



Chinese Antique Furniture

By Rhys Samuel

A unique exhibit has just closed in Morganton - Chinese furniture and antiques from the Qing (ching) Dynasty, which ruled from about 1750 to 1911. The exhibit was shown at the downtown Jailhouse Gallery and was sponsored by the Burke Arts Council.



Featured was a wide variety of pieces including chairs, tables, cabinets, bowls, and chests of all types that are best described as "rustic." In time, they overlap the American pioneer period when much of the common furniture was made by local woodworkers or by self-styled artisans who made their own furniture out of necessity.



Like American builders of the same period, the Chinese makers relied on locally available woods but in a greater variety. The Morganton exhibit pieces were made of elm, fir, willow, poplar, catalpa, bamboo, pine, beech, and cypress. A few

included low quality rosewood and teak.

While the level of workmanship appeared to be the same as that of corresponding American workers, the Chinese embellished even their most elementary pieces with simple adornments, including color painting of cabinet and chair parts. Again, these are the most basic furniture pieces intended for use by the Imperial Court and the everyday working class.



The Chinese have a long history of fine cabinet making. The furniture they produced in the Ming Dynasty period (1368-1644) is unsurpassed in its design, workmanship, and finish, and should be studied by any student of modern furniture design. Perhaps we can show some of these great pieces in a later issue.

In the interim, here are some of the later Qing Dynasty pieces from the Morganton show.

