

Deluxe Chinas

Judye Stewart
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The buttons that we collectively call “chinas” were among the first types of button to be mass-produced. Richard Prosser patented his “dry process” for producing china buttons in a factory setting in 1840, but before that porcelain buttons were being produced in very small quantities as “expensive curiosities.” The “new chinas” were first made at Mintons in England and then produced at various times in American factories, but the majority of them were manufactured in France at the Jean Felix Bapterosses factory.

These chinas were produced in large quantities and exported widely, so it is not surprising that they abound in button collections even today. The qualities that make them attractive to some collectors are the varieties of colors, patterns and body styles that can be found. Patterns range from the homey and delicate calico patterns of the 1850’s to the bold stencil designs produced as late as the 1900’s. Body shapes have such colorful names as shells, bull’s-eyes, bird cages, ink wells, acorns, aspirins, and igloos.

As in any area of collecting, though, there are patterns, colors or styles that are special to the collector because of their rarity. In china buttons these deluxe ones are perhaps styles that were made by one of the more obscure factories and therefore originally made in smaller quantities. In at least one case the button (the igloo) is considered rare because it was very difficult to sew on and was probably not popular with the consumer. It may have been an experiment in button making that failed and so was not produced for a very long period of time. Then, too, the amount of time or handwork that it took to produce a particular type of button may have led to limited production.

For whatever reason some of the china buttons are considered RARE (only a few known examples) and others are what I would label “hard to find” (HTF) or “very hard to find” (VHTF). Some of the examples are also “unlisted” (UNL) meaning that they are not catalogued in the China Guidelines. For the purpose of this discussion of these deluxe chinas, I have used the *Guidelines for Collecting China Buttons* published by the National Button Society in 1970 as a framework. The page numbers that follow refer to that publication.

The labels that I have used here for determining “deluxe chinas” are very subjective and reflect only my opinion. Other collectors will, no doubt, have other thoughts on what would be considered “deluxe,” and I will certainly bow to their expertise in this area.

I would like to add a note, too, about pricing. Inclusion on this list is not meant to indicate that these buttons should be expensive. Some of these buttons are very plain buttons and are overlooked as chinas. Some may even be found lurking in glass poke boxes, for example.

Gaiters

Page 22, Plate 10, Number 6. Aspirin shape button with a calico design. UNL & RARE **a**

Page 22, Plate 10, Number 9. Gaiter with scalloped edge. VHTF **b**

Page 24, Plate 11, Number 13, 14, 15. Bull’s-Eye Patterns. HTF **c, d, e**

Page 25. Spatter Pattern Domes. HTF **f**

Page 29, Plate 15. Smock with calico design. UNL and RARE **g**

Bird-Cages

Page 30, Plate 17, Number 4. Fluted border with concave center. HTF **h**

Inserted Two-Way Self-Inserted Shanks

Page 34, Plate 19, Number 9. “Acorn” VHTF **i**

Page 34, Plate 19, Number 10. “Shell” VHTF **j**

Whistles

Page 40, Plate 11, Number 11. High dome, top divided into 6 triangles...alternating smooth and ridged. VHTF **k**

Page 42, Plate 25, Number 5 and 7-10. HTF-VHTF **l, m, o, p**

Unlisted. Hand-painted flowers and leaves or spatter design. UNL and RARE **q**

Igloos

Page 44, Plate 27. All are considered HTF - RARE. The most “common” one is all white. The hardest to find ones have blue, green, or red in their design. **r**

Two-Hole Hollow-eye

Page 56, Plate 33, Number 26. Eleven raised petal shaped lines. Resembles a “pudding mold.” HTF **s**

Two-Hole Panty-Waist

Page 73, Plate 43 E. Rayed effect. RARE **t**

Two-Hole Pattern-Eyes

Page 74, Plate 44, Number 1A. Similar to sun offset to one side with rays. HTF **u**

Four-Hole Hobnail Rims

Page 93, Plate 53, Number 3. Knobs intaglio, also called “reverse” hobnail. HTF **v**

Three-Hole

Generally any 3-hole china that is larger than a diminutive. HTF **w**

Three-Hole Plate Shape

Page 102, Plate 58, A. Scalloped edge. HTF **w**

Ginghams

Page 123, Plate 76. All are desirable. HTF **x**

Calicoes

Pages 105-121

Generally, calico designs on unusual body styles are very desirable.

Jeweled calico UNL & HTF **y**

“Aspirin” shape gaiter UNL & RARE **a**

Pin-shank UNL & RARE **g**
Faux sew-through gaiter UNL & RARE

Generally, calico designs with unusual finishes are desirable.
Two or more colors in the pattern. VHTF - RARE
Metallic finishes. HTF **z**

Generally, calico designs on buttons with metal rims are desirable. HTF **A**

Generally, calico designs on unusual sizes are desirable.
NBS size medium buttons. HTF **B**
NBS size medium buttons with metal rims. VHTF **A (right)**

Stencils

Page 143, Plate 84, Numbers 2, 5, 26, 30 HTF

Page 146, Plate 85, 86, and 87, Numbers 32-63 VHTF – RARE

In general, any stencil with two or more colors. VHTF **C**

Other Unlisted

Jeweled china buttons. Plain or decorated china disk set into a metal back with decorative rim and loop shank. The calico jewels have a convex disk. The plain ones or ones with painted bands have concave disks. UNL & HTF **y, D**

Albert Parent Transfers. Transfer designs on china buttons found in sample books of the Albert parent & Co. in Paris. Diana Epstein and Millicent Safro purchased this collection in 1984.
UNL & RARE **E**

Snouffer Stencils. Two and four-hole china buttons with various designs, some resembling stencils, a few resembling calico patterns. These buttons were bought in 1991 at a garage sale in Michigan and very little is known about their origin. UNL & RARE

Size

Generally, NBS size medium china buttons are less plentiful than size small and diminutives, and being a medium does moderately add to a button's value.

NBS size large china buttons. RARE

Temporary Competitive Value

Generally, when an award appears at Nationals for a particular type of china button, the price of those buttons will increase until after the competition.

