



Enlarged from picture at center of this page, from left to right

The Carvers and their Skills Eight Immortals crossing the sea (on the way to Xi-Wang Mu)



Bright Hill Temple - Singapore



The Eight Immortals on Walnut and Olive (All on one seed, carved at Sanher and Suzhou)



"Copying" or "producing" the same "piece of art"

Auction: Sotheby's Hong Kong April 30 and May 1, 1996

Examples:



Lot 417: HK \$ 70'000-90'000
Qing Dynasty, Kangxi (1662 - 1722) (**)

"In its attractive form and design this bowl closely follows an early Ming prototype that was copied both in the late Ming and early Qing periods."

"It is said, that many Chinese rely on patterns. There are many people with excellent technique, but not as good imagination, that is why they need a pattern."



Lot 331: HK \$ 800'000 - 1,200'000
Ming Dynasty, Xuande (1426 - 1439(**))

"A bowl of this design in the National Palace Museum, Taiwan, is illustrated in *Minji Meihin Zuroku* (vol. I), pl.59. Others are illustrated in Garner, *Oriental Blue and White*, 1954, pl.26A, from the R.H.R.Palmer collection: in *Ceramic Art of the World*, vol.14, 1976 pls. 25 and 26: in Krahl, *Chinese Ceramics from the Meiyintang Collection*, 1994, vol.H, no.673: and one was included in the exhibition *Ming Blue and White*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1949, cat.no.62, from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Bernat.

If one looks at the magnificent catalogue of Sotheby's for their auction at Hong Kong, 30.4./1.5.1996, one very often can find similar remarks to all the shown objects like the above indiscriminately selected examples. This should not be a surprise because the court was manufacturing porcelain for their own use at special kilns, e.g. Jingdezhen at Jiangxi province. In general it was forbidden to sell this porcelain as it carried the seal of the according emperor. As several thousand people were living at the court within the Forbidden City it is easy to imagine that even a really beautiful piece never was a solitary one. Taking into account the special Chinese habit of honoring a famous artist by copying him, it is easy to recognize that not the design of the artist but the seal of the emperor is the main criteria for the price (value?) nowadays.

If one look at "ENCARTA" for the definition of *genuine* or *fake*, it is not surprising finding the following:

fake

somebody or something not genuine: a person or thing that appears or is presented as being genuine but is not

genuine

real: having the qualities or value claimed, e.g. a genuine Cézanne

-> *There is nothing said that it must be a single piece or it only must be produced once.*

"Copying" or "producing" the same "piece of art"

Examples: Illustrated Handbook of Common People's Collection / Enjoying Wood, Bamboo, Ivory Carving



Enjoying Wood, Bamboo, Ivory Carving ()**

p.73: Bamboo / size – 24 cm

Estim. Value: 120'000 RMB

Period: Middle Qing Dynasty



Illustrated Handbook of Common People's Collection ()**

p.13: Bamboo / size – 14.4 cm

Sold:33'000 RMB (2005.9.17)

Period: Qing Dynasty



Illustrated Handbook of Common People's Collection ()**

p.60 Ivory / size – 8 cm

Sold: 3'300 RMB (2005.8.7)

Period: Republic

One really has to look very carefully at these sculptures to see any difference. But one is for sure: the original design (no sculpture above) is at least Middle Qing (Qing: 1645 - 1911), but only if the given age is correct.

Remarkable is:

- None of the sculptures show an artist's name / signature or seal.
- The right sculpture, though it is out of ivory, was sold for 1/10 of the middle figure, which is "only" out of bamboo. As both left sculptures are out of bamboo, looking extremely similar or nearly identical (both do not have any signature), the argument left over for that price difference of 1:4 only can be the age.
- As the size of these sculptures is between 15 and 25 cm no one will keep them in his hand too long and for sure not every day. So the shiny surface must be from lacquer, wax or oil. So again there is no argument for age. At least the darker shade of the middle sculpture is not interpreted as being older than the left one.
- But what does this time information really mean? Republic could mean 10 as well as 90 years old. Qing could be 100 up to 350 years old. So Middle Qing sounds much more precise. But it is really more precise? What is the argument for saying Middle Qing? Who knows!

So why not just looking at it and enjoying the beautiful craftsman ship?



Early Qing : sold for 68'200 RMB 30 cm



Qing: sold for 19'800 RMB 35.5 cm

Another example out of "Illustrated Handbook of Common People's Collection", Wood, page 65/66

Nothing is said about the artist or a signature / seal.



PYM0804 030

Porcelain, approx 40 cm



SINI007

Ivory, approx. 8 cm

Porcelain: Using the same Motif / Design



Wall Painting
Tikse-Monastery, Ladakh -
Himalaya



Tikse monastery, Ladakh -
Himalaya



Sotheby's Lot336 (HK-Auction 1996), HK \$ 80' - 100'000,
Mark and period Jiajing (1522 - 1566) (**)



Wall Painting
Tikse-Monastery, Laddakh -
Himalaya



Tikse monastery, Ladakh -
Himalaya

As a Chinese emperor had sent a monk to India, to obtain the Buddhist sutras, it is not surprising that quite some symbols out of Indian mythology found their way to China as well. These symbols do not necessarily show a religious background. Besides it is difficult to determine where general beliefs come to an end and religious faith begins.



Dragon / Phoenix - Tikse monastery (Ladhak, Himalaya)

Wood: "Blue print" and Copying



Thailand – Wood Carving "Company" outside Bangkok
The master is giving the last touch



Help-hands at work
Blueprint still to be seen



Disket monastery, Ladakh – Himalaya, India, wood carving
Blueprint at the background items (above) still to be seen



Blueprint still to be seen



In an article from National Palace Museum Taipei it is said, that an artist before he begins to carve an olive or walnut, he has to have a "blueprint" in his head. For quite a while we could not interpret this expression. How does all the details for an olive are shown on a blueprint, especially as the seeds are three-dimensional objects and only 3-4 cm big. This remark simply means that the artist must have an idea how to fit the design to the seed to be carved.

The above and following examples should show, that blueprints in reality are used by artists at Bangkok (Thailand), Ladakh (Kashmir, India) and Singapore. The pictures from Thailand, India and Singapore show examples of woodcarving and China for textile embroidery and jewelry designs.

Wood: “Blue print” and Copying



Singapore, above door entrance at China Town



left side



right side,
this side was flipped horizontally. Marked positions examples 1-4
show differences compared to left picture

The above examples show a principle, which very often can be found at Chinese houses or temples.

On the top picture, there are two lions left and right to a bronze vessel. At a glance both look very similar. On closer examination, they are nearly identical, but only nearly. How is that possible?

The answer again is the blueprint. As soon as you have drawn half of the design, one only has to fold it to the right or left, depending on where the second half should be shown on the finished product.

With PC technology it is very easy to show. Just take a digital picture of the object on the PC, copy half of it and with the right software you can flip the picture horizontally (see other pictures). By comparing the two you will find some differences, though even now it is still not easy.

If it would not have been done with a blueprint, I am convinced there would have been much more differences when looking for details.

Jewelry: "Blue print" and Copying



Miao jewelry: Sisters Festival, Taijiang, Guizhou Province



Necklace



Headdress



Design made by hammering (repoussé) the raw metal foil into the mould: 'Silver smith', Kaili Market, Guizhou Province



The mould

Such dresses are only worn by unmarried girls. The quality of the embroidery of the jacket shows the needlework skills of the wearer and the jewelry indicates the wealth of the girl's family.

The variety in jewelry is limited to possible combinations of the standard designs, being used by the different Minority groups. Each group can be identified by their type of jewelry.

The most common metal used to day is *baitong* (also called *patok*), an alloy out of copper, nickel and a bit silver and, therefore, is also called white copper. It looks like freshly polished silver and stays like that much longer.

In the old days the weight of the jewelry as shown above could be up to 15-18 kg for a girl.

Textile: “Blue print” and Manual Design



Copying blueprints



Kaili market – Guizhou Province, China
Blueprint for embroidery



Blueprints for sale



Back view with paper to stiffen



Center: Sometimes the design is painted on the textile with a yellow paste. On the back of the textile a paper is glued to stiffen the textile a bit while embroidering.

Left / right: Not to get dirty a piece of white textile is provisional fastened on both sides to cover the already finished parts.

Shidong village



Front view



Design of Shidong-Miao, Guizhou Province (part of sleeve ornament) – Mythical animals



Design of Leishan-Miao, Guizhou Province showing different types of stitches (part of sleeve ornament) - Dragon

When seeing the outcome of embroidering with or without “blue-print”, there is no doubt, that people doing such a beautiful handicraft need to have quite a lot of knowledge, training, experience and patience. We were told that girls start to learn embroidering when they are about 6-8 years old and it will take approximately 3 years to finish their wedding jacket.

Skills of the Artists: Armrest out of Bamboo



Right half of the wall painting at Bright Hill Temple, Singapore



Center part of the above wall painting (colored and glazed tiles) - Bamboo, 32.5 cm



We gave one section of the picture of the total wall (see top picture, right side only) and were asking for an armrest to be carved on bamboo. Carving of bamboo is quite difficult because it is a fibrous material and details are not easy to carve.

We were given two armrests instead of one. What are the differences?

Besides others: Mark no.1 shows a flying fairy (below shows only clouds), no.2 should show the monk Tripitaka with Sun Wukong (it looks more like an attendant), and no. 3 shows Liu Hai with the three legged toad and rocks to the left (below no toad can be seen, the money chain is missing and instead of rocks, some bushes are there).

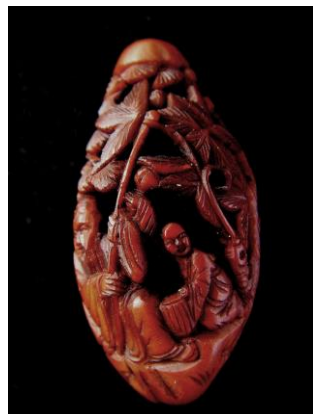
Skills of the Artists: Twice the same Olive



A1 (CHN337) 35mm



B1 (CHN337.01) 35 mm



A2



B2

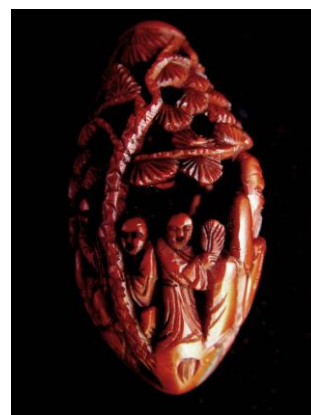
A/B 1-4 view from different sides



A3



Yellow Mountains – Anhui Province



A4



B3



B4

It is easier to see differences in olive designs by comparing photos. The man with the fishing rod on pictures A1/B1 nearly exactly has the same posture, but the pine branch over his head show clear differences. The same is for the leaves in picture B2 above the head of the attendant, which clearly look different compared to picture A2. The branches of the tree above the person sitting at the table is again quite different between A3/B3. The distance between the two persons in B4 is clearly greater than in A4.

The pine, a symbol for longevity, is a popular art motive. In Huang Shan (Mountain range at Province Anhui) they seem to grow just on the rocks and attract lots of artist to paint them. Additionally, the rising fog in early morning gives them a magical atmosphere and is copied by the artist in a very realistic manner.

Color by Aging



"Old" and recent carvings on olives (recent= center, CHS071, 072 from Suzhou)

The shade of seed carvings, whether they are olives (*Canarium pimela*), peaches, apricots, walnuts or what so ever darken by time. This process seems to become faster when the seeds are oiled (to prevent from getting cracks) and / or when they are exposed to light. The same effect one can get by moving a rosary or single beads in one's hand, when thin layers of fat will be transferred from the skin to the seeds. As it looks like the change in color / darkening is faster at the beginning and slows down. So one can say: the darker the older, but unfortunately one can't say how old. Dyeing the seeds with modern dyestuffs is critical, because one not necessarily gets this unique shade. Instead one can get dots or stripes of different darkness, which can't be repaired. And the dyestuff will stay at the surface of the seed, not penetrating through the total shell.

Smoothing the surface artificially is not so difficult, so worn looking is not necessarily a sign of long usage / movement in ones hand.

And what do the carvers / dealers are saying? Unfortunately this does not help so much. The answer mostly is just Qing dynasty, which does not mean anything (it would be between 1644 and 1911) and in principle is just an argument to ask for more money. So again it is not a question of quality or skill of the carvers but age which determines the price / value.

Nowadays carvers of the Suzhou area have started to sign their works. They then will tell you this is a famous artist, therefore the high (higher) price. As during Qing Dynasty (and before) carvers were only exceptionally allowed to sign their work. So this as well does not help to define a carving being from Qing Dynasty

Even with today's technical possibilities (digital camera, PC-software like ADOBE Photoshop) it is difficult to reproduce the correct shade of the above olives ("old" = not recent). There are little differences which are possibly not to be seen on the screen or when printed.

Writing on Olives: Poem or Name of Design



CHN150 32 mm



CHN157 33 mm



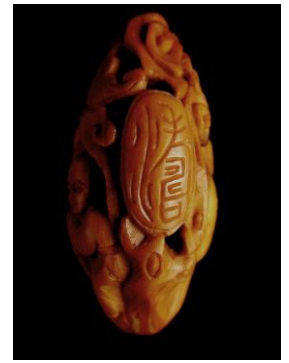
CHS106 29 mm



CHN291 40 mm



CHN051A4 36 mm



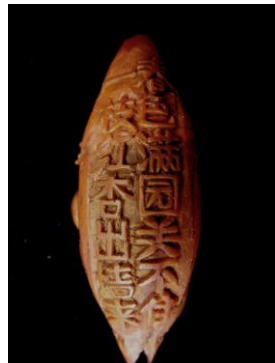
CHN518 35 mm

Writing on olives is rare or even exceptional and mostly only explains what is carved, e.g. Her-Her or Mi Lo Fo. Sometimes it is a small poem. The type of writing may look quite different.

Especially in the area of Suzhou they have started having the artist's name on the olive. Often dealers asking for more money when explaining it is a "famous artist".



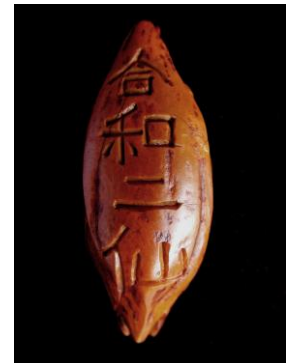
CHN584 36 mm



CHN503 41 mm



CHN296 43 mm



CHN502 40 mm



CHS100 31 mm



CHN317.04 36 mm



CHN306 33 mm

Writing on Olives: Poem or Name of Design

竹
Bamboo - Zhu

公雞
Cock - Gong-ji

龍
Dragon - Long

蝙蝠
Bat - Pian-fu

鶴
Crane - He

鬼子
Hare - Tu-zi

佛
Buddha - Fo

鹿
Deer - Lu

和合
He He

鯉
Carp - Li

狗
Dog - Gou

馬
Horse - Ma

關帝
Guan-Di

觀音
Guanyin

彌勒佛
Mi Lo Fo

猴
Monkey - Hou



橄欖
Olive - Gan-lan

牛
Ox - Niu

桃
Peach - Tao

鳳凰
Phoenix - Feng-huang

豬
Pig - Zhu

松
Pine - Song

大鼠
Rat - Da-shu

羊
Sheep - Yang

蛇
Snake - She

虎
Tiger - Hu

龜
Tortoise - Gui

麒麟
Unicorn - Qilin

西王母
Xi-Wang Mu



snake - CHN505



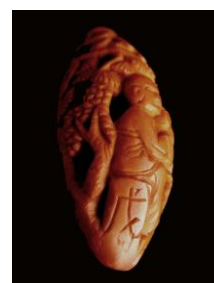
tiger - CHN564



dragon - CHN566



rabbit - CHN608



dog - CHN614



Fo - CHN855e

蛇

虎

龍

鬼子

狗

佛

It is difficult for a Westerner to identify Chinese characters carved on the olives for the following reasons:

- 6 official ways of Chinese writings like Sung, grass, cursive, pattern, ancient and seal (for seals see Plate 119)
 - personal style and hand carved
- (for more details / explanations see C.A.S.Williams, p.441)

Chinese Characters on Olives: Signature of Artists / Suzhou Area



CHS075



Artist:
Hsiao Yang



Artist:
Shu Min (carved)



CHN495



胡君伟
Hu Yun Wei (**)



Fishing in a creek



肖艳萍
Xiao Yan Ping
(**)



OB53.1



OB50.4



CHS047



Artist:



CHS038



Artist:
Xiao Fang



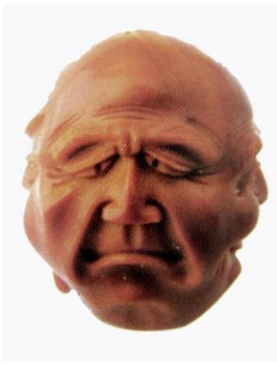
CHS037



Artist:
Yi Chen

It starts becoming common nowadays (artists from the area of Suzhou) to sign a carved olive on the lower part or in a small cartouche. The name, normally 2-3 characters long, should not to be mixed up with the explanation of what is carved. If there are more than 3-4 characters to be seen, it might be a short poem. An absolute exception is the boat (see plate 35, boat ex Sotheby's), which shows up to 300 characters or more on the bottom.

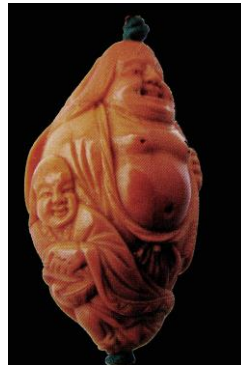
Chinese Characters on Olives: Signature of Artists / Suzhou Area



OB_H26.4a



OB_H53.04



OB_H56.02

任敏华
Ren Ming Hua



OB_H26.4b



须培金

Shi Pei Ying
OB_H30.01

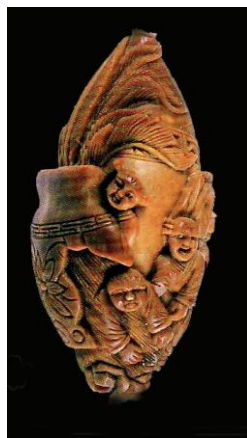


Working in a rice paddy – Guizhou Province



陈素英

Chen Su Ying
OB_H30.03



OB_H50.3



OB_H51.01



OB_H51.02

肖艳萍
Xiao Yan Ping

Chinese Characters on Olives: Signature of Artists / Suzhou Area



CHS042 30 mm Yong Fang



CHS076 39 mm Zhou Yi Qing



CHS045 32 mm Soon Yin



CHS062 39 mm Zhou Yi Qing



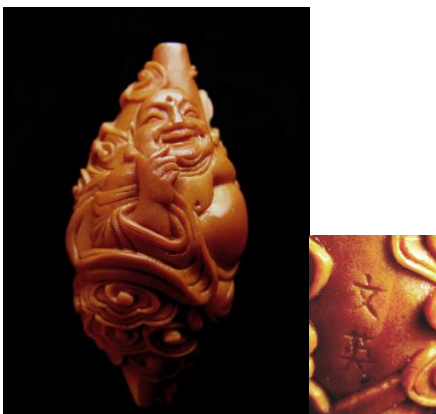
Her-Her Twins / Monastery at Suzhou



CHS041 37 mm



Chian Xing



CHS043 39 mm Wen Ying



CHS004 28 mm Mong Zai

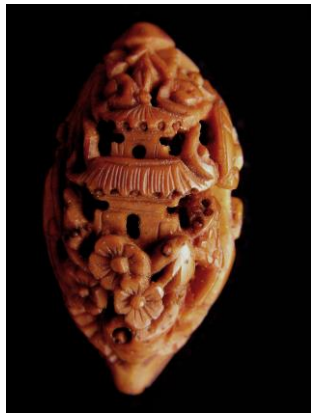


CHS044 38 mm Chian Xing

Old Carvings without Signatures from Beijing Area



CHN044 36 mm



CHN088 36 mm



CHN193 37 mm



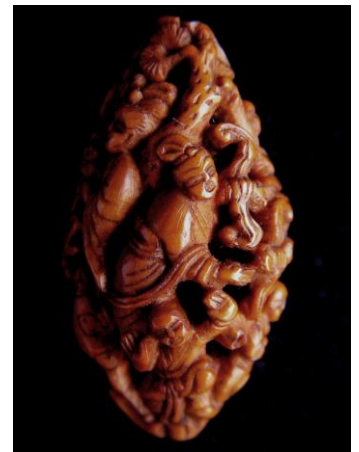
CHN249 36 mm



CHN462 35 mm



He-He Twins / Monastery at Suzhou



CHN498 33 mm



CHN500.01 40 mm



CHN537 38 mm



CHN669 36 mm



CHN724 36 mm

Olives without signature from Beijing Area



CHN030 33 mm
Liu Hai (peach seed)



CHN062A1a 29 mm
Have Buddha at your heart



CHN062A2a 31 mm
Shou



CHN062A3a 25 mm



CHN983b 31 mm
Horses



From a market at Beijing B02



CHN879 32 mm
Bats with coins



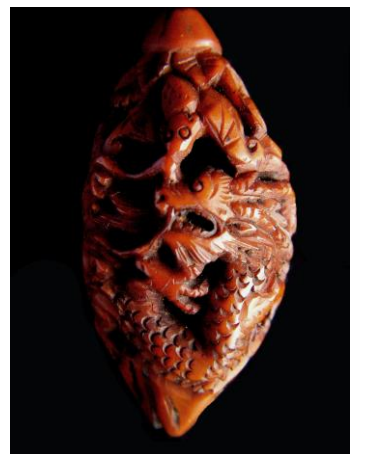
CHN098b 34 mm
He-He



CHN101a 35 mm



CHN121a 37 mm
Fu



CHN187b 36 mm
Dragon

Olives without signature from Beijing Area



CHN236a 31 mm
Tiger



CHN244a 34 mm
Lion



CHN291a 40 mm
Buddha



CHN296a 43 mm
He-He



CHN930 41 mm
Tripitaka



From a market at Beijing

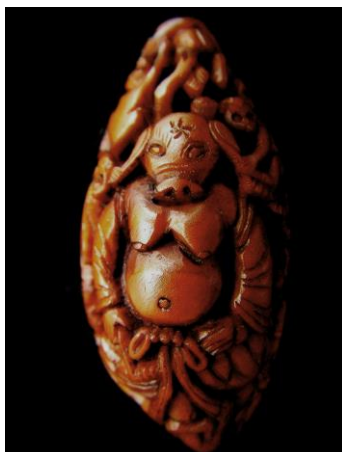
(B11)



CHN931 38 mm
Luohan on Tiger (?)



CHN304 33 mm
Bats with coins



CHN362 36 mm
Tschupa tsea



CHN535 29 mm
Qilin brings son



CHN586 37 mm
Flowerbasket

Olives without signature from Beijing Area



CHN597 36 mm
Buddha



CHN703 35 mm
Zodiac animals - Goat



CHN735 30 mm
Luohan with Tiger / Dragon



CHN764 38 mm
Buddha with swastika



CHN981 37 mm
Buddha with 5 children



From a market at Beijing (B08)



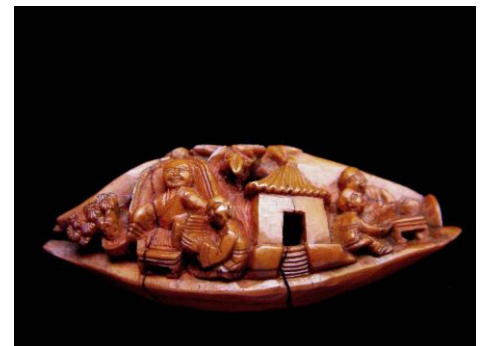
CHN885 39 mm
Monkey



CHN017A2 40 mm
Boat with fisher men



CHN867 25 mm
Herdsman on an ox



CHN313 42 mm
Boat with fisher men

Present day carvers: Zhou Shan / Suzhou, Jiangsu Province



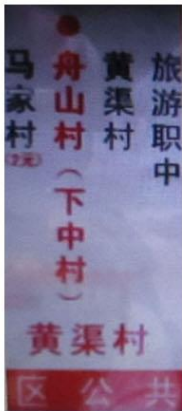
夏东
Hsia Tong



须明培
She Ming Pei



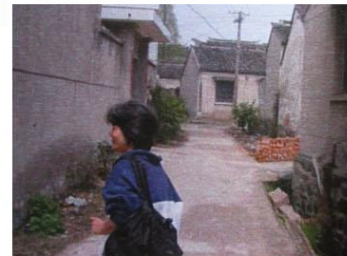
His wife does not want us to take a picture



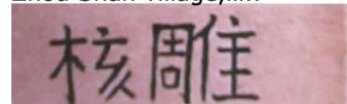
Bus stop



To-days carvers are close to Mudu at Zhou Shan



Zhou Shan village,....

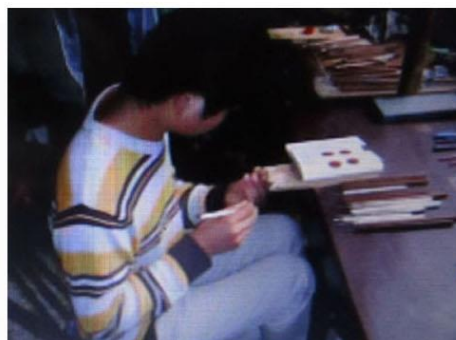


... and how to find them (writing at house)

Zhou Shan can be reached from Suzhou with Bus 511 direction Mudu and changing to 691 (totally two hours drive). The bus stop lies opposite to a small factory and this small vilage directly behind te factory (not to be seen from the bus stop).



Apprentices



"Old masters" work place

Present day dealers / Carvers: Beijing - Hebei province



Yong Ern Chi
Originally all were working for Mr.Yong Ern Chi, to-day everyone tries to run his own business



Zhang-Ji Ho



Chou Hai-Yen



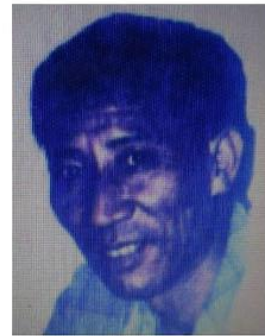
"The skull carver"



Liu Fu Ching



Beijing
Mrs.Zhang Shu Hua



Sanher
He is not carving anymore because of eye problems

Lanfang



Mr.Tan



Mrs.Tan



Mr.Tan jun.



Mr.Seah



Mrs. Wu Fong Yan



Zhu Yun Guang



Tong Ya Fei



His wife / friend