



中國瓷器及工藝精品

2017年11月7日

CHRISTIE'S

Uniquely Styled and Elegantly Crafted: A Pair of Huanghuali Round-Back Chairs

CURTIS EVARTS

INDEPENDENT ACADEMIC CONSULTANT

FORMER CURATOR OF THE MUSEUM OF CLASSICAL CHINESE FURNITURE, CALIFORNIA.



Fig. 1 Detail from *Shi Xianzu*, anonymous, album leaf painting, attributed Song dynasty, National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Fig. 2 Detail from *Breaking the Balustrade*, anonymous, hanging scroll, Song dynasty, National Palace Museum, Taipei.

The round-back chair emerged simultaneously with other high-back chairs during the late Tang and Song dynasties. The form may well have been developed through a fusion of two more ancient forms—the platform dais and the curved armrest (*pinji*) with three short legs, the latter which was also placed upon platforms as an accessory backrest (cf. fig. 1). Early evidence from Song period paintings reveals large ponderous chairs with a comb-like arrangement of vertical posts supporting a curved armrest with scrolling ends; such form appears in a detail from *Breaking the Balustrade* (fig. 2) where upon a Han emperor is seated. Others also depict more ethereal forms with slender cabriole legs and delicately balanced armrests; such is the drawing of an abbots chair as well as the elegant seat depicted in the portrait of the Zen master Dao Yuan (figs. 3-4). By the late Ming and Qing dynasties, streamlined hardwood versions had developed into one of the most graceful forms of traditional Chinese furniture. Notwithstanding, stylistic innovations continued to be experimented with, and archaic expressions drawn from early forms were also revisited. Such are the uniquely styled and exquisitely crafted pair of round-back armchairs offered in this sale.

Decorative art with archaistic characteristics was often favored by the literati class. Wen Zhenheng, a late Ming arbiter of taste, repeatedly cites a preference for furniture styled according to the old patterns from the Song and Yuan dynasties. Several archaistic features may be seen in the chairs offered by Christies. Firstly, the armrests terminate with large scroll-shaped handgrips, a characteristic that is even more pronounced in early illustrations. Secondly is the wide back splat (fig. 5), which is constructed as a tri-sectional panel as illustrated in the Song drawing above. Finally, the acute angle of the “goose-neck” front armrest posts, which is fitted with bracket-like spandrels above and below (fig. 6), recalls those ethereal forms depicted in Song and Yuan paintings.

Elegant design aside, the exquisite craftsmanship typical of the Jiangnan region is also apparent in the details of these chairs. The armrest is shaped with three pieces joined with half-lap joints utilizing blind tenons; the use of unique pressure pegs, which are intelligently set at an angle to impart compression, fixes the joint tightly together (fig. 7); this technique, which has been noted on several other chairs from the region, may also indicate



Fig. 5 Detail of lot 150, huanghuali round-back armchair, armrest and backrest.



Fig. 6 Detail of lot 150, huanghuali round-back armchair, gooseneck support.



Fig. 7 Detail of lot 150, huanghuali round-back armchair, gooseneck support.

柯惕思

客席學術顧問

美國加州中國古典家具博物館前館長

唐宋之際，靠背圈椅與其它高背椅應運而生。這些椅子的樣式融合了兩種前朝風格的家具——木製平臺以及帶三條短腿足之弧形扶手。扶手亦能放在平臺上，用作裝飾性的靠背（圖1）。在存世的宋畫中，可見早期梳形造型的座椅，其扶手兩端以弧形回轉，收尾成扁圓鈕形。該類樣式可參考臺北國立故宮博物院藏宋代《折檻圖》中，西漢成帝的座椅（圖2）。另外其它宋畫亦有描繪腿足較幼細、椅圈更纖巧的扶手椅；如附圖宋刻版畫中所見的圈椅以及一幅道元禪師像中的座椅（圖3及圖4）。晚明及清朝時期，承襲此設計的硬木家具逐漸成為傳統中國家具中的一種經典樣式。中式家具兼具創新風格與復古元素，在回溯傳統中依舊不斷創新前行，而此對清雅高致，巧奪天工的黃花梨靠背圈椅拍品，便是最佳印證。

雋永復古的工藝品自古以來便為文人士大夫所鍾愛。晚明名士文徵明，曾多次在文章中提到自己猶愛仿宋元風格的家具。佳士得這次呈獻的一對圈椅便蘊含各種仿古元素。其一，扶手兩末端均以扁圓鈕形收尾，此乃早期畫作中更常見的樣式。其二，圈椅的靠背板較一般寬（圖5），以三段攢框裝板造成，如上述宋畫中所呈現的座椅般。其三，扶手尾端下的鵝勃彎度很大，上下飾有一雙角牙，令人聯想起宋元畫作中所見的家具樣式（圖6）。

除了高雅脫俗的設計外，江南工藝的匠心獨運，亦可從圈椅其它細節中管窺一二。其扶手三接，兩端出頭回轉收尾成扁圓鈕形；椅腿帶有向內傾斜的挺拔角度令座椅極為穩固，再運用榫卯結構，使座椅穩當且不易變形（圖7）。該工藝技巧在同地區製作的其他座椅上亦有應用到，或許表明它們製成自同一工作坊。玲瓏的雕刻線條環繞背靠板及牙子，充分彰顯獨具匠心的南方家具制作傳統。

此拍品獨特之處是其可裝可卸的活屨座面。由柔軟藤條編織而成的座椅需要定期更換，而獨立的座面設計則方便更換。此造法在架子床中更為常見，直至今日，在中國一些街頭，依然能看到流動的工匠在路旁編織新的床面用作更換舊的床面。另外一組聞名遐邇的黃花梨南官帽椅，同樣安有可裝可卸的活動座面（圖8）；這類常在江南和渭陽地區見到的南官帽椅，與圈椅可能有不少關聯。總括而言，此類可隨意裝卸的活屨座面並不是一種廣泛使用的設計，實屬罕見。

佳士得這次拍賣的兩把圈椅極有可能源自一組八件甚至更多的組合，然而隨著時間的推移，這些圈椅四散各地。其中，羅伯特·哈特菲爾德·埃爾斯沃思 (Robert Hatfield Ellsworth) 收藏的四把圈椅於1970年出版過，在2015年在佳士得以破紀錄的價格出售 (圖9)；另一組則由朱塞佩·埃斯肯納齊 (Giuseppe Eskenazi) 在90年代後期出版；加之這對將要在倫敦拍賣的圈椅，使我們推斷這組椅子的數量起碼有八把。眾所周知的硬木座椅組合，極少超過四把；八把同組的椅子則極為罕見。儘管如此，在筆者研究過的漆椅銘文中，表明十二、二十到三十件組合的座椅並不少見；因此，藏家將更多件同類椅子組合在一起的機會依然存在。

「天圓地方」是傳統中國的陰陽學說，這兩把圈椅上圓下方，猶如張開的雙臂，虛懷若谷。中國成語中的「外圓內方」，指的是內部應以高尚的原則指導思想；而外部應有圓通豁達的適應能力。這對圈椅的曲線造型柔中帶剛，不僅能傳達坐者的威儀與端莊，同時又能予人一種安定平和及舒泰悠然的感覺。



Fig. 8 Huanghuali southern official's hat chair with removable seat panel, after Weiyang Mingshi jiaju, private collection, Hong Kong.



Fig. 9 Set of Huanghuali four round-back armchairs, formerly in the Robert Hatfield Ellsworth collection, sold at Christie's New York, 17 March 2015, lot 41.



(reverse of one chair, lot150)



■ 150

AN EXTREMELY RARE AND IMPORTANT PAIR OF HUANGHUALI HORSESHOE-BACK ARMCHAIRS, QUANYI
MING DYNASTY, 17TH CENTURY

On each chair the sweeping crest rail terminates in outswept hooks above shaped spandrels, and forms an elegant curve above the back splat decorated with an openwork four-lobed cartouche. The rear posts continue to form the back legs below the rectangular seat frame which has plain shaped aprons. The legs are joined by stretchers and a foot rest above a plain apron. Each 26¾ in. (68 cm.) wide, 21 in. (53.3 cm.) deep, 36 in. (91.5 cm.) high

£800,000-1,200,000

(2)
\$1,100,000-1,600,000
€910,000-1,400,000

PROVENANCE

With Grace Wu Bruce.
Property from a Distinguished Private Collection.

LITERATURE

Grace Wu Bruce, *On the Kang and Between the Walls*, London, 1998, no. 3, p. 16.
Grace Wu Bruce, *Two Decades of Ming Furniture*, Beijing, 2010, pp. 100-101.

The present pair is among eight known and published chairs of this design. Of the eight extant examples, a set of four, formerly from the Robert H. Ellsworth Collection, were sold at Christie's New York, 17 March 2015, lot 41 and was illustrated by Robert H. Ellsworth in *Chinese Furniture: Hardwood Examples of the Ming and Early Ch'ing Dynasties*, New York, 1971, pl. 15 (fig. 10) and another pair was sold at Sotheby's New York, 18-19 April 1989, lot 508, and is now in a private American collection. Of the eight known, all have been lacquered on the reverse of the backsplat and the seat frames are fitted with drop in mat seats.

This pair of chairs displays the unparalleled grace and finesse seen only in the finest furniture dated to the Ming dynasty. Several features distinguish this magnificent pair: the elegant curve of the crest rail, the exceptionally well-carved sweeping hook handles, the three-part backsplat with finely carved openwork panel, and the beautifully figured *huanghuali* panels. The chairs were constructed by a master craftsman, as evidenced by the confident carving of the well-molded hook handles, which are made rarer by the flattened, rounded ends. The unusual tri-part backsplat can also be seen on a single *huanghuali* side chair illustrated by G. Wu Bruce in *Two Decades of Ming Furniture*, Beijing, 2010, p. 136, suggesting that the set of eight horseshoe-back armchairs and the side chair were constructed in the same workshop. See, also, a Wanli-period woodblock print from the *Story of the Red Pear*, *Hong Li Ji*, which depicts two scholars seated in tall 'official's hat' armchairs with similar three-part backsplat (fig. 11).

The sweeping crest rail is constructed in three sections, which is rarer than the more commonly found five-section crest rail. Three-section crest rails demand larger sections of timber to achieve the dramatic curves of the arms and would have resulted in a significant amount of wastage, thus indicating the enormous financial resources of the gentleman who commissioned the set. For a detailed description and explanation of the sophisticated joinery utilized by the Chinese craftsmen to construct the curved rails of the elegant and graceful horseshoe-back armchair, see Curtis Evarts, "Continuous Horseshoe Arms And Half-Lapped Pressure Peg Joins," *Journal of The Classical Chinese Furniture Society*, Spring, 1991, pp. 14-18.

The Chinese name for this type of chair, *quanyi*, is literally translated as 'chair with a circular back' or 'circle chair'. During the Song dynasty (960-1279) this form was known as *kaolaoyang*, which refers to a large round basket made from split bamboo. The English name for this form, however, refers to the overall shape of the back and arm rests, which resembles a horseshoe. Wang Shixiang and Curtis Evarts have suggested that the horseshoe-back armchair emerged simultaneously with other examples of high-back chairs during the Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279) dynasties. See, Wang Shixiang and Curtis Evarts, *op. cit.*, p. 56, for a further discussion of the form.

明十七世紀 黃花梨圈椅一對

來源: 西方私人珍藏; 購自嘉木堂

文獻:

伍嘉恩著《On the Kang and Between the Walls》倫敦, 1998年, 第3號, 第16頁
伍嘉恩著《明式家具二十年經眼錄》, 北京, 2010年, 第100至101頁



Fig. 10 One of a set of four *huanghuali* horseshoe-back armchairs from the Robert H. Ellsworth Collection as published by Robert Ellsworth. Courtesy of Hei Hung Lu.

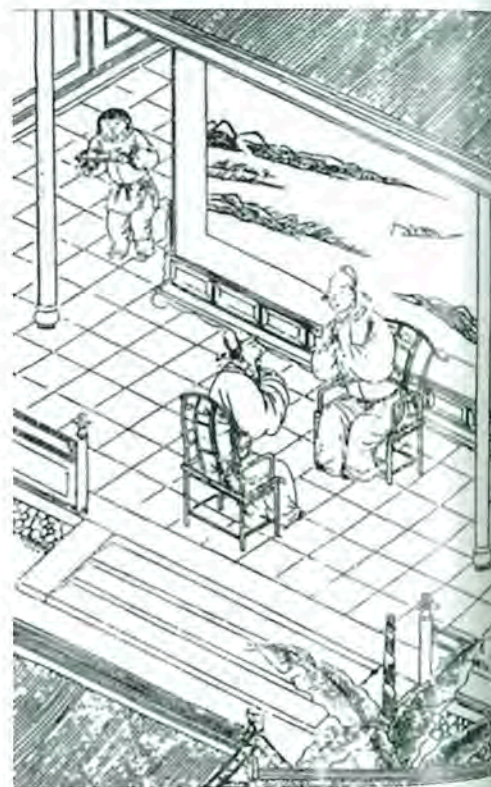


Fig. 11 Woodblock print from *Story of the Red Pear* (*Hong Li Ji*), Ming dynasty.



