



Stories
of
China

Finding Pleasure in Panning for Treasures

By Dong Shaopeng and Long Shu

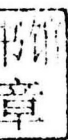


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Introductory Remarks

Thirty years after China started reform and opening-up in 1978, Chinese people have found their own road of development and acquired a balance between their own cultural heritage and the progressing tide of globalization, and have set out for the future full of confidence.

“Collection prevails in a prosperous era.” Chinese people’s growing enthusiasm

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1

A Prevailing Craze

With China's rapid economic development, cultural consumption among China's urban and rural residents is increase. In large- and medium-sized cities, various collectors' markets have already appeared. A great upsurge in collecting is evident throughout China, with more than 70 million people getting involved.

According to information provided by the Eighth National High-Level Forum of Civil Culture of Collection held in September 2008, more and more groups of collectors are

being established, and the number of artifacts and works of art collected is in the hundreds of millions.

- ▼ Celadon glazed jar from Yueyao Kiln of the Three Kingdoms period (the Wu Kingdom, 222-280) (collection of the Palace Museum)





► Bronzeware

As people's awareness of collection has improved, their enthusiasm for collection has developed, cultural relics and artworks are being more effectively preserved. These works of art include ancient ceramics, paintings and jade, coins, literature and collections of items from the "cultural revolution" period. Today, many rare works are protected thanks to large investment from many Chinese businesspeople.

According to experts, due to the effect of market mechanisms, a large number of collections in various parts of China gave birth to various kinds of exchange platforms such as flea markets, antique markets, the auction industry, and the media. In addition, various collectors' organizations were established in the 31 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions on the Chinese mainland.

In the golden autumn of October, the "Convention of Shanghai 2008 Chinese Collectors" was held at Shanghai International Convention Centre. Chinese collectors from various countries as well as company representatives gathered to explore issues related to the development of China's collection market. Ma Weidu, Wang Yannan, Cao Xingcheng, Du Nanfa, Shi Yunwen, and other collectors delivered speeches.

The 2008 Second "Auction Quarter in Beijing" was held from September 26 to December 28, and Beijing municipal government has put forward the target of building

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China



▲ The purchase price of Wu Guanzhong's oil painting *Beijing Snow* at an auction in 2004 was 3.63 million yuan.

Beijing into an “auction capital”. During the event, 50 companies held nearly 100 auctions, twice the number in the previous year. “The Auction Quarter” was composed of 12 sections, including Chinese paintings and



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▲ Ink painting *Bodhisattva* (vertical scroll), by Qi Baishi was auctioned in spring 2006 in Beijing.

calligraphy, porcelain, and folk collections. The logo and mascot of “Beijing Auction Quarter” debuted for the first time at the 2008 event. In 2007, 15 auction companies participated in the first “Auction Quarter”, at which the total turn-over amounted to 2.31 billion yuan. Among them, *Chibi Map*, a national treasure painted by Qiu Ying of the Ming

Dynasty, which belonged to China Guardian Auction Company Limited, was sold for 79.52 million yuan, a record price for a Chinese painting sold at an auction.

Chinese people's interest in collecting reflects a desire for cultural consumption after becoming better off, but it has more to do with China's 5000-year-old civilization. In China's history, wars broke out frequently, and many ethnic groups migrated and integrated over a long period. Although well-known relics such as the Serials Bells, Jade Garments Sewn with Gold Thread, Simuwu

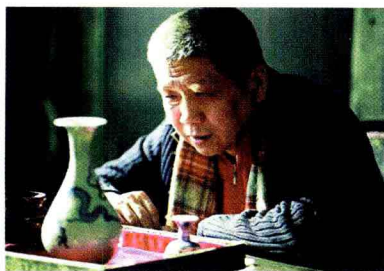
Chibi Map (detail) ▶
by Qiu Ying of
the Ming Dynasty
(1368-1644)



Ancient Sacral Square Ding, Four-Sheep Square Zun have been preserved, many other cultural relics were scattered, lost or neglected.

These ancient utensils, today's cultural relics, are like lengths of continuous thread coupling with each other. Travelling through time and space, they carry on a dialogue with the people of the present age, weaving one extraordinary story after another.

A saying goes like this, "Store gold in troubled times, and collect treasures in a prosperous era." The new round of collection emerged with the continuous and rapid development of China's economy in recent



► Ma Weidu

decades. More and more ordinary people are participating in it, finding pleasure in panning for treasures, and are becoming infatuated with it. Ma Weidu, who grew up in a military compound, is a typical example. He stepped into the collection market at an early time and accumulated rich experience, becoming a very important player in the market. Ma Weidu's stories of collection reflect the style and features of a generation of collectors, offering a chance to understand trends in collection and feel the pulse of cultural consumption in contemporary China.

What kind of extraordinary road has Ma Weidu traveled? How did he become such an outstanding collector? What kind of inheritance did China's long and troubled history give to collectors such as Ma Weidu? What excellent opportunities did the rapid development of China's economy and reform and opening give to them? What trends and challenges does China's collection

market contain?

Let us first talk about Panjiayuan, the major collectors' market in the Chinese capital, Beijing.