

For Immediate Release

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**EXQUISITE CHINESE SNUFF BOTTLES FROM THE J & J COLLECTION
TO BE OFFERED AT CHRISTIE'S HONG KONG SPRING AUCTIONS**

Important Chinese Snuff Bottles from the J & J Collection, Part 1

25 April 2004

Hong Kong – Important Chinese snuff bottles from the J & J Collection will be sold at Christie's Hong Kong Spring Auctions on 25 April 2004. Assembled by renowned collectors James Li and his late wife Julie over a period of 30 years, this is one of the most important collections of snuff bottles ever offered at auction.

The collection comprises about 600 snuff bottles and related paraphernalia, 88 of which will be offered in this inaugural sale in Hong Kong, the first in a series of auctions to be held over the next few seasons.

The initial core of the collection was formed in the early part of the 20th century by James Li's father, Li Ti-Tsun, a distinguished educator and Chinese Ambassador to numerous countries in South America. It was subsequently expanded and refined under the expert eye of James and Julie. Characterised by the extraordinarily fine quality of the bottles and by the superb range of techniques and styles they represent, the collection covers a wide range of materials, including jade, enamel on glass and metal, porcelain and organic materials.

“Julie and I have gained great satisfaction and enjoyment from collecting and living with these bottles. Through this dispersal, I hope that new collectors will be motivated to enter the field, and that in the future our best bottles will become the core of new major collections,” said James Li.

“We are very proud and honoured to have been entrusted with the sale of this exceptional collection of important snuff bottles, which was assembled with passion and a discerning eye by

collectors whose names are well known and respected throughout the world,” said Pola Antebi, Director and Head of the Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art Department at Christie’s Hong Kong.

This remarkable collection features an important group of bottles decorated in delicate famille rose enamels produced by the Imperial workshops in Beijing during the Qianlong reign (1736–1795). One of the top lots for this group is the enamelled copper bottle with a continuous scene of a European lady and a young boy tending to three goats. This classic Chinese motif is a rebus for san yang kai tai, the opening up of the new growth in spring, symbolising happiness and good fortune (Estimate: HK\$950,000–1,500,000/ US\$130,000–190,000). The bottle also reflects the Qianlong emperor’s interest in European enamels and subject matter, and could very well have been painted by a Jesuit missionary enlisted to service at the Chinese court.

The art of enamelling on glass was far more technically challenging than on metal, making the small milky-white glass bottle, delicately painted with a bird and flower theme in the classical painting genre, all the more remarkable (estimate: HK\$1,300,000–1,800,000/US\$170,000–230,000). The translucent, opalescent glass body complements the soft enamels and imparts a sense of life to the decoration. Enamelled glass snuff bottles were among the rarest produced at the court; this bottle is expected to be one of the most sought after in the auction.

The Qianlong emperor was particularly fond of intricate ivory carvings, and he commanded that any carvers of particular skill be sent to Beijing to work within the Palace workshops. An exceptional Imperial ivory bottle carved with groups of figures in a boat offered in the sale, is an outstanding example of the highest technical and artistic quality (estimate: HK\$700,000–1,000,000/US\$91,000–130,000).

Outstanding snuff bottles were also produced outside the court which displayed great novelty, interesting and exotic materials and innovative techniques. The Suzhou jade bottle is superbly carved, with the natural brown markings of the stone ingeniously worked to create a design of two sages in a country landscape (estimate: HK\$1,000,000–1,500,000/US\$130,000–190,000). Another interesting snuff bottle is the amber one brilliantly embellished with a garden scene rendered in a variety of materials including mother-of-pearl and coral, representing the work of an exceptionally skilled Japanese artist (estimate: HK\$480,000–750,000/US\$60,000–90,000).

Perhaps the greatest innovation in decorating snuff bottles during the 19th century was the art of interior painting. The painstaking technique required the artist to insert an angled brush or pen inside the tiny mouth of the bottle and slowly build up paint to create a design on the interior. Among the most celebrated artists of this technique was Ma Shaoxuan. The crystal bottle is painted with an almost photographic realism with a portrait of Hao Shouchen, one of the great stars of the Chinese theatre, executed in 1912 (estimate: HK\$650,000–1,000,000/ US\$84,000–128,000).

*The J & J Collection has been widely exhibited around the world, including the Percival David Foundation, London; the Empress Place, Singapore; the National Museum of History, Taipei; and the Poly Art Museum, Beijing. An acclaimed two-volume catalogue of the collection, entitled *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle*, was published in 1993 and has been discussed in numerous publications.*

Notes to Editors

Pre-sale Exhibitions:

<i>New York</i>	<i>18–23 March</i>	<i>Christie's Rockefeller Center</i>
<i>Singapore</i>	<i>2–3 April</i>	<i>Grand Hyatt Singapore</i>
<i>Shanghai</i>	<i>10–11 April</i>	<i>The Westin Shanghai</i>
<i>Beijing</i>	<i>13–14 April</i>	<i>The St Regis Beijing</i>
<i>Taipei</i>	<i>17–18 April</i>	<i>Fubon Life Insurance Building</i>
<i>Hong Kong</i>	<i>23–25 April</i>	<i>JW Marriott Hotel</i>

Auction: 25 April at 6:00 pm at the JW Marriott Hotel, Hong Kong

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Images available on request

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