

ANTIQUES

A Chinese Dealer, Trafficker in Mystery

By EVE M. KAHN
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The Chinese art dealer C. T. Loo held court at his galleries in Paris, New York, Shanghai and Beijing. From the 1910s through the 1940s, he spoke mysteriously of his "friends" who could acquire artifacts in the countryside, while he angled spotlights on stone Buddha heads and opalescent jade bowls for sale.

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Loo Family Photographs/Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian

C. T. Loo (1880-1957), an influential dealer in Chinese artifacts.

He won over customers as elite as Morgans and Rockefellers and institutions including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. He plied buyers with his own exhibition catalogs and helped them to publish volumes about their holdings.

He promised secrecy about their purchases. "I am reserving them for you: I will not speak or send photos to anyone unless I hear from you," he wrote to a Museum of Fine Arts curator in 1922, while persuading the institution to spend about \$25,000 on a sixth-century limestone stele crawling with Buddhist deities.

A fraction of this dealer's own research material has ended up at Christie's in New York for a sale on Thursday, "In Pursuit of Knowledge: Asian Art Reference Books Including Selections From the C. T. Loo Library." Estimates are mostly under \$1,000 for batches of books that cover paintings, bronzes, ceramics and stone and jade carvings belonging to Chinese emperors and European and American aristocrats.

The volumes also document tombs and temples, which Loo was accused of looting during his care fact, Loo, who died in 1957, is still controversial in

"Most Chinese have very negative opinions about him," said Daisy Yiyong Wang, a Chinese art specialist at the Freer/Sackler museum in Washington, who wrote her dissertation on Loo. Material that he handled, like frescoes, temple statues and freshly excavated bronzes, is now difficult to export legally.

But Loo argued that the Chinese government was not protecting its ancient sites, and the artifacts were safer elsewhere. Western collectors, he wrote in a 1931 essay, were "preserving relics of the past for the aesthetic appreciation and scientific study of posterity."

Because of his fascinating contradictions, Ms. Wang said, "the picture is very complex." She has interviewed Loo's descendants, and recently learned that he had planned to market his wares on the Titanic's maiden voyage, but he ran late at a port and narrowly missed boarding.

The family has sold his Paris gallery building in the Eighth

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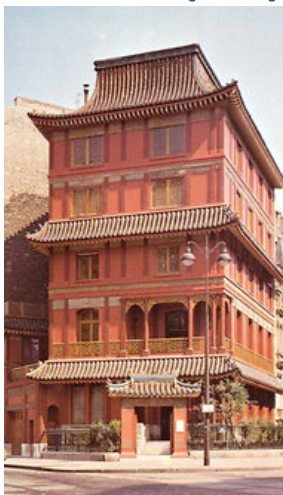
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Pagoda Paris

C. T. Loo (1880-1957), an influential dealer in Chinese artifacts, had an unusual Paris gallery, now called the Pagoda Paris.

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Swann Auction Galleries
An auction of vintage pens and pencils includes a set of celluloid models with barrel lettering spelling "YES ITS NEW."

Arrondissement, a 1920s red pagoda lined in lacquer panels. It has been restored and reopens on Oct. 12 as the [Pagoda Paris](#) gallery, with a show juxtaposing contemporary Asian art and vintage textiles. Auction previews and exhibitions will eventually be held there.

Jacqueline Baroness von Hammerstein-Loxten, the Pagoda's director, said in a recent telephone interview that she hugely admired Loo's ability to interest Westerners in Asian culture. With verve and showmanship, he wedged his pagoda between staid mansards. "In a very conservative district in Paris, it was something unheard-

of," she said.

The bulk of his library remains at the Pagoda Paris. (The Christie's lots had belonged to a successor at his gallery, Frank Caro.) Loo's books, correspondence and photographs will be accessible at the Pagoda by appointment.

Objects with Loo provenance are coming on view in New York in the next few days. [Sotheby's](#) and [Christie's](#) are offering bronze, ceramic and jade vessels that he handled. An [exhibition](#) opens on Tuesday at New York University's Institute for the Study of the Ancient World. The show, "Echoes of the Past: The Buddhist Cave Temples of Xiangtangshan," has sixth-century statues and fragments that he distributed after they were torn out of archaeological sites in northern China.

PENS OF A CERTAIN AGE

Pen collectors can be slotted into two basic categories. High-powered executives pay five and six figures for new, bejeweled limited editions from companies like Montblanc and Cartier, while a scholarly contingent trolls Web sites and flea markets for vintage writing instruments used by the common man.

"There's really not much crossover" between the two groups, said Ivan Briggs, the pen department chief for Bonhams auction house.

Bonhams has largely bowed out of the non-limited-edition market these days, since antique models typically do not sell for more than a few hundred dollars. Swann Auction Galleries in New York is now stepping into the vintage pen void. Previews start on Saturday for Swann's [sale](#) next Thursday, featuring 400 writing instruments representing the past century's experiments.

The shafts of the pens (and a few pencils) range from Art Nouveau silver filigree to psychedelic camouflage-pattern celluloid. Patented caps and mechanisms have boosterish model names like Lox-Top and Vacuumatic. Pistons, levers and pneumatic tubes drive ink into the nibs.

A third of the Swann lots come from William Baisden, a collector and dealer in Florida. He has focused on wares made by Chilton, a company active in Boston and Long Island City, Queens, from the 1910s to the 1940s. He spent decades tracking down celluloid variants that look like carnelian, jade, tortoiseshell and marble.

Swann is offering Mr. Baisden's [trio](#) of black sales display models (estimated at \$1,000 to \$1,500 for the set) embossed with gold lettering that spells "YES ITS NEW." A few Chiltons in the auction were barely used and have original boxes and tiny price stickers, and others bear teeth marks from previous owners on the caps.

The Baisden collection documents much of Chilton's product range, which has long puzzled scholars. The company seems to have published only one catalog. "We don't know what they produced," Rick Propas, Swann's pen specialist and a former Bonhams consultant, said in a telephone interview.

Mr. Propas collects wares from the German manufacturer Pelikan. He recently stumbled on a Pelikan model that he did not yet own; the seller fortunately kept the price in the four-figure range. "It was a question of how much mercy he was going to show me," Mr. Propas said.

Swann's pen debut drew several consignments Mr. Propas had scarcely seen before. One 1930s lot in creamy celluloid (\$2,500 to \$3,500), made by the Italian manufacturer



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Aurora, is embossed with an eagle representing Mussolini's regime. The model name, [Etio](#) [pia](#), commemorates the invasion of Africa. Ink pellets, meant for dissolving in water on the battlefield, are still rattling around a compartment in the Etio

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