

# **A new style of inside painting glass sculptures**

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## **Abstract**

Traditional inside painting techniques of Chinese snuff bottles have developed over more than 200 years into a popular form of Chinese folk art, often based on glass snuff bottles with painted decoration on the inside. The craftsmen who make these pieces usually pay more attention to inside painting skills and overlook their own artistic expression. The designs used tend to be repetitive and copies of existing designs from other media such as ink painting or photographs. In this research, a body of inside painted glass works was produced to show how the glass form and painted content were combined. These works also helped to establish possible ways to reduce the limitations of traditional inside painting of Chinese snuff bottles. It has attempted to create a 'new style' for Chinese traditional inside painting through the creation of contemporary glass sculptures.

## **1. Introduction**

This paper introduces the research field, including traditional inside painting of Chinese snuff bottles, Chinese painting, calligraphy and Taoism. This paper focus on the method of how to develop the traditional inside painting. The harmony of the outside and the inside is the basic way to reduce the limitation of traditional inside painting.

## **2. The context for the development of the inside painting**

### **2.1. The traditional inside painting of Chinese snuff bottles, traditional Chinese painting, calligraphy and Taoism**

The art of inside painting of Chinese snuff bottles is believed to have begun in the early 19th century (Liu, 2011). Special tools and transparent bottles were developed so that calligraphy, natural scenes and landscapes, flowers or wildlife could be painted in miniature and in reverse on the inside walls of the bottle. The inside glass wall of these bottles had to be frosted by sandblasting before paint was applied to them in order to provide a stable surface. The applied colors were usually Chinese pigment, watercolors, acrylic and oil paint. Currently, most of the Chinese inside painters employ Chinese pigment in their inside paintings (ibid.).

After more than two hundred years of development, it can be said that the existing forms of inside painting are mature and exquisite, but that the imagery depicted is rather repetitive and usually based on an existing ink painting . For example, the ink painting of Qing Ming Shang He Tu (清明上河圖), painted by Zeduan Zhang (張擇端) (Song Dynasty, 960-1279), is represented, or even copied, in a contemporary snuff bottle (Fig. 1 & 2). The techniques employed during inside painting of Chinese snuff bottles were subsequently developed, but relied upon classical Chinese images, inspired by the natural world, and calligraphy for the subject matter. However, there

was and is great scope for the development of traditional Chinese snuff bottles in contemporary society (Liu, 2011).



**Fig. 1:** Zeduan Zhang (1085-1145), *Qing Ming Shang He Tu*, Chinese painting (Part), 25.2cm x 528.7cm, (original painting), Song Dynasty (960-1279)



**Fig. 2:** Liwang Liu, *Qing Ming Shang He Tu*, borosilicate glass snuff bottle, inside painting, 13cm x 11.5cm, 1992.

Traditional inside painters usually practice intensively in Chinese painting onto paper, because inside painting methods are similar to paper painting. Taoism is the guiding thought of Chinese painting and calligraphy (Sze, 1957) and inside paintings are always accompanied by calligraphy. Traditional Chinese calligraphy (書法) is the technique of Chinese writing. The calligrapher is in harmony with his script, his tools, the text and his own spiritual heritage. Calligraphy and painting has the homological source in the Chinese words: ‘書畫同源’. It refers to Chinese calligraphy and painting

in terms of form, especially as the ink and brush are used in each method in the same way.

Taoism has been one of the dominant philosophical thoughts in China for nearly 3000 years. In the developing process of Chinese traditional culture, Taoism essentially performed a function of guidance for the governing powers. It also guided the development of the Chinese crafts art. "Tao was the touchstone of Chinese painting which affected the creative imagination, the subject matter and the interpretation" (Rowley, 1959, p.5). Taoism advocates the harmony between nature and the human being. Chinese artists are willing to follow this idea in their artistic actions. For Chinese painters, Tao is their painting guideline. Taoist thought has a very deep influence on Chinese art and it pays attention to the harmony between humans and nature. These concepts are reproduced in the art works by this author, where reducing the surface details holds back personal emotional expression. For example, in the sculpture 'Pregnant', this author's praise for a mother has been attempted: she will dedicate selfless love to her children, endure the greatest of pain and patience, but she will derive the most satisfaction from the subsequent happiness and joy of her children (Fig. 3 & 4). Here, the rigid classical rules of human dimensions have been relaxed. When shaping a figure, all the facial features details and limbs have been removed, leaving the features which show this author's true emotional feelings. How to maximize these emotions and 'fuse' them into personal artworks is the primary drive.



**Fig.3: Jianyong Guo, *Pregnant*, fibre glass, stoved lacquer, 85cm x 40cm x 40cm, 2008.**



**Fig.4: Jianyong Guo, *Pregnant*, cristalica cast, glass, Chinese pigments inside painting, 2016.**

Needless to say, Taoist thoughts have permeated into all my personal works, and have played a leading role in the development of the personal art of this author. In the work 'Tao Te Ching', calligraphy has been applied to many glass bottles. These were firstly sand-blasted inside, so that the inside glass wall would hold the ink well. The ancient Taoist philosopher Lao Zi's writing Tao Te Ching was then written in different bottles (Fig. 4). The bottles were put side by side, because the different heights of the bottles suggested modern metropolitan buildings. These bottles presented an illusion of a harmonic civilized spectacle. All the involved aspects in the research field, and the researcher's personal artworks have founded a solid basis for this research.



Fig.4 : Jianyong Guo, *Tao Te Ching*, inside calligraphy, ink, borosilicate glass bottles, inside sand-blasted, 2012.

## 2.2 The limitations of inside painting subject matter and content

Traditional inside painters rarely considered limitations imposed by the genre in their painting. But, the largest issue is the 'gap' between the content of the painting and the painter's feelings and views. The painters pay little attention to their own artistic expression, but focus instead upon the mastering of the technique necessary for inside painting. The ability to accurately 'copy' meant that the painters would eventually become skilled 'craftsmen'.

Ability and the way of thinking are very different between imitation and creation. Ability can be divided between that inherent for reconstruction and that for creation. The ability to master accepted knowledge and skills in order to follow a ready-made model or a program, to be good at imitating and copying belongs to reconstruction. Creative ability is found in one who can independently work with new modes and programs to master and apply new knowledge and skills. They are good at discovering new principles, forming new skills, inventing new methods, in order to achieve.

### **3.Development and demonstration of the creative use of inside paintings for contemporary glass sculptures**

This author applied personal practice in order to develop and subsequently demonstrate the feasibility of applying the techniques of inside painting of traditional Chinese snuff bottles, so as to create a body of works demonstrating totally different effects and styles. The techniques focus on kiln-casting and hollowing inside painted glass sculptures. The new form of inside painting shown could be applied to contemporary academic glass teaching and therefore reduce, or even solve, the limitation of traditional inside painting style.

#### **3.1 The development of different glass form of Chinese snuff bottles from the traditional**

Being a contemporary glass artist, this author is of the opinion that it is important to develop the advantage of the traditional culture of inside painting that do exist. The most effective way is to change the whole approach to creativity in snuff bottle painting. The form of the snuff bottles could be changed according to how the artist can express his own language and styles which could then be brought into teaching practice for new students and existing artists to learn. This contemporary teaching should then serve to develop snuff bottle painting.

#### **3. 2 Hollow cast glass sculptures**

The method of producing a hollow-casted glass sculpture was a new approach which had the advantage of being easily able to control the shape precisely. Usually, the casting glass sculpture making process includes clay shaping, plaster mould making, wax model casting, lost wax technique, kiln – casting, and cold working. The process is outlined below:

Firstly, the basic shape was made with clay, which allowed changes to be continuously if required, based upon the artist’s thought processes.

Next, a ‘male’ mould was made using wax casting, which was then placed into a fire-resistant mould. The lost wax method was then used to produce the sculpture before it was finished by kiln-casting.

Thirdly, for kiln-casting, the temperature schedule was as follows:

°C/hr	Reached Temp. ( °C)	Soak (hr)
30	90	3
60	680	2
100	860	3
150	600	2
25	510	6
2	380	3.3
8	300	3
15	150	End

Then, cold work: cutting, polishing and, after hollowing, sand-blasting ready for Painting.

After hollowing, cast glass sculptures can retain a thick wall. This style of glass work has a strong effect in terms of reflection and refraction where the inside painting has been carried out, the unpainted parts of the glass sculpture would reflect and refract the colors and graphics. The transparent character of glass is highlighted (Fig. 5 & 6). This process required some special tools and working experience.



**Fig. 4: Janyong Guo, *Pregnant I***, cast cristalica glass, hollowed inside, Chinese pigments inside painting, 25x15x12cm, 2015.



**Fig. 6: Jianyong Guo, *Girl*, cast cristallina glass, hollowed inside, Chinese pigments inside painting, 25cmx 20cmx12cm, 2015.**

#### **4. Conclusion**

It is hoped that this research will promote the development of traditional inside painting and lead to inside glass painting developing as a strand of the contemporary Chinese glass arts. It has offered a special creative approach for the contemporary glass world. This research had produced some works as examples to inspire all glass studios. This research is especially concerned with integration of artists' ideas, feelings and aesthetics with in their glass works and practice. The research offers a body of models for resolving such crucial concerns. In the traditional inside painting

of Chinese snuff bottles the art form and art content are stereotyped. Similar sized and forms of bottles have to suit all sorts of art content. These bottles do not facilitate art, but rather craft decoration. My research practice provides a way to address such shortcoming. For example, the sculptural form of the exterior of figure 7 is displaying a abstract young girl's body. The content of the inside painting is trying to present the beautiful girl's love stories. The outside and the inside are harmonized.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would especially like to thank my Director of Studies Professor Kevin Petrie, and co-supervisor Dr. Manny Ling, for their patient guidance throughout the whole process of research. Various University members of staff have provided assistance to my research, notably Tim Betterton and James Maskrey. Thanks are also given to the Swedish glass artists Bertil Vallien and Ulrica Hydman-Vallien, the American glass artist Cappy Thompson and the Czech glass artist Dana Zamecnikova for their advice and appreciation of my research aspirations.

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