

A Bright World in Autumn Waves And A Heaven in A Palm

MA WEIDU

the Founder of Guanfu Museum, the Director of Guanfu Museum, the famous cultural scholar

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Introduction of Snuff and Its Efficacy

In the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, snuff, with the efficacy of improving eyesight and avoiding epidemic diseases by sniffing, was introduced into China from Europe. Although it was a “foreign thing”, snuff, together with its container, snuff bottle, was soon popular in China. Several centuries later, snuff bottle has gradually become a typical case, of which “the form is bigger than the content”. Today, snuff is completely extinct, but snuff bottle has turned into an un-failing collection category as it nearly covers all Chinese artistic and cultural essences.

In Qing Dynasty, it was very common for Chinese to sniff snuff. All the people, from the emperor to the common people, were able to sniff snuff. As a result, the container of snuff was very important and became a showing tool in social contact so as to demonstrate one’s social status. At that time, there was no tobacco brand to boast about, so Chinese people used to show off their snuff



bottles, such as emerald snuff bottle, white jade snuff bottle... Snuffers preferred to compare snuff bottles secretly. Many snuff bottles were bright colored, especially those made of glass. As glassware came from the west, Chinese people loved the exotic styles of snuff bottles and showed off them to each other. Someone held a hawthorn-red snuff bottle, someone kept a bright yellow one, and someone else had a light green or sapphire blue one...All the people showed off their outstanding features. So, a snuff bottle was the symbol of a person's social status.

The medicinal effects of snuff were recorded in many ancient books. As we all know, there are records about snuff in *The Story of the Stone*. For example, in the 52th chapter of the famous novel, Qing Wen caught a cold when she was sewing a coat. After taking some medicine, she did not feel well. Then, Jia Baoyu ordered She Yue to take some snuff for her to sniff so that she could sneeze to help her recover. So She Yue fetched a flat gold plated double-button gold star glass bottle for Qing Wen. Bao Yu told her to sniff some snuff and then cap the bottle tightly to avoid the leakage of the smell. Hearing his words, Qing Wen immediately took out some snuff with her finger nail and sniffed it. Not enough? She thought. So she took more to sniff. Suddenly, it seemed that a sour and hot smell rushed in her nose and penetrated into her brain. She sneezed for 5 or 6 times with tears and snot running down. We know that, if you sneeze out tears and snot, your cold will disappear soon.

Here we can find some information, for example, about gold star glass. But what is gold star glass? It is also called "aventurine stone". In fact, this is a foreign name. During Qianlong period of Qing Dynasty, the gold star glass was also called "aventurine stone", which was invented in the 6th year of Qianlong period. In general historical records, aventurine stone only existed in Qianlong period, but it is possible that it existed after that period.

Classifications of Glass Snuff Bottles

Glassware was called "material ware" in the field of antiques. In the past, we talked about "material snuff bottle" instead of glass snuff bottle. Why didn't ancient Chinese people call it glass snuff bottle? In fact, we have a lot of ancient article names in Chinese, for example, glass was called "colored glaze", right? However, after Qing Dynasty, glass was called "material", because the raw material of glass was not produced in Beijing but in Yanshen town of Shandong province. The ready raw material of glass was transported to Beijing, and then craftsmen in Beijing made it into wares and snuff bottles.

There are many kinds of snuff bottles, including single color glass snuff bottle, flashed glass snuff bottle, gold star glass bottle and in-painting glass snuff bottle, etc. These snuff bottles feature good

sealing effect and they could be made as one wished. Compared with snuff bottles made of other materials, glass is similar to porcelain, but different from metal. For example, copper may generate a special odor. We all experienced this: when we touch articles made of copper, copper odor may stay in our hands. As a result, it is not good to use copper container to hold snuff. On the contrary, glass has no odor, so snuff will not be tainted by other odor and can be kept against damp.

The most common colors of single color glass are like colors of white jade and hetian jade. If you do not observe a white glass snuff bottle carefully, you may think that it is really made of white jade. In addition, ruby red glass is also a very popular variety, generally belonging to bright glass, for it is transparent. Ruby red was called “haw jelly”, which is a very suitable name. Now, few people eat this kind of snack. When I was young, I was a fool for haw jelly, and you could spend twenty cents buying a big piece haw jelly. I planned to enjoy it for a day but often ate it out in 5 minutes. So delicious! In the past, a sniffer used to show off his snuff bottle to others. If someone boasted about the beauty of his haw jelly snuff bottle, someone else would flaunt a bright yellow snuff bottle like the yellow color of chicken oil. If you have not seen chicken oil yellow glass, you cannot imagine the chroma of the yellow color. It looks so perfect, so delicate!



It is easy to understand what flashed glass is. It refers to the colored glass coated with a layer of glass in another color. It is the most representative glass process of China. However, we may

ignore the fact that the royal flashed glass was usually coated with one color but the folk glass may be coated with two colors, three colors, four colors or even eight colors. To make flashed glass is to make use of the viscosity of glass at high temperature to bond them with each other. Blue glass can be coated with red glass or green glass coated with yellow, and we can see the colors clearly. The colors of many flashed glass were freely chosen from all kinds of colors. When we match colors, we are afraid that the colors are similar to each other. When one color is coated with a similar color, it does not look beautiful. However, there exists a kind of flashed glass snuff bottle whose colors are of the same color family. We can find a collection of such snuff bottle in Beijing Palace Museum: a pale yellow glass body is coated with bright yellow dragon patterns. What does it mean? As the yellow color is exclusively used by the emperor, this yellow flashed snuff boat is called “yellow over yellow”, which symbolizes an emperor of emperors, or father of the emperor. In his twilight years, Qianlong became a retired emperor, so he was very pleased to see a snuff bottle with such an implication.

Pre-burned painted enamel glass snuff bottle is another kind of glass snuff bottle. The paintings on the bottle are very exquisite and very elegant. During Yongzheng period, glassmakers made a glass body enamel snuff bottle called “bamboo joint and double spider bottle”. This snuff bottle was made in the shape of bamboo joints, and two spiders stay on bamboo leaves. In traditional Chinese culture, spider was nicknamed “happy spider” and was a symbol of happiness. Next time, if you go out and meet a spider web dropping from your door frame, you shall feel happy, because it is not a bad thing but an indication of good thing.

In-painting snuff bottle appeared latest. Generally, in-paintings are drawn inside crystal or glass bottles. The process of making an in-painting snuff bottle is as follows: first put some emery in a snuff bottle and shake it to make the inside wall rough. Then, use a specially made bamboo brush to draw a reverse picture inside it. This is a challenge to a painter in terms of painting skills, understanding of painting and calligraphy, and especially the perfect control of brush and images to be expressed. In late Qing Dynasty, famous in-painting masters include Zhou Leyuan, Ma Shaoxuan, Ye Zhongsan, Ding Erzhong, etc.

In the past, we did not attach much importance to the culture of snuff bottle and considered snuff bottle making process an insignificant skill, so a lot of snuff bottles flew to Europe. Today, most good snuff bottles are kept by European collectors. I am delighted to know that Shanghai Glass Museum is about to hold a special exhibition of 18th century royal glass snuff bottles. For glass culture and collection market, this exhibition is really worthy of attention. In such a small bottle, we may find a fine world!

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