



**Chinese blue and white bowl, Kangxi (1662-1722),
POA**

Chinese blue and white bowl, Kangxi (1662-1722), with slightly everted rim and raised upon a tallfoot; the exterior finely painted with a continuous scene of four groups of scholars gathered on a garden terrace engaging in various literati pursuits: playing the guqin against a background watery landscape scene, playing a game of weiqi, examining a scroll painting and practicing calligraphy together, all amongst bamboo, plantain and rockwork; the interior rim decorated with six lobed cartouches variously containing pomegranate and citron fruit (known as the hand of Buddha) against a band of diaper ground, the well with a central lobed cartouche containing a bonsai in a jardiniere. The base with apocryphal Chenghua mark within a double circle.

Dimensions:

Diameter: 20.75cm. (9in.) height:

Condition:

two hair-lines

Notes:

Known collectively as *qinqishuhua* (qinqishuhua), the four pursuits represented on this bowl were artistic talents required of the aristocratic scholarly gentleman. The concept dates back to at least the mid Tang; the earliest extant source discussing the four combined arts is the 9th century work *Records of Calligraphy* (Fashu Yaolu, 'Records of Calligraphy') by Zhang Yanyuan, a high-ranking calligrapher and art historian. The pursuits are playing the guqin (qin), the strategy game weiqi (qi), calligraphy (shu) and painting (hua). Such creative endeavours were associated with the literati scholars of ancient China, who, free from the confines of artistic schools and court life, considered themselves ideal observers of the workings of moral law in nature. From the Yuan dynasty onwards, many educated Chinese retreated to the mountains and sought self-cultivation through immersion in arts, away from the Mongol government. Composing poetry and painting subjects inspired directly by personal experience of nature, their practices emphasised the creative process itself. During the political upheaval of the late Ming and early Qing, literati-themed wares such as this bowl became popular, as the notions of traditional value and stability associated with the ancient scholars offered a connection to an idealised past. Encouraged by the Emperor's own personal dedication to literati pursuits, Kangxi collectors valued wares that embodied the scholarly aesthetic and demonstrated their elevated intellectual and social status.

Bonsai Your description of the literati folk and their pursuits captures the spirit of those scholars.

The bonsai depicted is a Pine tree. In oriental folklore, the Pines are symbols of longevity, serenity and dignity. This species of tree has been used for thousands of years in bonsai art and continues to be used today.

The art of the bonsai originated in Japan and China over a thousand years ago, and is intricately linked to promoting relaxation and balance. It also aligns with spiritual movements like Zen Buddhism, embodying the essence of natural beauty and harmony.

Origin	Chinese
Period	17th Century
Style	Other