Wang Shixiang is the foremost authority on Ming and Qing furniture in the world. His two volume set is an indispensable reference for all serious students of Chinese furniture. Why, one might ask, would a collector of soft wood Chinese furniture such as Northern elm or cypress used by the "average Joe" be interested in a book of much earlier furniture? The reason, of course, is the constancy of construction techniques and of style in Chinese furniture. It is always a source of amazement to me that one could put two "horseshoe" arm chairs next to one another - one mid 19th century - the other 200-300 years earlier and have such constancy in expression as well as construction.

The set is divided into two books. Volume I: Text, Volume II: Plates. The separation of the plates from the text is unfortunate. Volume I: Text does have line drawings as visual examples and these are helpful. I find it a bit frustrating, however, as I would like to have both volumes open simultaneously, and my space does not easily accommodate two large open books at once. It is also a bit disappointing that the plates are in black and white - not color. These are minor quibbles however.

Volume I contains the following chapters:

Ming and Early Qing Furniture

The Types and Forms of Furniture

Construction and Joinery

Decoration
Materials

The Problems of Dating and Alterations

The material contained in Volume I is superbly researched and described. These books deserve to be carefully read and subsequently used as references.

These books are not light reading. They are for the serious or aspiring scholar. Neither are they "coffee table" books, to be glanced at for visual beauty while waiting to see the doctor. Technical and demanding, they are examples of first rate scholarship at its finest.

If you're serious about Chinese Antique Furniture, these volumes will get you intimately familiar with the Ming/Qing furniture that sets the quality and construction standard for the country (vernacular) furniture that is still affordable and available today.