



## A Large Natural Burl Wood Screen on Root Stand

自然节木大屏幕根木支架

Height: 95.0 cm. (37 5/8 in.)

Width: 48.5 cm. (19 1/2 in.)

Qing dynasty

19th century

Natural-root “Southern-style” stand

19th-20th century

Wood from tree trunks, branches, burls, and roots was utilized in countless imaginative ways by Chinese craftsmen. They were able to work wood into a variety of shapes, some of great utility, others merely decorative. Surfaces were augmented or completely transformed through carving and incising and further enhanced by inlay or applique of, for example, mother-of-pearl, bone, turquoise or other semi-precious stones and lapidary materials. Further décor was provided by painting directly on the wood surfaces, sometimes with lacquer. If visually compelling enough, however, the piece could be left almost completely in its natural state. Here the only modification appears to have been polishing the surface to bring out the warm amber color of the burl and to produce an attractive sheen.

The penchant among literati for all manner of “found” treasures, perhaps discovered when on walks into the woods, was at one extreme of what characterized a very broad and catholic taste. The efforts of craftsmen were often directed to appealing to this elite, turning stones, for example, into *objets d'art* by creating impressive stands on which to support and display them, the stands themselves the products of creative minds and talented handiwork.

Among the numerous and various types of stands produced was a relatively rare type, one created from natural root and related to those stands were others carved from wood to simulate the character and appearance of a real root or tangle of roots. It is quite clear that the stand here was produced from such an actual root. A cavity was carved into the upper side, shaped to support the narrow base of the burl screen. The underside, where the raw, untouched root is visible, was worked in four areas to form low feet on which the stand sturdily rests. Natural depressions and what appear as perforations,

and in a least one area a trapped stone, are also apparent. The visible side has been polished and enhanced with some carving creating a more cultured and cultivated appearance. However, the carvings here remain abstract, while yet organic in feeling following the character of the root, unlike that more subject-oriented images usual in the “Southern-style” stands. “Southern-style” is a category of stands that “includes two related groups: hand-finished stands of natural root, and wooden pedestals carved with naturalistic motifs, including scenes of rocks, trees, *lingzhi* fungus or waves”<sup>1</sup>. Whereas the carved Southern-style stands are associated with Guangdong workshops, the origin and provenance of the natural-root stands such as the present, is unclear.

1. Jan Stuart, “Where Chinese Art Stands: A History of Display Pedestals for Rocks,” in Robert D. Mowry, *Worlds Within Worlds: The Richard Rosenblum Collection of Chinese Scholars’ Rocks*, Cambridge, 1997, p. 102.