

THE
JINGGUANTANG
COLLECTION PART II

Fine and Important Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art

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CHRISTIE'S

Classical Chinese Furniture From The Jingguantang Collection

by Curtis Evarts



Fig 1 圖版一 (Lot 9)

exposure to light. The finest *huanghuali* has a translucent shimmering surface with abstractly figured patterns that delight the eye - those appearing like ghost faces were highly prized; the color ranges from reddish-brown to golden-yellow. Hainan Island is generally considered as the source of *huali*; nevertheless, variations in color, figure and density, as well as various historical references pointing to sources in North Vietnam, Guangxi, Indo-China and the isles of the South China Sea suggest the possibility of several differing species.

The individual pieces in this collection generally tend to the traditional classical style with an emphasis on purity of form and minimal surface decoration. Such is the well-proportioned large recessed-leg painting table (fig. 1) which is solidly constructed of beautifully figured material. Art of line and balanced form are also elegantly pronounced in the large round-leg square table (fig. 2). And the quintessence of minimalistic design demonstrated in the narrow side table (fig. 3) would certainly have complimented the austerity of the *qin*'s thin melodic line.

Of more grandiose and majestic style is the large roundback or horseshoeback armchair (fig. 4). The Chinese terminology *taishi yi*, or literally "grand master's chair," is well suited here. The chair's imposing stature suggests the hierarchical marker of a mighty magistrate or wealthy merchant whose powers were further augmented by the flared nostrils and bulging eyes of dragon's head hand grips which glare back at the eyes of the host. According to those who discovered the chair, the *huanghuali* footrest (fig. 4) was already paired with the chair; at present, this may be the only known mated set in *huanghuali* furniture.

During the late Ming period, recessed-leg tables with everted flanges and open-carved end panels were called "altar tables" (*tianchanji*) or "wall tables" (*bizhuo*), depending on how they were used. Wen Zhenheng (1574-1636), a leading arbiter of taste, informed the readers of his *Zhangwu zhi* (Treatise on Superfluous Things) that the "raised ends (*qiaotou*) [of wall tables] ... must not be too sharp, but smooth and rounded." His writings were in large part a reaction to the decline in refined taste that accompanied the rise of the *nouveau riche* merchant class. Thus, he goes on to praise wall tables whose tops were figured with natural grain patterns, but detested those "carved with vulgar patterns such as dragons, phoenixes, flowers, and grasses." Given these parameters, perhaps Wen would have found some satisfaction in the classical antiquity of the long narrow *huanghuali* table (fig. 5). It is one of the few extant examples with a standing *nuyi* in each end panel, yet according to visual reference material in woodcut illustrations such decoration was once commonly seen during the late Ming period.

靜觀堂收藏的中國古典傢俱

柯惕思



Fig 2 圖版二 (Lot 5)

靜觀堂收藏的黃花梨傢俱在香港展覽時，我有幸恭逢其盛，其完美的品質至今仍記憶猶新。這是整個亞洲第一流的傢俱展覽，展品的質量足以與世界各地的公私收藏相埒，亦堪與靜觀堂收藏的名瓷和青銅器媲美。

本次拍賣中的多數傢俱是用質地堅實的熱代硬木黃花梨製作的。黃花梨是降香黃檀的一種，學名是 *Dalbergia odorifera*，古代稱為花梨，又稱花櫨。二十世紀初古董商人給這種木材加上黃字，用來形容因長期受日照而變成淺黃色的舊花梨傢俱。優質的黃花梨表面晶瑩潤澤，紋理悅目，其中帶有所謂“兔臉”紋的最為珍貴，其顏色從淺紅到金黃不等。通常認為黃花梨產

於海南島，不過各種文獻的記載以及花梨木形形色色的顏色、紋理和木質密度都說明花梨木應有幾類不同的品種，在越南北部、廣西、印度支那和南亞諸島都有出產。

靜觀堂收藏的中國傢俱多數是傳統的古典風格，注重淳樸的造型和簡練的裝飾，如比例勻稱的大畫案（圖版一），造型堅實，材質秀美。高大的圓腿方桌（圖版二）線條流暢，外形均衡，別具風姿。狹長的條桌（圖版三）則體現了簡潔樸素的真髓，與古琴的修長而有韻律的線條相得益彰。

高大的圓背扶手圈椅（圖版四）表現了莊嚴凝重的風格，稱之為太師椅可謂名副其實。雄渾的造型暗示普權臣或是富商的顯赫身份，扶手兩端的龍頭雙目圓睜，鼻孔怒張，回首仰望，更助長了坐椅子的人的威風。據發現這把椅子的人講，黃花梨的腳踏（圖版四）與椅子是原配，可能是目前的黃花梨傢俱中唯一的一對。

明代晚期的透雕擋板翹頭案可以根據其用途稱為天禪几（又稱天然几），或稱為壁桌。著名的鑒賞權威文徵明（1574-1636）在【長物志】中講到“（天然几）飛角處不可太尖，須平圓。”當時由於商人新富階層的崛起，高雅的格調日趨末路，文氏的評論主要是對時勢有感而發。他接下來又稱讚桌面有自然紋理的壁桌，但抨擊刻有“龍鳳花草俗格式”的傢俱。依照文徵明的標準，本收藏中的黃花梨翹頭案（圖版五）的典雅格調定會使他感到賞心悅目。這類擋板上雕有如意的條案僅有幾件存世，這是其中一件。不過據木刻版畫插圖看，這種裝飾在明代相當常見。

飾有攢門門和裝板的書架（圖版六）是本收藏中較妍秀的一件。精良的做工和細膩的紋飾是清代早中期的裝飾藝術的特色。攢門門、幫板以及兩塊背板均可拆卸，因此書架比較容易拆裝。這種結構使經常需要搬遷的官員免去了攜帶笨重傢俱的煩惱，也為蘇州等硬木傢俱製作中心沿運河送貨增加了便利。



Fig 3 圖版三 (Lot 20)



Fig 4 圖版四 (Lot 10, 11)



Fig 5 圖版五 (Lot 29)

The bookcase with decorative lattice doors and panels (fig. 6) is one of the more ornate pieces in the collection. Exquisite craftsmanship and a refined style or ornamentation are both characteristic of the decorative arts during the early to middle Qing periods. The lattice doors, side panels, as well as the two *huanghuali* back panels, are all removable, permitting the cabinet to be disassembled and reassembled with relative ease. Such construction allowed officials, who were periodically required to relocate, to travel with otherwise bulky furniture and also facilitated delivery along canal routes from hardwood furniture-making centers like Suzhou.

Transportable cases were another form of portable furniture. Such cases were bound up with woven cords and then carried by one or two porters with a pole that was slipped through the cords. The traditional Chinese doctor frequently made house calls to the homes of the officials and those of wealth with his assortment of medicinal herbs, dried animal parts, horns, etc., stored in the drawers of his portable medicinal chest. The *huanghuali* medicine chest (fig. 7) has four *baitong* loops mounted on the base which served as guides for the cordage. The *baitong* handles were also used for moving the box, and the corner mounts served both as construction reinforcement and corner protection.

Incense stands not only supported incense burners, but were also used to display flower arrangements, fantastic rocks, and miniature trees; at night they could be placed near the bed to hold a candlestick. Decorative characteristics of both Ming style and Qing palace style furniture are reflected in the two incense stands offered in this sale. The deep relief carving of scrolling tendril design on the aprons and strong cabriole legs of the rectangular *huanghuali* incense stand (fig. 8) impart a relatively masculine stance. The eighteenth-century *Yuan Ming Yuan Zeli* (Standards of Construction for the Summer Palace) records the terminology "dragonfly legs" (*qinting tui*) for the long, slender cabriole legs of incense stands of similar construction. The *zitan* incense stand is finely crafted from reused *zitan* and finely inlaid with bamboo. The refined style and angularity of form are typical of the early to mid-Qing palace style. The practice of laminating material and recycling old *zitan* material occurred more frequently during the eighteenth century, when supplies had become so sparse that its use was strictly controlled by imperial decree.

Sales from private collections of classical Chinese furniture are now providing exceptional opportunities for collectors and public museums. Recent exhibitions have also successfully demonstrated how Chinese furniture can be used in museum settings in new exciting ways to demonstrate aspects of the Chinese material culture. While the traditional arts of painting, bronzes, jades and porcelain can be appreciated in and of themselves, an understanding of their individual relationships to the culture from which they were born requires a deeper plunge into the esoteric. The medium of classical Chinese furniture, however, provides more immediate contact with the material culture and the daily life of a people who actually sat in chairs, worked on tables, and reclined on beds. Furthermore, classical Chinese furniture also embraces the traditional Chinese love of beauty of line, composition and materials. Each piece, transcending its utilitarian origin, can really be considered a work of art and it is at this level that the furniture of the Jingguantang Collection should be viewed.



Fig 6 圖版六 (Lot 28)



Fig 7 圖版七 (Lot 8)



Fig 8 圖版八 (Lot 12)

可攜木箱是攜帶式傢俱的另一類。這類箱子可用繩子捆紮，兩個扛伏用扁擔穿過繩子即可搬運。中醫大夫常常到官員和富人家中出診，他在藥箱的抽屜里可以攜帶著各類中草藥。黃花梨的藥箱（圖版七）底上裝有四個穿繩用的白銅環，也是搬運時的提手。箱子的銅包角既有加固作用又可以保護箱角。

香几不僅可以擺香爐，也可以擺放奇花異石，盆景雅玩，夜間還可以置於床前放燭臺。本拍賣中的兩件香几表現了明式和清代宮廷式的裝飾特點。長方形黃花梨香几（圖版八）的雄強之美來自於牙子上的高浮雕蔓草紋和挺拔的三彎腿。同樣結構的香几的細長三彎腿在十八世紀的【圓明園則例】中亦有記錄，稱為“蜻蜓腿”。紫檀香几利用舊料精工製成，並且嵌有纖巧的竹片花紋。秀麗精美的風格和方硬的造型是典型的清代早中期宮廷風格。硬木包鑲和紫檀舊料的利用在十八世紀更為常見，此時因為原料日漸短缺，所以官府對紫檀木施行嚴格控制。

私人收藏的中國古典傢俱的拍賣為收藏家和博物館提供了不可多得的機會。近來的展覽充分顯示了在博物館布局中採用中國傢俱能夠以新穎有趣的形式來展示中國物質文化的各個層面。雖然繪畫、青銅器、玉器、瓷器等傳統藝術本身可以帶給觀眾美的享受，可是要瞭解產生這些藝術的文化與這些藝術的關係卻需要深奧的研究。然而中國古典傢俱卻使人對物質文化和使用這些桌椅床櫃的人有更直接的聯繫，而且還表現了中國傳統中對於線條、布局和材料之美的愛好和崇尚。每一件傢俱已遠遠超越其實用性質而成為名副其實的藝術品，靜觀堂的傢俱正是這樣的傳世佳作。