

ZHUIZI

CHINESE TOGGLES FROM THE GLENN R. VESSA COLLECTION

Zhuizi are small palm sized talismans or amulets that served as counter weights or 'toggles' securing personal accessories to a sash around the waist. Very little has been written about the Chinese Toggle in spite of the fact that they must have developed very early on in Chinese history. One can imagine that as long as people had a need to carry cash, pipes, perfume, brushes or seals they needed something to carry and attach those items securely to their person.

Toggles developed as a matter of necessity but quickly evolved into lucky talismans or amulets as well. The Japanese counterpart to these are the better-known Netsuke which have been highly collected and traded for centuries and about which many books have been published. Netsuke evolved into a high art often signed by famous makers during the later part of the 19th century. Zhuizi (pronounced joo-ee-dzee) on the other hand remained securely in the realm of folk art and were often carved by farmers and peasants for personal use.

Every Zhuizi doubles as a talisman reflecting the owner's desire for something good to come his way. Wishes for health, wealth, many progeny, a long life and a happy and fruitful marriage are all universally embraced. The Chinese use many symbols to express hopes for these things; a frog or a pomegranate for instance are both wishes for many offspring. Putting certain elements together in certain combinations, symbolize yet more complex wishes. These Chinese icons read like rebuses or puns and as visual cues, could often be understood and "read" even by illiterate commoners. Emblems incorporated together can reference certain sacred writings or literary references and therefore can be exceedingly sophisticated and complicated as well.

Having lived briefly in Japan, Korea, Singapore and Thailand Glenn & Lucille Vessa finally settled in Hong Kong and in 1968 established Honeychurch Antiques on Hollywood road. Both the Vessa's and their shop became iconic fixtures in old Hong Kong and contributed to the early and longstanding reputation that Hollywood Road enjoyed as the place to find important and exceptional antiques for decades.

Of his many collections amassed over a life time in Asia, Vessa's toggle collection was his favorite. He never tired of holding these small amulets, turning them in his hands and marveling at the carvings with surfaces worn smooth from use by owners long passed. Each one told a unique story and no two were exactly alike.

Honeychurch Antiques is pleased to offer this collection to the public for the first time. Due to the size of the collection we will be offering 18 pieces a month until the collection has been sold. If nothing else these Toggles will tell a story we hope you will enjoy.

John Fairman
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