



Chinese Document Box Made Of Huanghuali Wood



6 000 EUR

Period : 17th century

Condition : Bon état

Material : Rosewood

Length : 56

Width : 38

Height : 16

Description

A rare Chinese document chest made of *huanghuali* wood, dating from the Kangxi period (1662-1722) and intended for the Dutch colonial market; 17th-18th century, circa 1680-1720, Fujian or Canton, Southern China. Dimensions: 56 x 38 x 16 cm. This rare Chinese document chest is finely crafted from *huanghuali* (???) wood (*Dalbergia odorifera*), one of the most precious hardwoods used in Chinese cabinetmaking. This square-shaped box is adorned with engraved gilded metal fittings: *ruyi*-shaped corner reinforcements, handles, hinges, and an ornate lock plate. The brass is finely chiseled with floral motifs and pearls. The term *ruyi* is composed of the two characters *rú* (?) and *yì* (?), which literally mean "according to your wishes."

Dealer

Verkoulen Oriental & European Antiques
Antiques

Tel : +31

Mobile : 0622008502

Willem II Singel 44

Roermond 6041

Although it may, at first glance, resemble the *lingzhi* (a symbolic mushroom), it has a different meaning: it represents the rounded upper part of the *ruyi* scepter, a Chinese ceremonial attribute symbolizing authority. According to popular belief, the *ruyi* brings its owner good luck, blessings, and longevity. Its shape is closely modeled after that of travel cases designed to hold documents and writing materials, used by officials and merchants of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in Batavia, Ceylon, and other Dutch trading posts. These cases were indispensable for storing correspondence, contracts, and account books, as VOC agents were required to produce multiple handwritten copies of reports concerning trade, diplomacy, and local affairs. Although of Dutch design, this example was most certainly made in China, combining European functionality with the craftsmanship and luxurious materials of Chinese cabinetmakers. Founded in 1602, the VOC sought, with limited success, to establish direct trade with China. Due to trade restrictions imposed by China and the loss of Formosa in 1662, the Company had to rely on Chinese merchants rather than trade freely on Chinese soil. Through Batavia, and later through Canton, the Company commissioned Chinese workshops to produce luxury items for export--shipped by junks--including several *huanghuali* document boxes, designed in the Dutch colonial style for high-ranking officials and VOC merchants. It was not until the early 18th century that the Dutch were permitted to travel directly to Canton. "Huanghuali"--a term literally meaning "yellow-flowered pear wood"--was reserved for the most refined furniture, intended for the Chinese imperial court, wealthy merchants, and the literati elite. Native to Hainan Island, this wood is characterized by extremely slow growth and a distinctive character. Its rich golden-brown hue, fragrant oils (which protect it from moisture), and remarkable grain made it one of the most prized woods during the Ming dynasty

and the early Qing dynasty. It sometimes displays what is known as the "ghost face" (a pattern resembling a face, which is occasionally observed in this type of wood). By the late 18th century, supplies had already become scarce, which explains its enduring rarity and value. Today, Hainan huanghuali has become so rare that it is protected by the government to prevent its extinction. According to some sources, there are fewer than 10,000 pieces of huanghuali furniture dating from the Ming (1368-1662) and Qing (1662-1912) dynasties, a large portion of which is now held in museum collections. This box bears witness to the trade and the high quality of craftsmanship that characterized relations between China and the West during the golden age of maritime trade.

References:- Christie's, May 13, 2011, Auction 6162 "Chinese Ceramics, Works of Art, and Textiles," Lot No. 1103.- Liangyi Museum, Hong Kong, objects nos. LYMF-230 and LYMF-331.- Bonhams, London, November 9, 2017, "Fine Chinese Art," lot no. 114 (private collection).- Sotheby's, November 3, 2021, Sale L21212 "Important Chinese Art," lots no. 189 and 193. (Item from the Elvina and Gerard Hawthorn Collection)

Source: Zhong Pingyuan, Taipei Times 2011 Qiao Hao, 2013 M. Backman