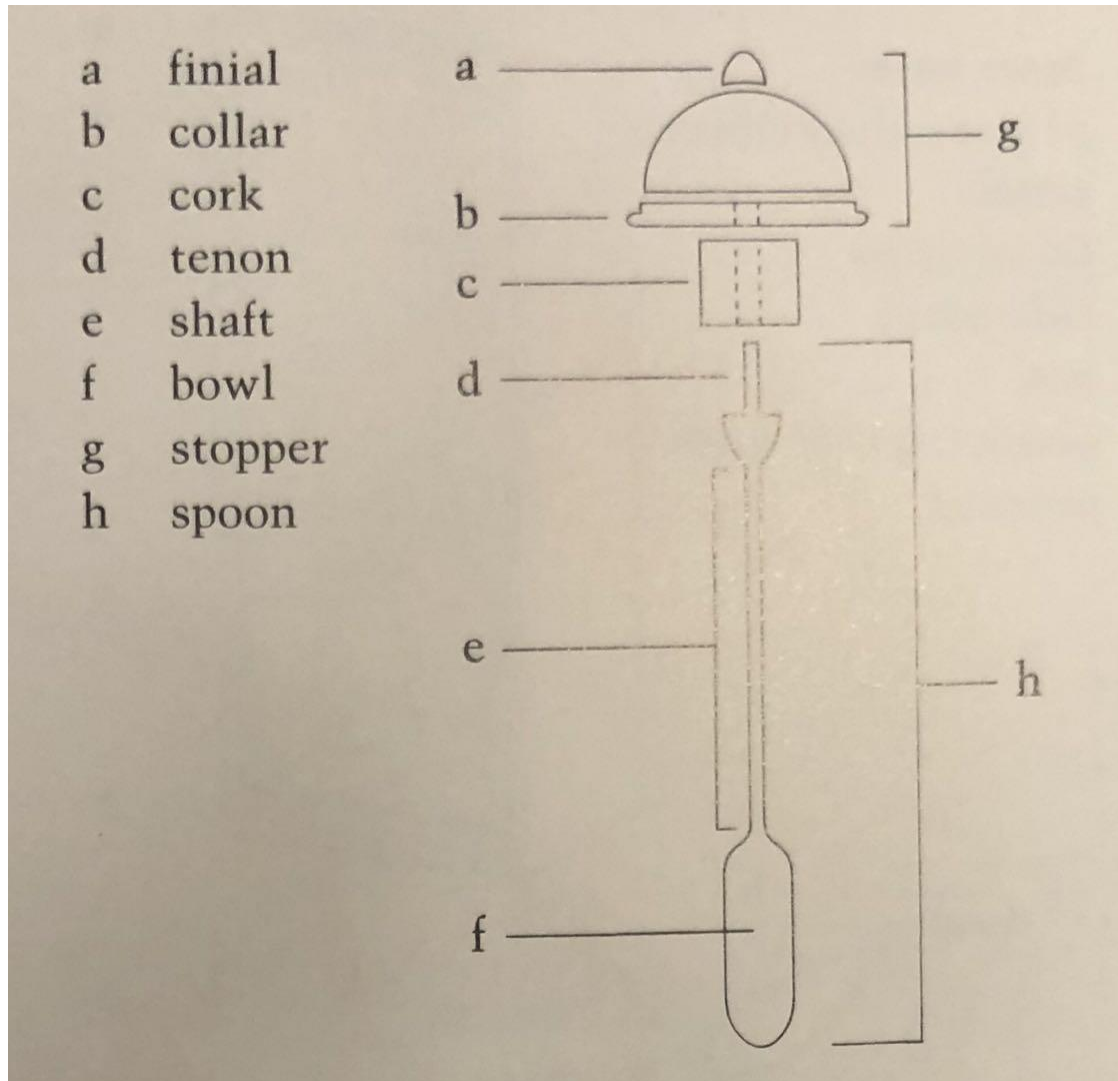


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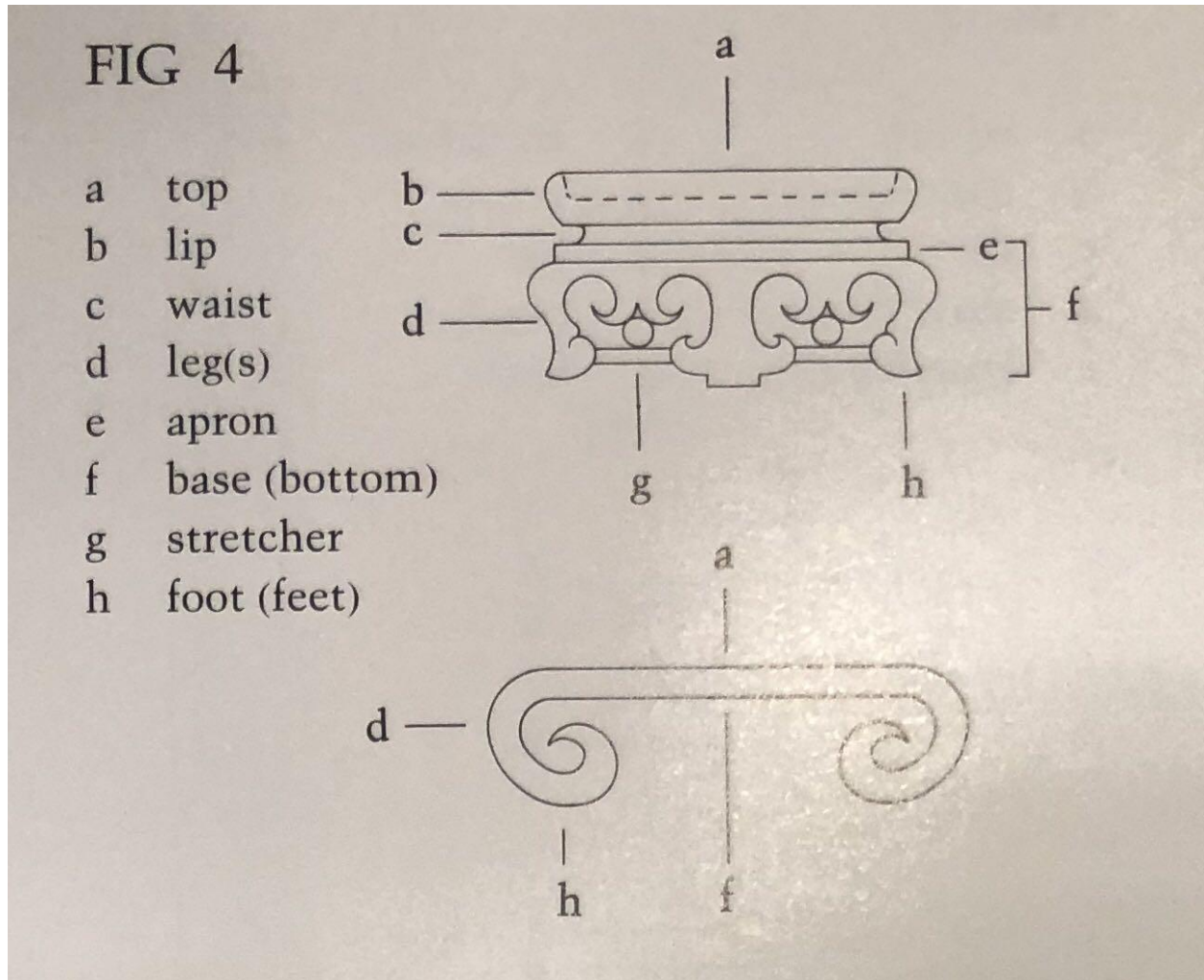


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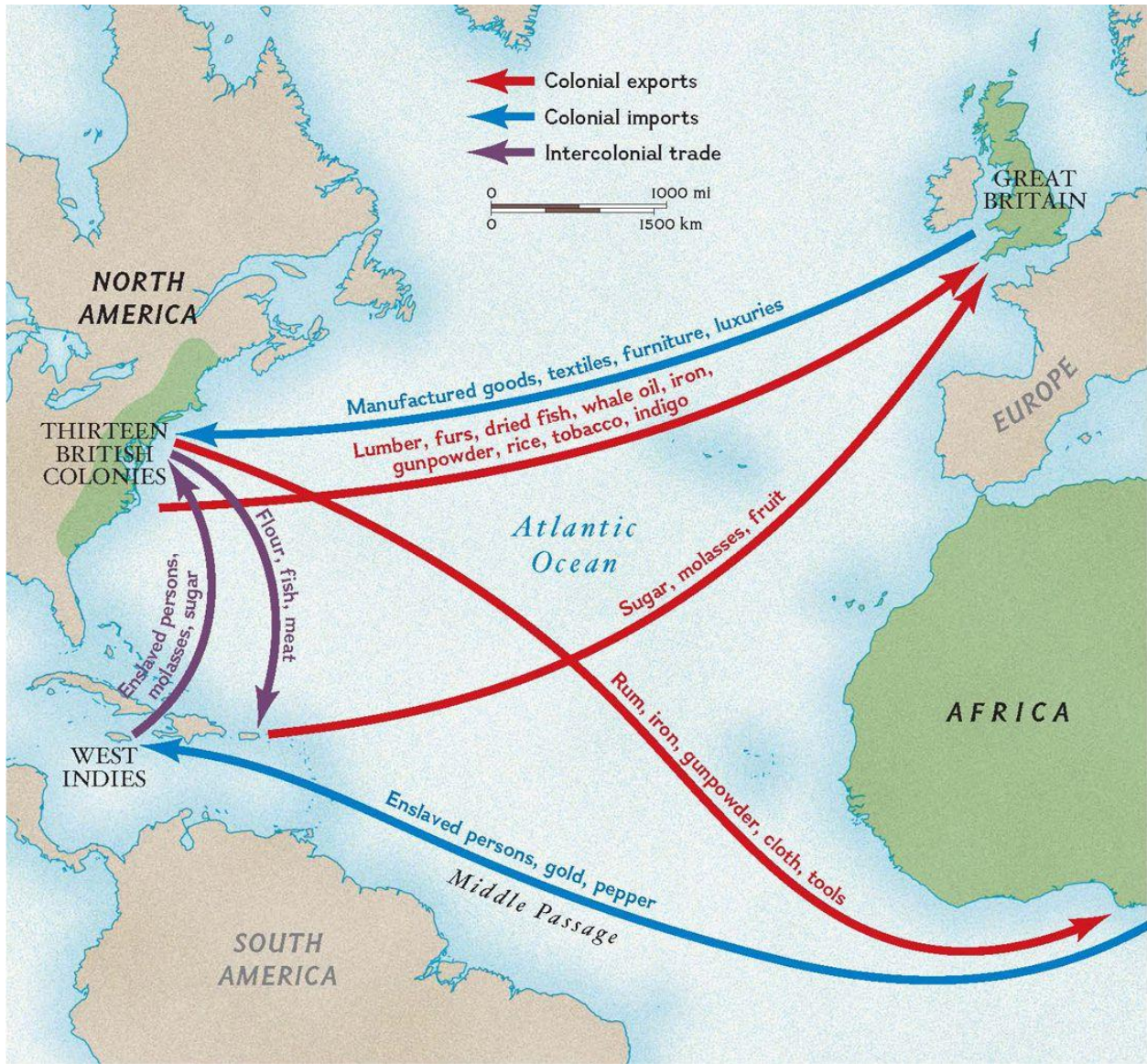




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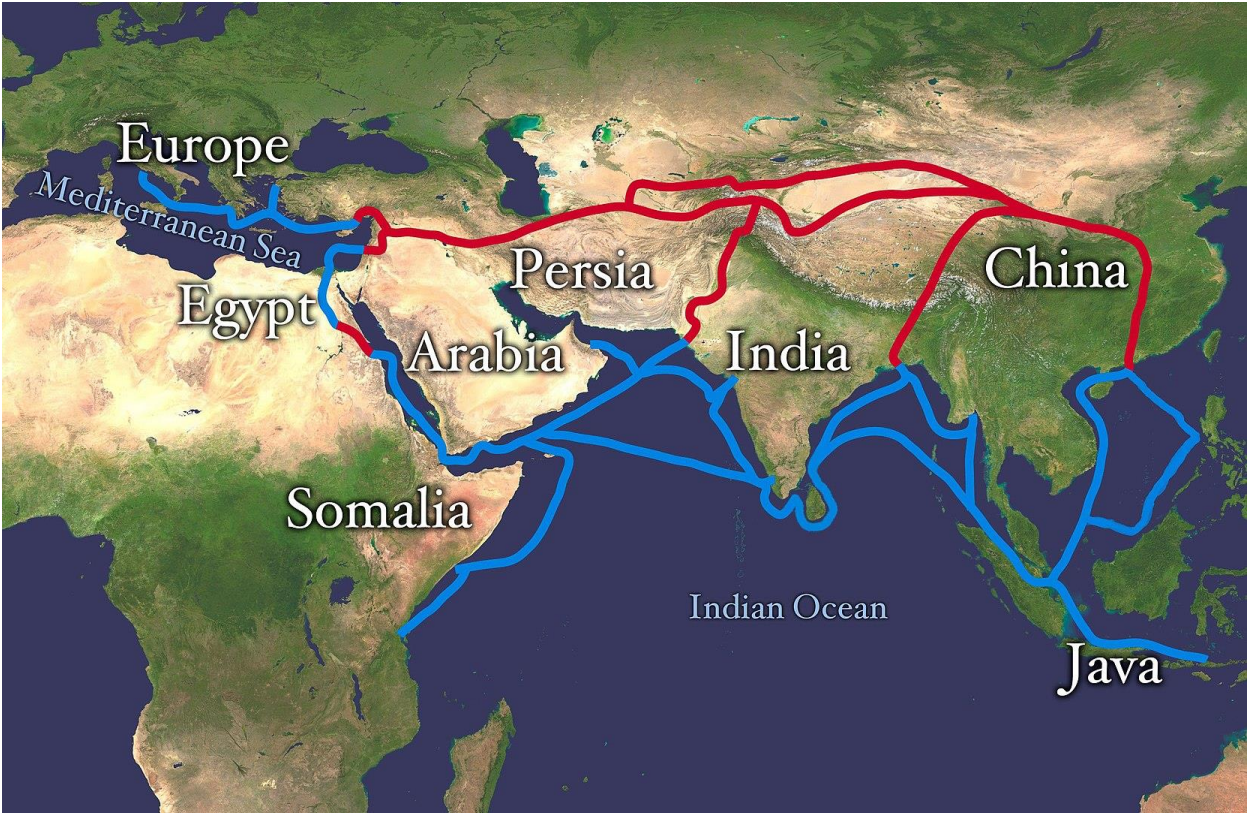


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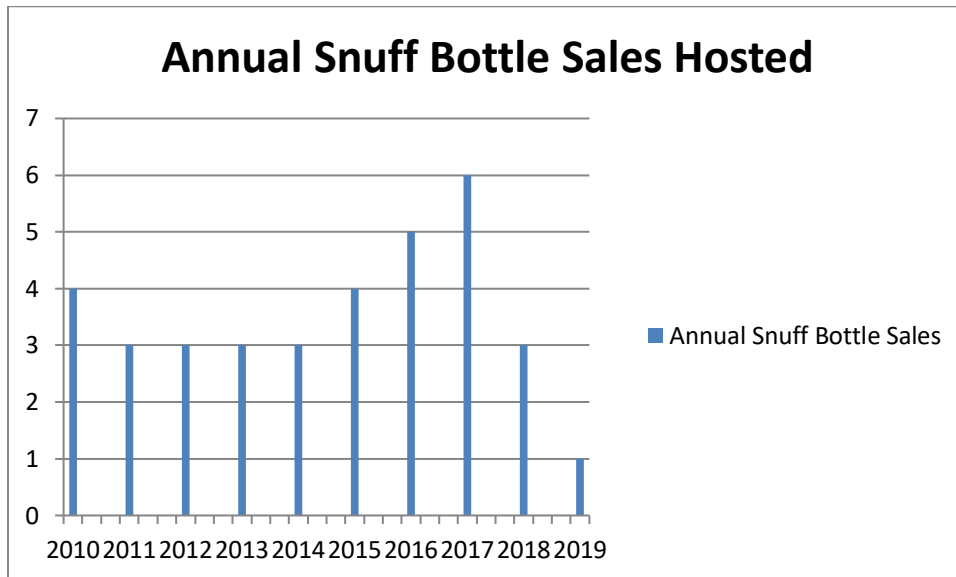


Table 1. Chronological Table for Qing Dynasty

Shunzhi	1644 – 1661
Kangxi	1662 – 1722
Yongzheng	1723 – 1735
Qianlong	1736 – 1795
Jiaqing	1796 – 1820
Daoguang	1821 – 1850
Xianfeng	1851 – 1861
Tongzhi	1862 – 1874
Guangxu	1875 – 1908
Xuantong	1909 – 1911

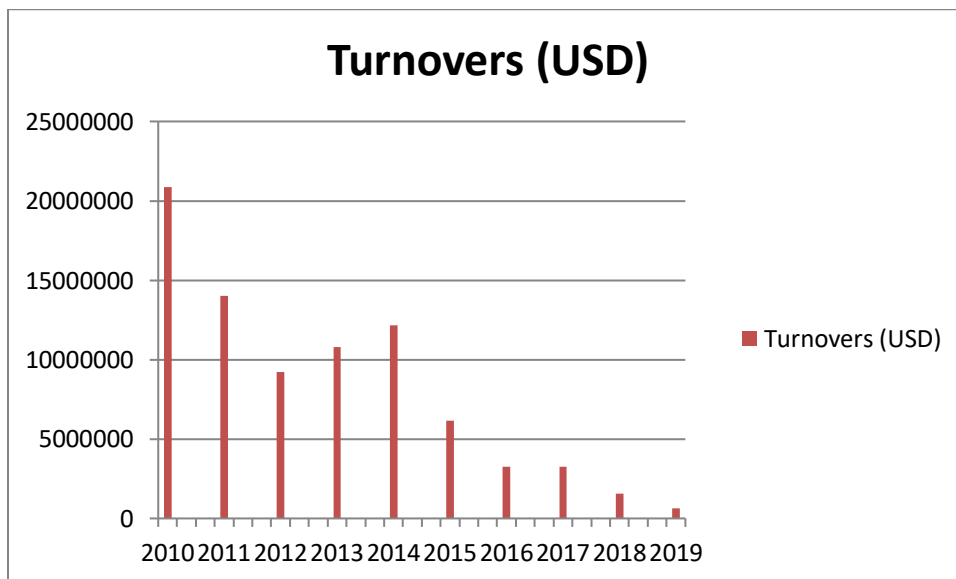
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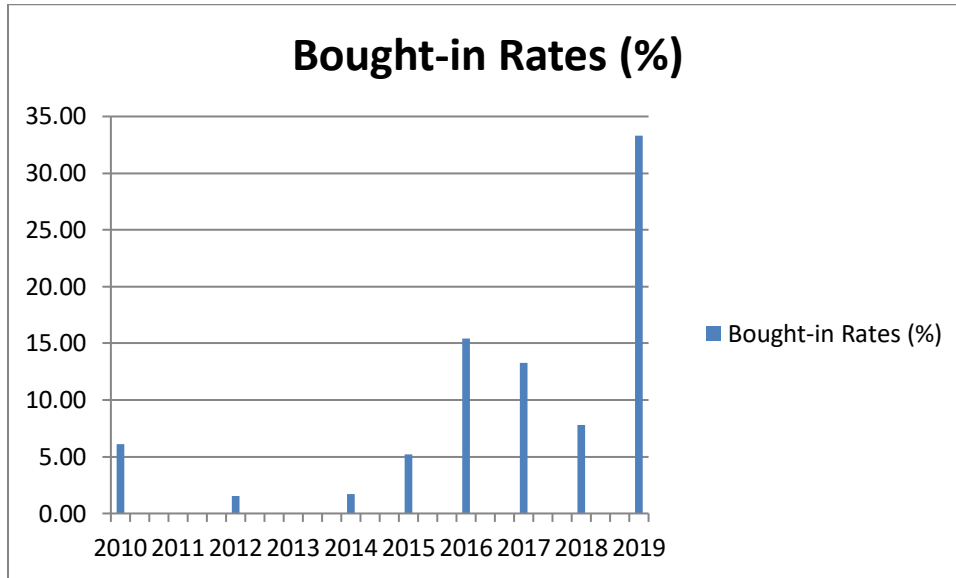
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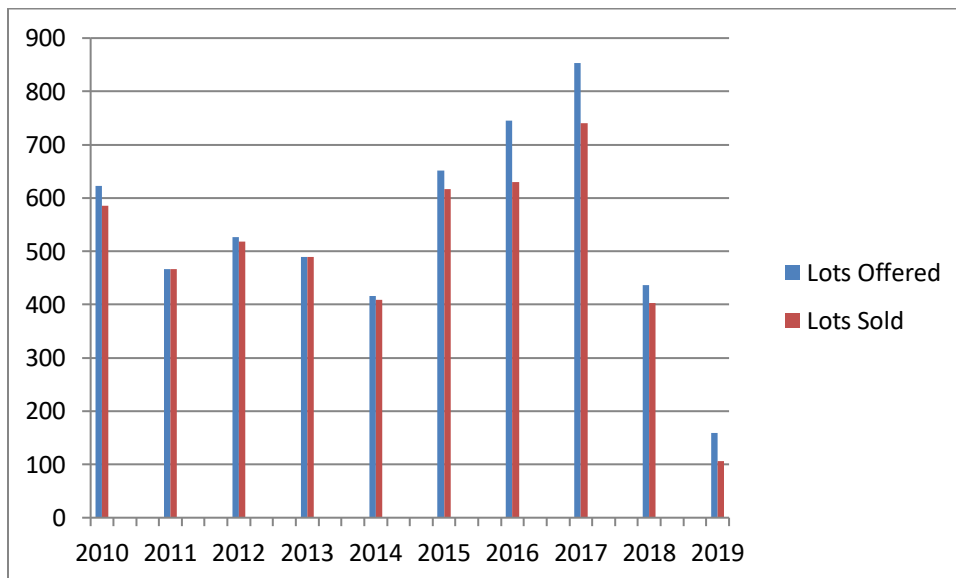
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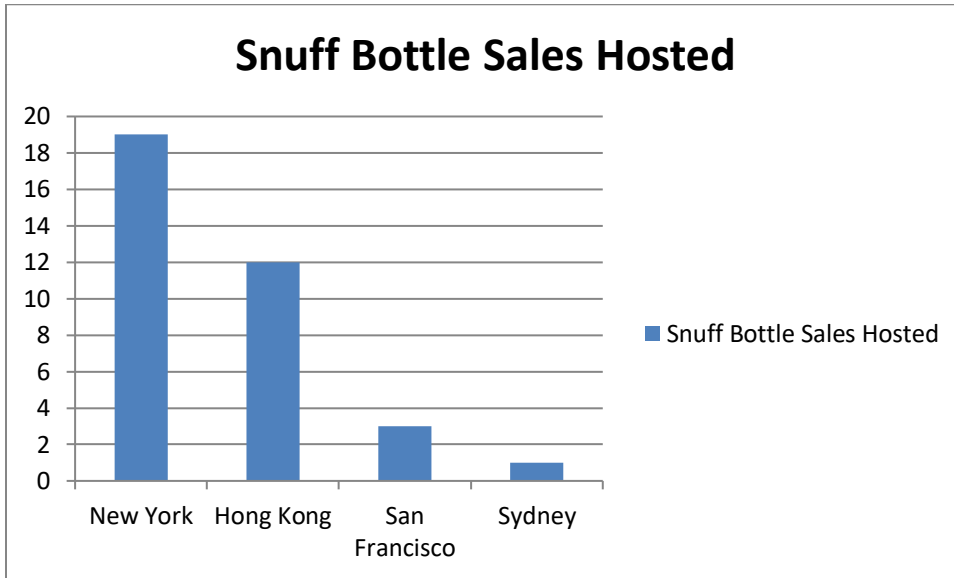
Sources from Christie's, Sotheby's, and Bonhams Record between 2010 and 2019

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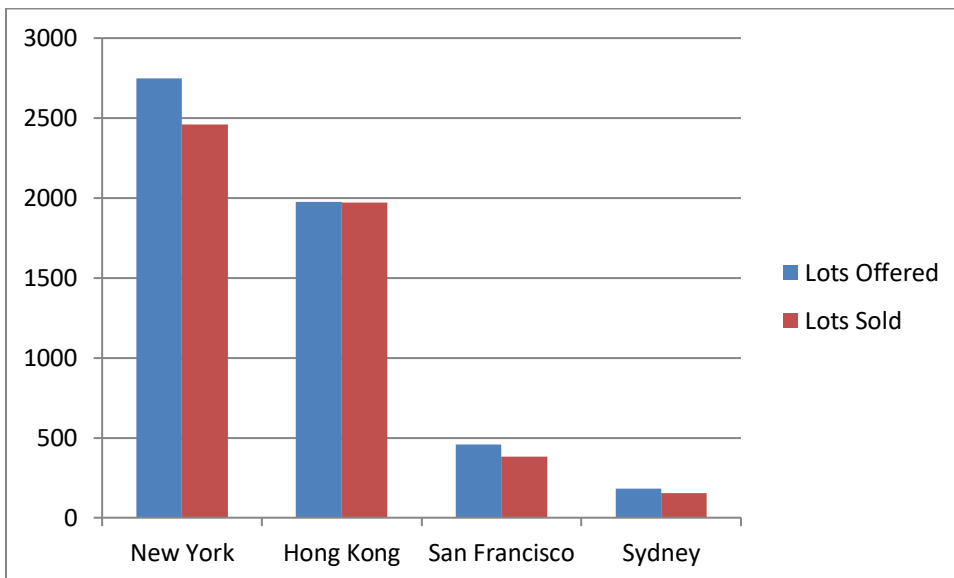
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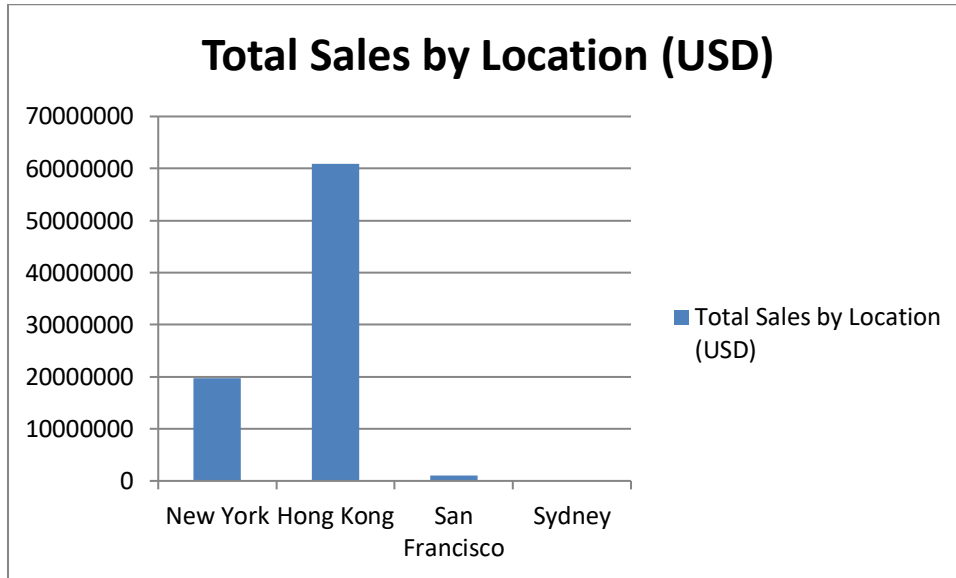
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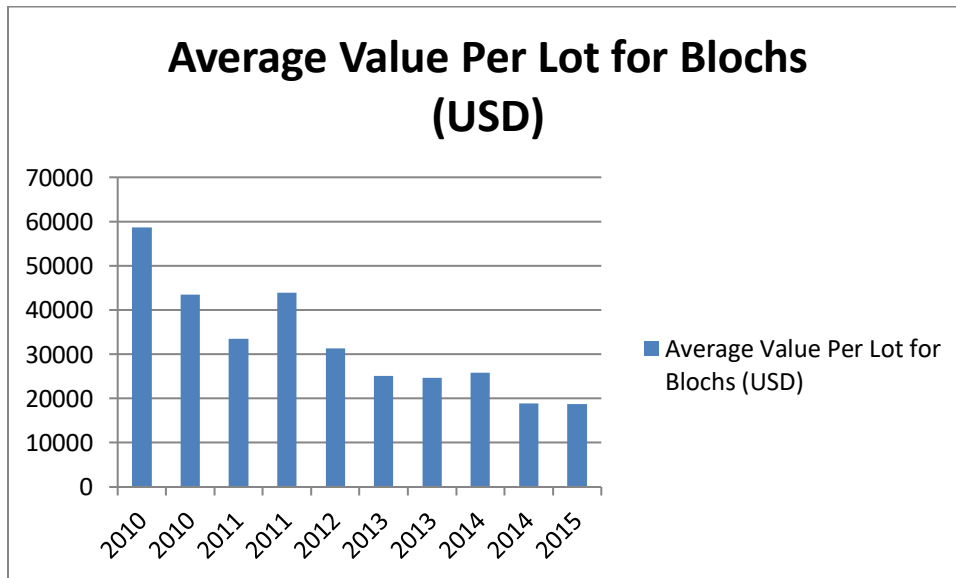
Sources from Christie's, Sotheby's, and Bonhams Record between 2010 and 2019

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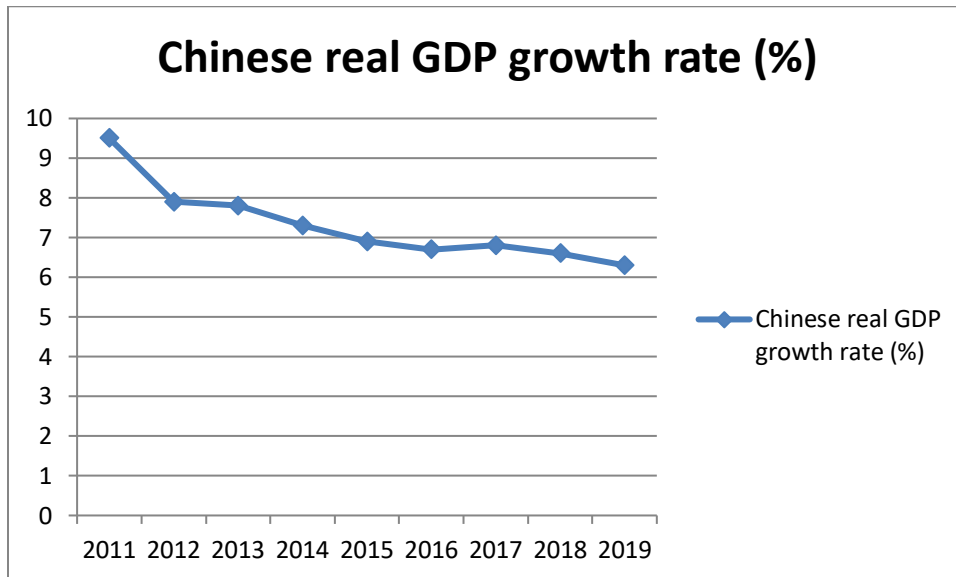
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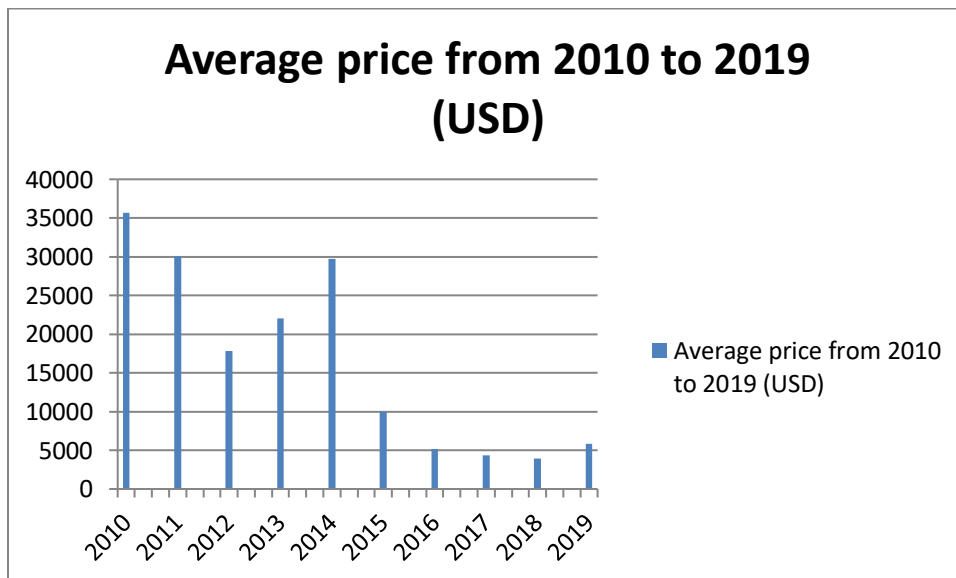
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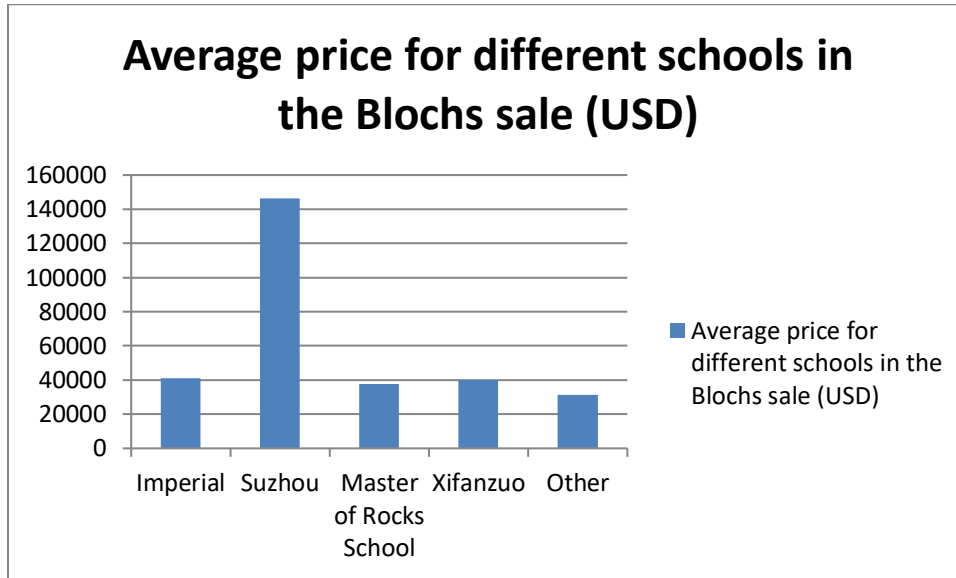
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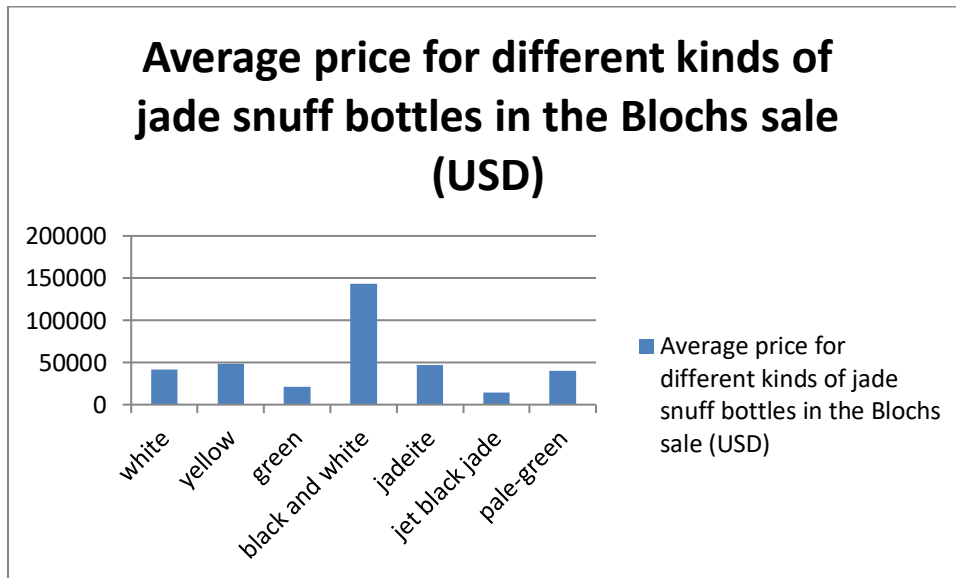


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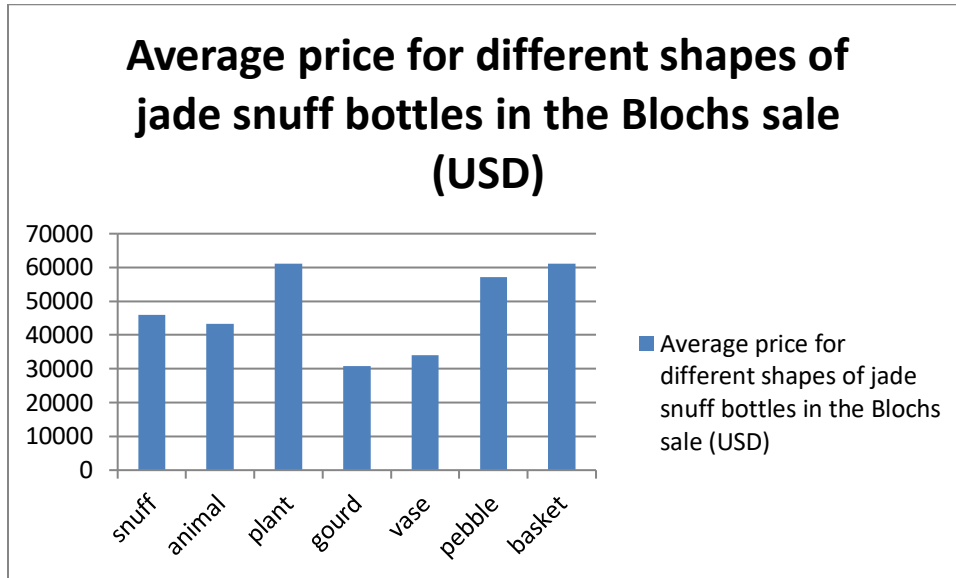
Sources from Sotheby's and Bonhams Record between 2010 and 2015

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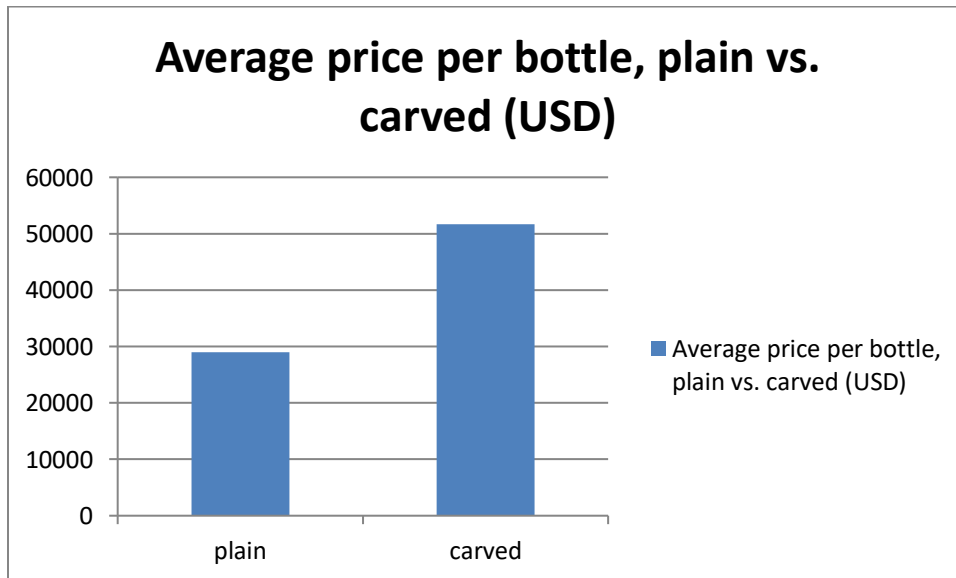
Sources from Sotheby's and Bonhams Record between 2010 and 2015

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Sources from Sotheby's and Bonhams Record between 2010 and 2015

Chart 15. Average price per bottle, plain vs. carved



Sources from Sotheby's and Bonhams Record between 2010 and 2015

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1. Qianlong's grading of jade material

- First Grade: Golden skin color, large scale, smooth glazed, flawless white, yellow or green pebble jade with natural skin, the white jade was called “mutton fat jade”.
- Second Grade: Smaller or have several flaws pebble jade
- Third Grade: Even smaller pebble, having significant flaws, or glaze isn't good. Some of the best mining jade can make it to this grade
- Fourth Grade: Mining Khotan green jades that used for furniture or decorative wares for ceremonial uses, including some pebble jade that is not fitted for making small decorative wares.
- Fifth Grade: Mainly mining green jade from Yarkand Khanate, unusable pebble jade

### Appendix 2. Common Auspicious Motifs and their Meaning

- Plants
  - Plum blossoms – Tough, Brave, Good luck for the coming spring
  - Orchids – Gentle, Elegant, True friendship
  - Bamboos – Tough, Modest, Peace
  - Chrysanthemums – Noble, Loyal
  - Pine Trees – Longevity, Tough
  - Lotus – Purity, Sanctity
  - Gourds- Fertility, Lucky, Rich



- Magnolias – Beautiful women, Fertility, Purity
- Eggplants – Fertility
- Peach – Eternal Life
- Pomegranates – Fertility
- Melon – Endless Generations
- Basket Weave – Desire for male children
- Animals
  - Fish – Abundance, Freedom
  - Pigs – Wealth, Sufficiency
  - Cicadas – Reincarnation
  - Elephant – Peace, Good luck
  - Bats – Good fortune, Wishes come true
  - Carp – Reincarnation, Good Luck
  - Crabs – Pass on Examinations
  - Dragons and Phoenix – Powerful, Royal
  - Rabbits – Fertility, Smart
  - Bee & Monkey & Horse – Be Conferred to Nobility Right away
  - Snakes – Fertility
  - Tigers – Powerful, Brave
  - Turtle/ Turquoise - Longevity