

KAZARI

Collectable Chinese Furniture: Catalogue Essay

The design and construction of furniture is one of the most basic needs of a civilization and reflects the standards of wealth, ingenuity, skill and culture of a people. Whilst every country has had a time of great wealth where no expense was spared to create elaborate furniture, the real story was to be found in the cities and towns away from the palaces and compounds of royalty and privilege, where furniture was produced for everyday use.

Up until about 10 years ago, only Ming (1368-1644) and early Ching (1644- 1680) furniture made from the tropical hardwoods; zitan, huang hua li, jichimu and tielimu and created for the Imperial Household and the wealthy were subject of any scholarship, as introduced by Wang Shixiang in 1990 in his 2 volume set: *Connoisseurship of Chinese Furniture, Ming and Early Ching Dynasties*. These pieces were the benchmark for collectors and purveyors of fine Chinese furniture worldwide. The legitimacy and collectability of softwood and fruitwood furniture (made from walnut, elm, cypress, pear, cherry, persimmon, beech, camphor, fir, laurel, oak and pine) was not explored in print until 1999 in a book by Curtis Everts on the Cola Ma Collection entitled *Traditional Chinese Furniture from the Greater Shanxi Region*, although individual articles did appear in the magazines Arts of Asia and Orientations before this time.

So the scholarship on and availability of Chinese softwood furniture has had a very short history in relation to the West, but a very fast ride indeed. It was only in 1994 that the Chinese government, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, allowed the export of general household and folk art merchandise including architectural items.

Most pieces in this exhibition come from the greater Shanxi region, the centre of fine furniture production historically for the whole of China. A few painted pieces included to add some colour to the exhibition come from Qinghai province (neighbouring Tibet) and Gansu province (neighbouring Qinghai and Mongolia). The major pieces made of huang hua li Qianlong (C18th) are remarkable and rare examples as the cultural revolution (1966-1976) saw the destruction of many high quality items.

Since the development of the market in the early 90s, Kazari together with Victoria and Raymond Tregaskis from Sydney, were there then on the ground floor and have since witnessed the entire process unfold. World and especially now domestic demand, along with the Chinese Government's new found zeal to protect its' cultural heritage, has seen the supply change from a river to a tributary. This exhibition presents an opportunity, with consideration to availability and currency exchanges, to buy C16th, C17th and C18th Chinese softwood furniture at very affordable and unrepeatable prices.

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