



Cricket Cage

Mahogany and brass reproduction

This is a modern example of a cricket cage that would have been used to house crickets as pets (they were initially valued for their “songs”) or to raise them for cricket fighting. Symbolically, crickets in China represented good fortune and potential wealth. For farmers, chirping crickets were also a sign that spring was arriving. People in China began keeping crickets in cages during the Tang Dynasty, while breeding crickets to fight started during the Song Dynasty and became increasingly common during the Qing Dynasty.

Keeping crickets as beloved singing pets became a hobby of literati, emperors, Buddhist monks and, of course, children who have delighted in catching and keeping crickets. The practice of buying and selling crickets, cicadas, and katydids in Chinese summer markets persists to the present day.

Crickets have come to be associated with intelligence and good fortune in China. In the earliest Chinese agrarian culture, singing insects such as crickets and cicadas played an important role, being the best indicators of changes in the climate such as when to start planting crops and when to prepare for winter. Inscriptions on ancient bones or tortoise shells show the early Chinese word for “summer” as a pictographic character in the form of a cicada and for “autumn” in the form of a cricket.

Crickets only live a few months from egg to death, and it is a time-consuming process to collect and raise particular breeds of crickets. The ability of the cricket to lay hundreds of eggs related to the Chinese belief that an important aspect of success in life was to have children. While the crickets would often be captured with nets and placed into simplistic-looking wood, bamboo or ivory cages, they would sometimes be moved to winter cages, often made from gourds, ceramic, or porcelain. Intricately carved gourds were commonly used to hold crickets--an example of this can be found in Gallery 217. Examples of the

iron and copper nets that were used to capture the crickets can be found in Galleries 216 and 217, along with a pair of small porcelain and ceramic dishes used for feeding crickets.

Resources

China Art Cart Manual 2009

Collection Connections:

Crickets were usually captured in the evening in small traps made out of bamboo or ivory rods fitted with sliding doors. This style of container also served as cages in some parts of China. The exceptionally rare iron "nets" shown here were used to capture insects and also act as a wire cage to hold a cricket while its gourd or pottery cage was being cleaned. The long, pointed handle of the iron net was used to dislodge wet wood, rocks and other debris while hunting crickets. - [Mia Collection](#) (not currently on view): *Cricket Trap*, 19th century, unknown artist, China

[Mia Collection](#) (G217), similar to trap described above: *Cricket Trap*, 19th century, unknown artist, China

This unusual container is crafted in the general shape of a lotus pod with stylized petals on the side. The removable lid is carved with small, round openings which acted as air vents for the *crickets* that were kept within. Gourd and wooden *cricket* containers were generally used during the cooler months. - [Mia Collection](#) (not currently on view): *Cricket Box*, 18th century, unknown artist, China

[Mia Collection](#) (G217): *Dome-shaped Cricket Carrier*, Date Unknown, Unknown artist, China

[Mia Collection](#) (not currently on view): *Cricket Fighting Ring*, 19th century, Unknown artist, China

[Mia Collection](#) (not currently on view): *Spherical Cricket Container*, Date Unknown, Unknown artist, China

[Mia Collection](#) (G216): *Cricket catcher*, 18th century, Unknown artist, China

[Mia Collection](#) (G217): *Cricket Catching Net*, 18th century, Unknown artist, China

[Mia Collection](#) - one of a pair (G216): *Cricket feeding dish*, 19th-20th century, Unknown artist, China