

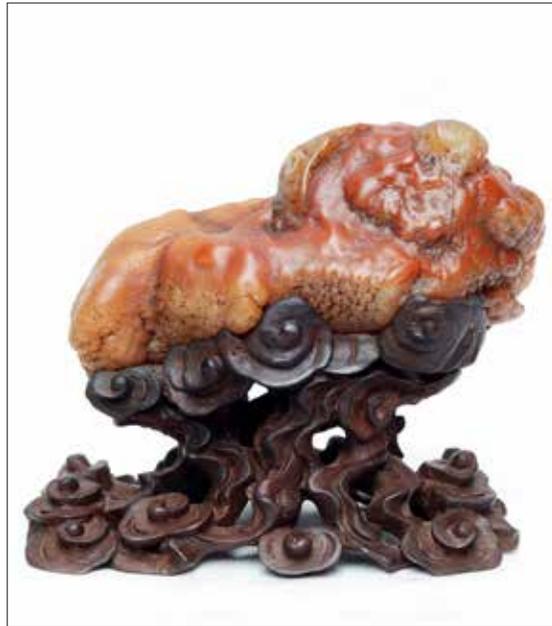
# Yellow Wax Stones of Southern China

From the collections of  
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and Lin Nan

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and Huang Jiuwei

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*top left;* A rare multi-color wax stone possibly resembling a bird sitting on a plant motif wooden base. Lin Collection. WxHxD: 16 x 11 x 7 cm (6.3 x 4.3 x 2.7 in).

*top right;* This Yellow Wax Stone can be viewed as a person sleeping in a bed. The elevated base accentuates the stone. Lin Collection. WxHxD: 12 x 6 x 5 cm (4.7 x 2.3 x 2 in).

*bottom right;* Some Yellow Wax stones have a rough surface worn rounded edges yet appear soft to the touch. Lin Collection. WxHxD: 18 x 28 x 38 cm (7 x 11 x 15 in).

*facing page;* This deep golden-brown mottled stone with its wax-like surface is a beautiful example of the darker wax stones. Huang Collection. WxHxD: 47 x 35 x 60 cm (18.5 x 13.7 x 23.6 in).

**W**ax Stones have been collected and valued by Chinese stone enthusiasts for many generations, especially those in southern China where many of the finest wax stones originate. These stones are named for their lustrous, silky, wax-like surface texture and are most frequently yellow to yellowish brown in color; however, some are white, red, brown, and rarer green, purple and black. This article will focus mainly on the Yellow Wax Stones of southern China. These stones are exceptionally hard (6.5 to 7.5 MOHS), similar to jade, and composed of varying high levels of silica in the form of quartz. Impurities that have infiltrated the quartz over many years are responsible for the color.

Many of the finest Yellow Wax Stones first originated from Guangdong, Guangxi, and Fujian Provinces but were later found in all of the southern provinces of China. They have since been found in Northern provinces and autonomous regions of China as well as in other countries (Malaysia, Myanmar [Burma], Thailand, Laos, India, and Vietnam). In China, the best quality wax stones are found Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian, and Yunnan Provinces.

Yellow Wax Stones have been collected and displayed as artistic objects in China for several hundred years. The first mention of these stones is attributed to Lian Gao's monumental work *Zun Sheng Ba Jian* in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644); however, it wasn't until the following Qing dynasty (1644-1911) that wax stones were added to the stone appreciation culture. Liang Jiutu, a Cantonese from Shunde bought twelve

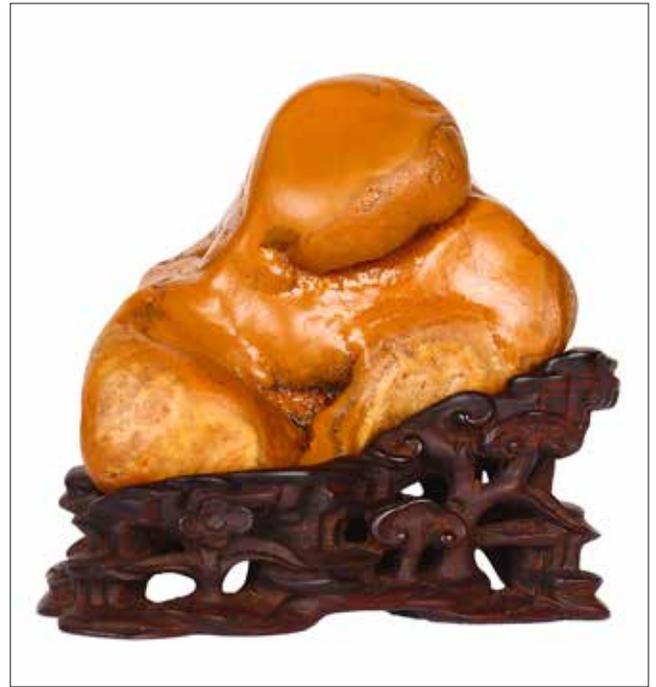
top quality Yellow Wax Stones on a trip from Hengxiang to Feilai Gorge. He liked them so much that he displayed them in his Foshan home that he named "A Twelve Stone Studio." The demand for Yellow Wax Stones grew rapidly during the Qing dynasty along with the development of courtyard gardens in southern China. Large wax stones were often displayed in these gardens, while medium-sized ones were used as art objects, and small wax stones held in hands. In addition to their use as art objects, Yellow Wax Stones have been elaborately carved as pieces of sculpture and made into high-end jewelry.





*bottom left;* A scarce block-shaped wax stone with somewhat wrinkled surfaces. Xie Collection. WxHxD: 19 x 18 x 16 cm (7.5 x 7 x 6.3 in).

Yellow Wax Stones are especially popular in southern China and quality stones are in demand at steadily rising prices. They are so popular that no less than five books solely on Yellow Wax Stones have been published recently. Four of them, including the monumental,



348-page China Chaozhou Yellow Wax Stone Encyclopedia, were published in the last four years.

These stones have their own specialized criteria for evaluation and grading, primarily using surface texture and color but also shape. There are five main grading categories just for the texture or surface of the stones.

Frozen Wax (Dong La) has a surface texture that resembles frozen fatty pork but appears warm and is dense like jade. This type can be subdivided into seven subcategories depending upon the appearance.

Mastic Wax (Jiao La) has a transparent or semi-transparent texture that looks like congealed wax.

Smooth Wax (You La or Xi La) has a smooth texture and the stone is often thick and appears slick giving a simple elegant appearance. This is the most common and popular wax stone among Chinese collectors.

Crystal Wax (Jing La) has a crystal-like appearance due to the high percentage of quartz.

Rough Wax (Cu La) has a texture that appears soft and rough giving it a gloomy and appearance. Many of these stones are large and used as garden or courtyard stones.

Color varies widely among wax stones; however, varying shades of yellow, white, brown, and reddish browns are the most prevalent. Each of the main colors forms has been further subdivided. For example, Yellow Wax Stone subcategories include golden yellow, orange yellow, yolk yellow, chicken oil yellow, ivory yellow as some examples. Elaborating on all of the color forms is beyond the scope of this article. In general, the darker shades of Yellow Wax Stones along with those that have varying shades of browns and reds often are more sought after and valued.





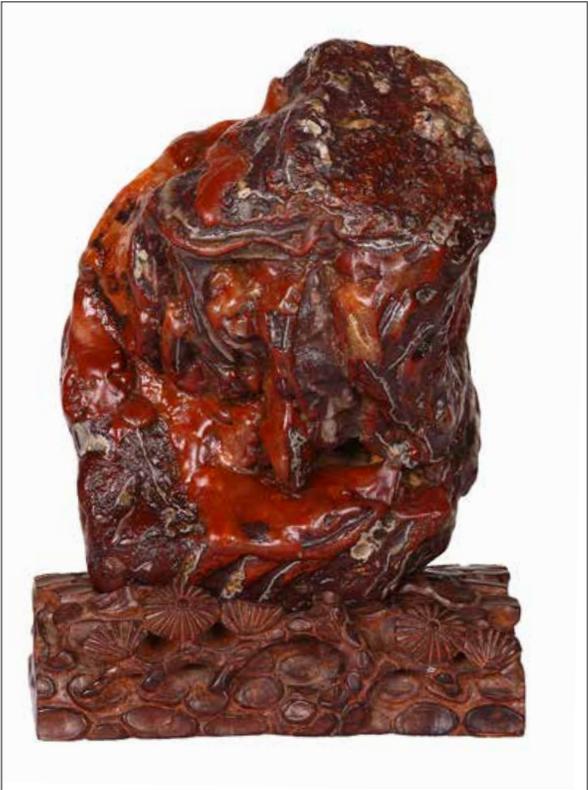
*facing page, top left;* This light reddish brown stone has a silky waxy appearance typical of these stones. Huang Collection. WxHxD: 18 x 10 x 9 cm (7 x 3.9 x 3.6 in).

*facing page, top right;* A sitting figure can easily be imagined when viewing this stone. Huang Collection. WxHxD: 20 x 17 x 8 cm (7.8 x 6.7 x 3.1 in).

*above;* A pleasing and unusual horizontally shaped stone. Xie Collection. WxHxD: 25 x 8 x 18 cm (8.8 x 3.1 x 7 in).

*bottom left;* Yellow Wax Stones range in color from light yellow to dark reddish-brown. This is a striking example of one of the more dark toned stones. Huang Collection. WxHxD: 13 x 8 x 20 cm (5.1 x 3.1 x 7.8 in).

*bottom right;* The interior darker hues help make this appear like an ancient tree trunk, especially with its tree-like base. Lin Collection. WxHxD: 30 x 14 x 10 cm (11.8 x 5.5 x 3.9 in).



Many of the wax stones from southern China are small elegant pieces lacking holes and the strong convolutions and shapes of many other kinds of stones used in stone appreciation. Quality stones are often complemented with skillfully carved elaborate bases. These bases are typically associated with southern China.

Guangdong, Shangxi, and Fujian Provinces produced some of the earliest and finest Yellow Wax stones. While there are many localities where these stones are found in Guangdong, the best ones come from Chaozhou Prefecture, and, in particular, in Qinggang village in Raoping County where ten separate mines are located. The local farmers dig in the mountains or in sand along streams and rivers to find wax stones. Yellow Wax Stones are naturally worn and shaped from being continually tumbled in stream and river beds. This action combined with their hardness and being so siliceous likely explains why so few stones are found with naturally occurring holes. Stones with holes are more prone to shattering into smaller pieces.

Another type of wax stone, the Babu Wax Stone, originates near Hezhou City in Guangxi Province. Varying shapes and textures of stones are found among the towering mountains and interlacing rivers in Guangxi Province, some of them with fascinating surface patterns. Colors are deep and rich resembling the simple and elegant appearance of jade. The upper reaches of the Lisong River produces wax stones as heavy as several tons, while the lower reaches of the Mawei River produce wax stones as small as a fist.

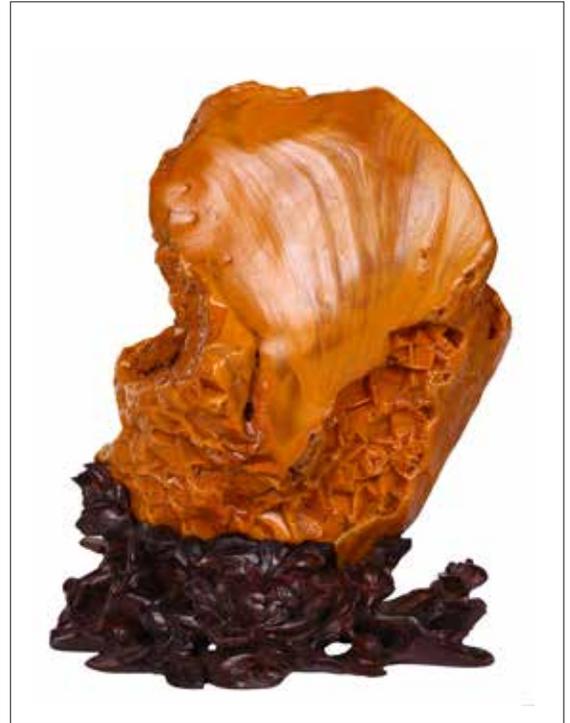
Fujian Wax Stones are usually collected in the winter months when the river levels are lowest. At this time, some wax stones may be exposed and readily collected; while others can be found by digging in and near the stream bed. Nice pattern stones with good texture and elegant shapes, both vertical and horizontal, are found.

Yunnan Province in southwestern China also produces high quality wax stones, mainly in the lower reaches

*top right;* The smooth waxy surface of the upper part of this stones appears to be emerging from a larger basal stone. Huang Collection. WxHxD: 18 x 10 x 9 cm (7 x 3.9 x 3.6 in).

*bottom left;* This golden yellowish-brown wax stone is perfectly matched to its base. Ling Collection. WxHxD: 20 x 17 x 25 cm (7.8 x 6.7 x 7 in).

*bottom right;* This thin stone resembling a fruit with a frozen-wax surface sits on an elaborate wooden base carved to resemble a plant's roots and leaves. Elias Collection. WxHxD: 16 x 11 x 5 cm (6.3 x 4.3 x 2 in).





*top left;* This rich two-tone brownish stone suggests a figure. Huang Collection. WxHxD: 13 x 7 x 8 cm (5.1 x 2.7 x 3.1 in).

*bottom left;* Light colored stones often have a lower value, but the beautiful, lower cone-like wood base adds to the aesthetic appeal of this stone. Xie Collection. WxH: 20 x 18 cm (7.8 x 7 in).

*bottom right;* The dramatic apex of this smooth Yellow Wax Stone may suggest a snake's head. Xie Collection. WxHxD: 18 x 17 x 8 cm (7 x 6.7 x 3.1 in).

of the Zhenxi Nu River. Nice colored wax stones have been taken from here along with beautiful Yellow Wax Stones. In fact, one of the highest grades of Yellow Wax Stones is now referred to in Yunnan as Yellow Dragon Jade or Yellow Jade.

Regardless of its province of origin in China, Yellow Wax Stones remain one of the most sought after of the viewing stones in southern China. They have great appeal because they are beautiful with their shining colors, hard jade-like composition, and are completely natural. The famous modern Chinese writer Lu Xu described the wax stones as “The most honest and the most profound art in its unpolished condition.” 🌿

