

Tales of Adventures



Dear Collectors,

Let me offer you a journey among the wonderful world of Chinese tales which are very popular among Chinese snuff bottles.

I especially want to thank you Gayle Laverlochere for letting me use her researches.

Laurence Souksi



The story of Zhong Kui

In Chinese folklores, Zhong Kui is a god who exorcises ghosts and evil spirits.

As legend has it, he lived in Zhongnan Mountain in the early Tang Dynasty. He was born with a panther-like head, ring-like eyes, an iron face and curly whiskers. Though very ugly, he was a profoundly learned and talented figure. As a man of integrity, he always upheld justice and feared no evil or mischievous being. In 712 when Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty ascended the throne, Zhong Kui went to Chang'an to take the imperial civil examination. Impressed by Zhong's five poems entitled Holding Banquets in Yingzhou, the chief examiner praised him as a prodigy and enrolled him top of all examinees.

During the palace examination, however, a treacherous minister named Lu Qi judged Zhong Kui by the appearance, and repeatedly spoke ill of him before the emperor. As a result, Zhong Kui failed to claim championship in the exam. Infuriated, he bumped his head against a pillar in the palace and thus killed himself. The entire court was shocked. Then Emperor Dezong issued an imperial edict, conferring upon Zhong Kui the title of Demon Queller who traveled all over the world to kill the evil and expel the wicked. In addition, the official title of Number One Scholar was also buried with him.

The Painting of Zhong Kui Catching a Ghost, very popular among the folk people, comes from a story recorded in The Book of Unofficial History. Depicting Zhong Kui catching the evil spirit, it is believed to convey the message of avoiding calamity and bringing on good fortune. Therefore, people often buy the painting on festivals and put it up at home.





The demon slayer at rest

A porcelain snuff bottle of cylindrical form decorated in iron-red with Zhong Kui and five demons around him holding vases, bat and bird.

1800-1850

High : 8 cm

Provenance : Collection Odette Debosque - Paris

Zhong Kui and the green goblins

A porcelain snuff bottle of cylindrical form decorated in iron-red yellow and green enamels with Zhong Kui and five demons around him holding vases, bat and bird.

1820-1860

High : 8 cm





Zhong Kui likes a sedan chair

A porcelain snuff bottle of flattened circular form, the raised central panels decorated on one side with Zhong Kui seated in a sedan chair supported by two demons; the other side with two little demons.

1800-1850

High : 5,6 cm

Alternate Story of Zhong Kui

Sources from the Song Dynasty stated that during the reign of Emperor Xuangzong of the Tang Dynasty in China; the emperor had fallen ill and suddenly he had a dream. He saw two ghosts, a small one and a big one. The small one stole a purse from the imperial consort and the flute belonging to him. Then he saw the bigger ghost captured the small ghost and tore out his eyes.

The big ghost introduced himself as Zhong Kui, he said that he would eliminate all evil beings and protect the empire. After his dream, the emperor woke up and regained his health. He later commissioned Wu Daozi to draw the image of Zhong Kui. The image of Zhong Kui then had circulated among the peasants.

A protector of mankind from vengeful spirits has been well respected by the Chinese and his picture is always seen on the doors.

Where are you demons ?

A small porcelain snuff bottle of baluster form enamelled in iron-red and decorated with the two personae of Zhong Kui, one as the Demon Queller wielding his sword, the other as a scholar holding a fan and a hu (audience tablet).

1800-1850

High : 5,2 cm

Provenance : Collection Odette Debosque - Paris



The Batmen

Two porcelain snuff bottles of cylindrical form decorated in iron-red and green enamels with Zhong Kui holding a sword and three bats.

Qianlong apocryphal mark.

Second part of the 19th century

High : 7 cm



Hua Mu Lan (ca. 400/500)

She was a brave woman. When the Huns invaded China, the Emperor decreed the mobilisation of one man per family. Hua Mu Lan trained to fight like many girls officers, surreptitiously undertakes in place of her father too old to wage war by pretending to be a man.

For over ten years, she fought like a man without her true identity being discovered. Her bravery earned her the title of general. The war ended, Mu-Lan returned to her family and resumed a normal life.



A Brave Woman

A porcelain snuff bottle of rounded rectangular form decorated in polychrome enamels with Mulan on one side and a calligraphy on the other. Dog-mask and fixed ring-handles. Mounted in silver by "Maquet" (France) as a lighter.

19th century.

High : 7,5 cm

Su Hui (351-381)

Su Ruo lan, (Su Hui) wife of the official Dou Tao was a Chinese poetess. Her husband fell in love with a concubine. Public servant, he was called away to occupy a new job and his wife did not want to follow him. But after his departure Su Hui was so sorry, she wrote a poem. She wove the poem on a costly cloth of many hued silk to record her sorrow and regret. When her husband received the cloth he was so touched that he returned near his wife.

Su became famous over the centuries, due to her ability to combine feminine art (embroidery) and poetic composition, and as an example of female virtue. Her work later went down in history. Su Hui was a rare example of an educated woman during this period.



The Lady in blue

A squared rectangular form porcelain snuff bottle painted with under glazed blue with Su Hui holding a book on one side and a calligraphy with a “leiwen” pattern on the other. A stylized design around the neck and flowers on the shoulders.

Dated 1899.

High : 6,8 cm

Gaoliang - The Water Dragon of Beijing

Although the dragons of Chinese mythology are often portrayed as wise, benign, and helpful to mankind, that is not always the case. One story involves a jealous dragon who resented human intrusion and took dramatic action to make his displeasure known. The occasion was the initial establishment of what would become the thriving city of Beijing.

One legend of the founding of this great city comes from the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, about 1370. (Beijing's origins lie in the eleventh century b.c.e.) One of the ancestral Chinese gods, Nocha, is said to have advised the emperor as to where the city should be placed. At the time, the land where the capital now exists was a broad and stagnant lowland, wet with marshy swamp and brackish water.

The marsh was ruled by a clan of dragons who were quite happy there. They took a very dim view of operations when the emperor appointed a great builder, Liu Ji Bowen, to begin construction of a vast city in the dragons' marshland. As men spread through the countryside, digging ditches, laying down roads, and beginning to place the foundations for great buildings, the dragon who ruled the family decided that he would make the audacious humans regret their choice of location.

Like many Chinese dragons, this one was a highly magical creature who could change his shape at will. He made himself and his mate to appear as an old man and an old woman. They put two large water jars onto a cart, and made their way to see the emperor. Bowing and showing the imperial leader all respect, they humbly asked permission to be allowed to leave the city with their water jars.



Thinking very little about the request, the emperor bade them to go. What he did not know is that the dragons had taken all of the fresh water from the region around Beijing and magically stored the liquid in the two jars. They left the city in the evening, and made their way into the distant hills.

The next morning the city awakened to discover itself in the midst of a sudden and devastating drought—no water was to be found anywhere, in the wells or the swamps or ponds that had previously dotted so much of the landscape. The emperor despaired, and his people panicked—all but the great builder, Liu Bowen, who consulted the god Nocha and learned what had happened.

Acting quickly, Liu sent word to all the gate guards in the city to find out who had departed the city the previous night. He learned that the elderly couple, with their two large jars, had left the city heading toward the western hills. He knew that, if they reached those hills and spilled the water there, the city would be dry forever. So the builder asked for a member of the emperor's guards to volunteer to save the day.

A brave soldier, Gaoliang, offered to perform the task. The builder gave him a long spear and told him to hurry after the old man and old woman. When he found them, he was to break the jars quickly, one right after the other, then turn around and flee back to the city as fast as he could run. He was warned not to look behind him but to keep on running.

Carrying the spear at his side, the bold warrior jogged along the western road, traveling so fast that he caught up to the old couple—who plodded along very slowly indeed—by midday. There was no clue that these two were dragons; they looked like elderly Chinese peasants. Gaoliang approached as stealthily as he could and suddenly stabbed his spear into the nearest of the water jars.

The clay vessel shattered, but as the soldier drew back his arm to thrust at the second jar a deluge of water flooded from the broken jar, forcing him back. Before his horrified eyes he saw the old man swiftly change shape, coiling and growing, rising to loom before him as a mighty dragon.

There was no chance to break the other jar, so Gaoliang turned and sprinted back to the city as fast as he could run. He heard the surging and churning of a vast flood roaring behind him, but he dropped the spear and sprinted with every bit of speed he could muster. Soon he came within sight of the city, but at the very gate he had departed he saw a crowd of people gesturing and shouting at something that was behind, and pursuing, the running soldier. Gaoliang faltered in his flight, turning to look, and a massive curl of churning water swept over him, smashing him down and drowning him.

The waters surged up to the city but did not inundate it. The water from the jar that the soldier shattered was brackish and tainted, but it was enough to grow crops. Still, the legends claim that the best, purest water was taken away forever in the other jar, the one that Gaoliang did not have a chance to shatter. Even so, his heroism was recognized, and the river that formed at the western gate of the city was named for him. So too was a beautiful arched bridge that was erected over that river in 1764. The Gaoliang Bridge is a work of stunning artistry that still stands today.



Across the wooden bridge

A porcelain snuff bottle of cylindrical form enamelled in polychrome enamels with a continuous scene depicting the story of Gaoliang.

1800-1850

High : 7,9 cm

Provenance : Collection Odette Debosque - Paris



The amazing story of a water pot

A porcelain snuff bottle of cylindrical form enamelled in polychrome enamels with a continuous scene depicting the story of Gaoliang.

1800-1850

High : 7,5 cm



Adventures in blue and white

A porcelain snuff bottle of cylindrical form enamelled in blue and white enamels with a continuous scene depicting the story of Gaoliang. The base unglazed.

1820-1880

High : 7,4 cm

Zhou Chu (242-297)

Zhou Chu became an orphan at an early age. As a teenager he was stronger than most people and fond hunting. He did only what he loved. He contemptuously trampled on local villagers who then called him one of the « three harms » together with the fierce tiger in Nanshan Mountain and the ferocious dragon in Changqiao. When Zhou Chu heard this, he learnt that he was abhorred by the villagers, and so he went into the deep mountain to shoot the tiger and then jumped into the river to fight against the dragon. For three days and nights, he finally managed to kill the dragon, after chasing it for dozens of miles.



Wen Tian Xiang (1236-1283)

Wen Tian Xiang (Wen Chengxiang) was a scholar, general and Prime Minister during the Song Dynasty. He was given the title of « the West River's Filial Son and Loyal Subject », one of the most famous symbols of loyalty and patriotism in China. Eminent scholar, he held successive posts in the ministry of Punishments and in local government offices in Hunan and Jiangxi. His writings are still taught in schools of China today.



The dragon killer

A porcelain snuff bottle of rounded rectangular form decorated in polychrome enamels with Zhou Chu on one side and Wen Tian Xiang on the other.

Daoguang mark and period.

1820-1850

High : 6,3 cm

Provenance : Collection Odette Debosque - Paris

The Eight Immortals

The Eight Immortals are a group of legendary Taoist immortals in Chinese mythology.

There were different versions of the Eight Immortals' names before the Ming Dynasty, when Wu Yuantai wrote *The Eight Immortals Depart and Travel to the East*, in which the names were made certain as Iron Crutch Li (Tieguai Li), Han Zhongli (Zhongli Quan), Lü Dongbin, Elder Zhangguo (Zhang Guo Lao), Imperial Uncle Cao (Cao Guojiu), Philosopher Hanxiang (Han Xiang Zi), Lan Caihe and Immortal Woman He (He Xiangu).

The Eight Immortals are not born immortals. They were originally from the mortal world, where they were general, imperial family member, beggar and Taoist priest etc. There's a fantastic story behind each of them in their successful Taoism practicing and immortality attainment.

In the legend, the Eight Immortals respectively represent men and women, young and old, rich and noble, and poor and humble.

The instruments the Eight Immortals hold - hardwood clapper, fan, crutch, flute, sword, bottle gourd, Taoist whisk and flower basket, are called "eight treasures", representing the Eight Immortals. The most well-known pieces on the Eight Immortals in literary and artistic works include *The Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea*, and *The Eight Immortals Offering Birthday Peaches and Toasts*.

In the Legend are eight immortals that are best known among the people including seven men and one lady. They are Han Zhongli (Zhong Liquan), Zhang Guolao, Han Xiangzi, Tie Guaili, Cao Guojiu, Lu Dongbin, Lan Caihe and He Xiangu.

The legend of the Eight Immortals is one of the most moving Chinese ancient stories. There are a lot of folk tales about them. The most famous ones are *The Eight Immortals Celebrate the Birthday* and *The Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea*.

Immortality in a bottle

A porcelain snuff bottle of cylindrical form enamelled in polychrome enamels with a continuous scene depicting the "Eight Immortals celebrate the Birthday".

1800-1850

Ht: 7,7 cm





The return to Jingzhou - Scene from the Romance of the Three Kingdoms - chapter 55

The Romance of the Three Kingdoms written by Luo Guanzhong in the 14th century, is a Chinese historical novel based upon events in the turbulent years near the end of the Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms era, starting in 168 and ending with the reunification of the land in 280. It is acclaimed as one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature with 120 chapters.

Love Story in colors

A porcelain snuff bottle of pear form molded and decorated in polychrome enamels with a continuous scene depicting a scene from the Romance of the Three Kingdoms.

Apocryphal Chenghua mark.

1800-1850

High : 7 cm

Provenance : Collection Odette Debosque - Paris

“Flooding Jinshan Temple”

is one of the most captivating plots in the Tale of the White Snake. Jinshan Temple of Zhenjiang is a temple with rich legends and myths, among which “Legend of the White Snake” is the most moving and best known. It mainly tells about the romantic story between Bai Suzhen, who was a magic snake and changed herself into a beautiful girl, and Xu Xian, a young scholar who fell in love and married with Bai Suzhen, unaware that she is a thousand year old white snake that has taken on human form.

However, a monk Fa Hai tried again and again to undermine their marriage. Out of indignation, the white snake summoned a deluge and flooded Jinshan Temple. At the end of the story, Fa hai casted the white snake into a deep well at Leifeng Pagoda and Xu Xian was forced to be a monk in Jinshan Temple. It is this story that makes most Chinese people get to know Jinshan Temple.



The Snake who wanted to be a Lady

A porcelain snuff bottle decorated in polychrome enamels with a scene depicting a story from the « Legend of the White Snake ».

Kangxi apocryphal mark.

Second part of the 19th century

High : 5,8 cm



Price List



1. The demon slayer at rest – 2800€
2. Zhong Kui and the green goblins – 1500€
3. Zhong Kui likes a sedan chair – 1800€
4. Where are you demons ? – 2200€
5. The Batman – 600€ (each)
6. A Brave Woman – 1000€
7. The Lady in blue – 1300€
8. Across the wooden bridge – 2800€
9. The amazing story of a water pot – 2500€
10. Adventures in blue and white – 1600€
11. The dragon killer – 1500€
12. Immortality in a bottle – 2800€
13. Love Story in colors – 1800€
14. The Snake who wanted to be a Lady – 1500€