EDITORIAL

WHAT AN HONOUR it was for my son Robin Markbreiter and I to have breakfast on November 14th at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel with President Jacques Chirac, who is an avid reader of *Arts of Asia*. Also present were Mr Jean-Pierre Lafon, Ambassador of France and founding member of the Fondation Chirac; Ms Catherine Joubert, managing director of Fondation Chirac; and Christian Deydier (see “Christian Deydier in an Interview with Tuyet Nguyen”, *Arts of Asia* September–October 2010 issue, pages 14–20).

President Chirac was in Hong Kong for only a few days, having visited Shanghai where he attended an international conference for museums with three thousand participants. He gave the closing speech and was warmly received by the Mayor of Shanghai, whom I also know. At the same time the president brought copies of his memoirs, published for the first time in Chinese, and I am delighted to have received a signed copy. There are two volumes: the first volume is from his birth to 1995 when he was elected President of France; the second volume is from 1995 to the present day.

After Jacques Chirac (born 1932) completed his graduate studies at the Paris Institut d’Études Politiques (Institute of Political Science) and the Harvard University Summer School (USA), he began his career as a high-level civil servant, and soon entered politics. He subsequently occupied various senior positions, including Minister of Agriculture, Prime Minister, Mayor of Paris, and finally President of France from 1995 to 2007. The first term lasted seven years and the second term lasted five years. He made a number of important constitutional modifications as President of France. One of them was to reduce the term of leadership from seven years to five. Only French President François Mitterrand has served longer with two seven-year terms.

These days President Chirac dedicates most of his time to the Fondation Chirac (www.fondationchirac.eu) which allows him to continue to serve France. He said, “Today’s major question concerns the world we will leave behind for future generations. It is because this involves the future of the French and their children that I wish to take on my full responsibility in this fight. I wish to remain fully mobilised in the thick of the fray on their behalf. The Honour Committee at the Fondation Chirac works tirelessly for the cause of peace, dialogue and development. All of the members have played an eminent role in their respective countries or at the head of international organisations. Together they represent the diversity of experience and cultures that can give balance to the world. They bring inestimable human capital to the Fondation Chirac. To fulfil its missions, the Fondation Chirac has a board of directors capable of taking the initiative and providing effective and rigorous management of the resources implemented in its programs. Each of its members brings his or her rich experience and well-honed creative skills in his or her area of expertise. The team managing the Fondation Chirac’s projects is lead by Catherine Joubert.”

Jacques Chirac feels it is important to maintain individual languages. He remarked, “In India eight hundred dialects will disappear due to globalisation. One of our missions is to keep the memory of languages before they disappear completely. In the world six thousand languages will disappear — especially those languages from Oceanic countries. Globalisation is necessary but at the same time it is important to maintain cultural diversity. Keeping the origins of languages is one way to maintain unique cultural differences. When languages disappear, whole cultures disappear. We need to take care of our languages in the world today because languages play a vital role in cultural heritage. I have always had a keen interest in culture and I want the Fondation Chirac to show people the meaning of culture. We are also interested in the environment, and I am especially concerned about deforestation. When forests disappear the people and living things there will have to move away and risk disappearing. When people move into cities they lose touch with their background. With the help of technology, the internet and people like you, we are able to make others more aware of important causes. When you are interested in doing something, you will always find time.”

I asked what was his most memorable achievement as President of France? He replied, “Perhaps it was my stance during the war on Iraq. In 2003 I resisted engaging in the war. It was the same time as SARS in Hong Kong and China. Many people were afraid to go to China and I wanted everyone to know that they should not be scared to go there.
Dr Alice Cheng bought a Qianlong mark and period yellow-ground famille-rose double-gourd vase for HK$252,660,000 (US$32,392,308).

So I arranged for Prime Minister Raffarin to make a special trip to Beijing to prove this point.” President Deng Xiaoping was a great friend of Jacques Chirac who knew him well. “He was an intelligent man”, said President Chirac, “and I liked him very much. Deng Xiaoping lived in France when he was young and especially enjoyed croissants. He was a nice man and at the age of sixteen he worked in a car factory in Paris.”

For my final question I asked the president what types of Chinese art he likes to collect? He said, “I enjoy Chinese art, but I am not a major collector because it takes a lot of money. I do have a few archaic bronzes and Tang pottery. I also like African and Tribal art, and try to find the best examples. I have a lot of feeling for Chinese art. When I was younger I used to stop on my way from school at the Musée Guimet. It is an excellent museum in Paris for Asian art and culture and I have spent a lot of time there. I first visited China in the 1970s and whenever I get a chance I am always eager to come here. In China I particularly like Xi’an in Shaanxi province for its wonderful history. In Hong Kong I like the people I have met.”

A smiling Alice Cheng, the sister of renowned art dealer and collector Robert Chang, is seen above proudly holding her Qianlong mark and period yellow-ground famille-rose double-gourd vase. Dr Cheng, an important art collector with considerable influence in China, bought the vase for HK$252,660,000 (US$32,392,308) at Sotheby’s Hong Kong Autumn 2010 auctions.

Sotheby’s seven-day event achieved the highest total ever for a series of sales in Hong Kong, making HK$3.08 billion (US$400 million). The sale of over 370 lots of Chinese ceramics and works of art achieved HK$1.6 billion (US$208 million), more than double the presale estimate. Of particular interest was an imperial white jade Xintian zhuren (The Ruler Who Believes in Heaven) seal, which sold for HK$121,620,000 (US$15,592,308), a world record for white jade and an imperial seal at auction. It is worth noting that the seal made £23,500 at Sotheby’s London on December 7th, 1997. For information about other highlights readers may refer to the Saleroom News by Jungenze Lee in this issue on pages 127–131.

In 2010 we successfully published six memorable issues to commemorate Arts of Asia’s 40th Anniversary Year. For 2011 Arts of Asia will continue to publish articles from Asian art experts in the West, East and especially in China, such as this issue’s important cover article by Dr Guo Fuxiang, Associate Research Fellow of the Palace Museum in Beijing.

Specially commissioned by Arts of Asia and translated into English by Tiffany Wan-Ting Chao and Bradley James Gardner, Dr Guo’s article, “The Portrayal of a Life in a Splendid Age: Qianlong Emperor’s Imperial Seals”, includes thirty-four seals made by imperial command for Qianlong (reigned 1736–1795), renowned throughout world history as an ambitious and accomplished emperor. During his diligent reign of more than sixty years, Emperor Qianlong created an unparalleled and prosperous China, as reflected in his royal jade seals.

For those interested in Chinese textiles please refer to pages 55–65 for the article “Power and Clothing: Imperial Chinese Robes from the Forbidden City”. Ming Wilson, Senior Curator of the Asian Department at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, writes on the grandeur of the garments worn by emperors and empresses for formal engagements. The imperial robes, armour and dresses illustrated in her article are from the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing and will be on show at the Victoria and Albert Museum from December 7th, 2010 to February 27th, 2011.

Dr David K. Hugus is the co-author of the book Ladder to the Clouds, and of an article on rank badges that appeared in the September–October 1999 issue of Arts of Asia. Together with Dr David S. Yee, an Asian textile collector and scholar, they now explore the “Evolution of Yongzheng Rank Badges”. Their article demonstrates with thirty colour images how the designs of mandarins squares (rank badges) changed at a rapid pace during Emperor Yongzheng’s reign (1723–1735), especially compared to the slow evolution that occurred during Emperor Kangxi’s reign (1662–1722).

“Inheritance and Innovation: An Archaeological Perspective of Qin Culture” is an enlightening article by Dr Liu Yang, Curator of Chinese Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney. He illustrates for Arts of Asia readers over thirty breathtaking ritual bronze, gold and silver ornaments and jade unearthed at Xi’an, capital of modern-day Shaanxi province. The excavated objects are associated with the burials of the rulers and aristocrats of the Qin state. In
analysing such works Dr Liu sheds new light on our understanding of early mortuary practices and conceptions of the netherworld, as well as enhances our knowledge of Qin contributions to craftsmanship and ritual practice during the Eastern Zhou period (770–256 BCE).

Other important articles in the January–February 2011 number include: “Korean Traditional Ceramics” by Professor Young-Jae Lee; “India’s Fabled City: The Art of Courtly Lucknow” by Dr Tushara Bindu Gude; “The Silk Road in History and Pre-History” by Professor Victor H. Mair; and “Royal Women: Power Dressing at the 19th Century Myanmar Court” by Mr Noel F. Singer. This is the perfect opportunity to warmly thank all the contributors for this issue’s wide range of authoritative articles. I believe they will provide invaluable insights for collectors and connoisseurs of Asian art.

Duchange & Riché (www.duchangeriche.com), located at the heart of the Sablon, gives pride of place to the 14th to 19th century arts of China and Japan. This is a family tradition which began in Paris in 1965, and which Anne Duchange and Philippe Riché are now continuing in Brussels. Anne worked with her father for many years, and now shares her enthusiasm with her husband, Philippe, a member of the Oriental Ceramic Society.

On display in the gallery are over four hundred porcelains from Japan, China and the East India Company, objets d’art of Canton enamel, cloisonné enamels, lacquer, jade, ivory and bamboo. The Ming and Qing dynasties are particularly well represented by museum-quality pieces. From January 15th to April 2nd, 2011 the gallery will present “The Emperor and the Gentleman”, a special exhibition for collectors of Chinese ceramics and works of art. Anne Duchange and Philippe Riché will be happy to welcome visitors at 45, Rue Ernest Allard, 1000 Brussels, near the Palais de Justice and the Place du Grand Sablon.

For over forty years, the eminent scientist John Menke assembled an encyclopedic collection of Vietnamese ceramics from the Dong Son Culture (700–43 BCE) through the 17th century. More than fifty pieces were chosen for their historical importance and beauty, and offer an opportunity to view seventeen centuries of the Vietnamese ceramic tradition in one group at Zetterquist Galleries (www.zetterquist.com). Many of the works in the March 19th–31st, 2011 exhibition and sale of “The John Menke Collection of Vietnamese Ceramics” have been published in major Vietnamese ceramics books in the United States and Europe over the last two decades.

The earliest items are earthenware vessels, some simple in their functional form, and others crafted after bronze vessel forms. The Giao Chi period (43–544) examples are closely related to Chinese bronze-influenced ceramic pieces from the Han dynasty. Thanh Hoa type ceramics, produced from the 11th–13th centuries, are unique in Asian ceramics, as they represent cultural influences both from China and India. Using advanced firing and glazing techniques from China, their forms were often influenced by Indian bronzes, sometimes filtered through Cambodian works, brought up through the southern trade routes. In the Menke Collection there are several forms and glaze types represented.

During the 13th through 15th centuries Vietnam saw a flourishing of ceramic production influenced by Chinese Song and Yuan dynasty wares. In the 15th century the Chinese stopped exporting their porcelain to the rest of the world, and Vietnam became one of the most important exporters of blue and white and enamelled porcelains.

Beijing Council International Auction Company Ltd (www.council.com.cn), established in October of 2005, has quickly become one of China’s leading auction houses, Beijing Council’s Chairman and General Manager, Mr Dong Guoqiang, insists on integrity and professional conduct.

Beijing Council’s competitiveness has strengthened as the company has expanded its core team of talented professionals and experts. At Beijing Council’s 2010 Spring Auction 1200 lots sold for over RMB1 billion, representing a 55% increase in turnover compared to the previous year, securing fourth position in the Chinese art auction industry. Council’s 5th Anniversary Autumn Auction in Beijing took place in the first week of December 2010 just as printing commenced for our January–February 2011 magazine.

In the Arts of Asia January–February 2009 issue (pages 16–22) I published an article on “The Chinese Collectors Convention in Shanghai” which I had the pleasure of attending in October 2008. Things have progressed since that first meeting. There has been sustained economic growth in China and art collecting is rising in popularity thanks to media coverage, market forces and an increasing number of art investors. The World Congress of Chinese Collectors (WCCC), organised once again by Mr Zhu Junbo, took place in the Friendship Hall of Shanghai Exhibition Center. Compared with the theme of its first meeting in 2008, “Collecting Art
Enriches your Life and Knowledge", the 2010 gathering focused on “Art Collecting: Inheritance and Innovation”.

During the November 5th opening ceremony and the ensuing forum, important collectors and artists from around the world spoke to over six hundred invited guests in the audience. On November 6th, helpful guidance to Chinese collectors was provided through a series of four seminars on “Art Collecting and Financing”, “Art Collecting and Brokers”, “Art Collecting and Authentication” and “Art Collecting and Individual Practices”. At the end of each seminar participants shared their views in lively and open discussions. Art collecting in China has become a more widespread hobby in recent years and I believe this trend will continue. WCCC in Shanghai was an excellent platform for making friendships and cultural exchanges among collectors around the world.

Arts of Asia is recognised for quality and informed reporting on Asian art activities and the beautifully printed advertisements from responsible Asian art companies. We value our readers and are certain our magazine will continue to grow from strength to strength for the next forty years! Thank you, as always, for your wonderful support, and I wish you the best for 2011.

TUYET NGUYET Publisher & Editor

Back Issues for Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong Imperial Works of Art

For a decade the Arts of Asia subscription rate has not changed. From January 1st, 2011 it will increase from US$85 to US$100. Readers will understand as our production and operating costs, paper, printing and mailing are far higher than ten years ago. Please visit our secure website www.artsfoasia.com to order available back issues and subscriptions.