

Old Bian's Dumplings

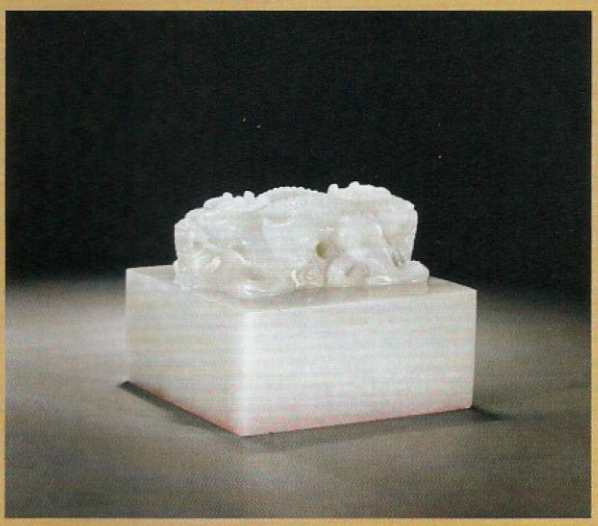


The famine that plagued Renqiu County, Hebei Province from 1821 to 1851 forced local residents either to leave their homes or die. Among those that fled was Bian Fu, proprietor of a dumpling restaurant, who traveled with his family to northeastern China. On their way they spent the night at a household that was holding a birthday celebration. Bian was both touched and impressed by the rich, tender dumplings the family served their guests. The secret, the lady of the house told Bian Fu, was to stir-fry the fillings before wrapping them in dough.

Bian Fu later opened a dumpling shop by the Shenyang City moat. The cooking techniques he learned from his family's benefactors soon brought his dumplings into high demand. To ensure no-one would steal his recipe, Bian Fu established the tradition of sharing it only with his male descendants. Thus came about the Old Bian's Dumplings brand – a much-savored aspect of Shenyang cuisine.

Old Bian's Dumplings enjoy international fame, largely due to being served on trains passing through Shenyang to Russia and beyond since the early 1960s. In 1980, Old Bian's Dumplings traveled to Sapporo and Kyoto in Japan. They won a gold medal at the IFE Americas (Americas Food & Beverage Show & Conference) in 1998 and the 4th National Cooking Contest championship in 1999. In 2000, the *Guinness Book of Records* recognized this time-honored dumpling restaurant, founded in 1829 in Shenyang, as the longest standing establishment of its kind.

Old Bian's Dumpling fillings are made from stir-fried minced pork marinated in chicken soup. Seasonal vegetables are then added. The dough wrappers are made by mixing fine flour with melted lard and boiled water, which gives them a soft, stretchy translucent texture. Old Bian's Dumplings can be steamed, baked or fried.



Two ancient seals were star lots at the 2013 China Guardian spring auction. One belonged to Qing Emperor Qianlong (1711-1799), the other to Qing ruler Jiaqing (1760-1820). The former, of white jade, was hammered out at RMB 66.7 million after more than a dozen bids. The latter, of green jade, sold for RMB 34.5 million.

Qianlong's seal bears the motto "unceasingly improve oneself." Its handle consists of imposingly fashioned twin dragons. One of the "eight treasures" specifically produced to celebrate the 80th birthday of the Qing monarch, the seal was formerly in the collection of French industrialist, traveler and connoisseur Emile Guimet (1836-1918). He purchased it from Paris antique dealer Galerie Langweil in the early 20th century.

Jiaqing, the 15th son of Emperor Qianlong, inherited the throne after his father's abdication. The green jade seal bears the characters "seal for Jiaqing's royal writings," and also has a twin dragon handle. The original yellow ribbon embellishment is well preserved, its pattern and the way it is tied complying with Qing etiquette as laid down in historical documents.

In the Qin and Han dynasties, each emperor had eight seals for different administrative purposes. This tradition continued until the reign of Tang female monarch Wu Zetian, who added one to the set. During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) it grew to 24.

Qianlong's reign lasted 60 years, and is regarded as the heyday of the Qing Dynasty. Historical records show that he had as many as 25 seals in 1746, each representing the supreme power of state. They included one applicable to enthronement statements, one for sacrificial rituals, one for educational and cultural decrees, and one for diplomatic documents. Mostly made of jade, imperial seals were also of silver, gold and wood. The Palace Museum in Beijing houses nearly 5,000 seals originally belonging to Ming and Qing emperors and empresses. ■