

WRITTEN BY : Jin Liang

TRANSLATED BY : Zhou Jian, Zhao Yahui

# Bronze Ware



Highlights of  
Auctioned Chinese Antiques



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## **Guide to the Use of This Series**

1. “Highlights of Auctioned Chinese Antiques” comprises five volumes, namely, “Bamboo, Wood, Ivory and Horn Carvings”, “Porcelain”, “Jadeware”, “Bronzeware” and “Ancient Furniture”. Each volume contains around 150 representative items put up for auction from 1995 to 2010 at auctions held by dozens of auction companies from cities like New York, Nagel, London, Hong Kong, Macau, Taipei, Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Nanjing, Guangzhou, Kunming, Chengdu and Jinan. The selection of the items is based on the style, texture, form, decorative pattern, workmanship, function, cultural implication and value of the antiques in question, including some items which have not yet been transacted.

2. Each volume retains the original record of auctions and the items are arranged in order of dynasty, name, dimension, transaction price (or estimate price), auction company, date of transaction and item analysis.

3. Due to different origins of auction companies, the prices of the antiques in US dollar, Euro, Great Britain Pound, Hong Kong dollar or Taiwan dollar, have been converted into RMB according to current exchange rates.



# Preface

## On Chinese Bronze Ware Market

Jin Liang

To have a clear understanding of the development of Chinese bronze ware market, one has to have enough understanding of the features and value of Chinese bronze wares, and the formation of its market at first.

### I . The History and Present Situation of Chinese Bronze Ware Collection

The earliest record about excavation of Chinese bronze wares was found in the Han Dynasty, which was regarded as an auspicious sign at that time. It is recorded in *Historic Record-Regulations of Offering Sacrifices to Heaven and Earth* that once Emperor Wu got an ancient bronze ware, and asked Mr. Shaojun for its origin. Mr. Shaojun answered that this item was once put on the Bai Qin by Duke Huan of Qi. Confirmed by the later found inscription on it, the item did belong to Duke Huan of Qi. Everyone was shocked and thought Mr. Shaojun was immortal so that he would live for such a long life and know things happened hundreds of years ago. Another record is found in *Book of Former Han-Treatise on Sacrifice*, which is about where to put a bronze ware discovered and presented to Emperor Xuan. Some ministers declared that this bronze ware should be consecrated in the royal ancestral temple. But the governor of the capital city, Mr. Zhang Chang declared that it was not proper to be placed there, since, according to the inscription, it was an article in commemoration of one subject's ancestor honored by Emperor Zhou. Another record is found in *Book of Later Han Dynasty-Biography of General Dou Xian*, which says that General Dou Xian found a bronze ware in the battle with Hun army, and presented it to Emperor He. In *Book of Liang-Biography of Liu Xian*, it is recorded that someone from Kingdom of Wei presented a bronze ware to Emperor Liang. There were some words of the inscription that could not be recognized by most of the people. Liu Xian, however, could read the whole inscription easily and accurately tell the producing year and month of the item. In *Book of Liang-Biography of Liu Yao*, there was a discussion between Liu Yao and Shen Yue about bronze wine vessels used in sacrificial ceremonies. Liu Yao said that, "In ancient time, the wine vessel used in a ceremony was made of wood and in the shape of a bird or an animal. The top of the bird or the back of the animal was holed in order to hold wine. It was said that one senior official in Kingdom of Qi named Zi Wei sent a bronze wine vessel to his daughter as a wedding gift. The vessel was in the shape of an ox. In the Jin Dynasty, a thief named Cao Yi robbed the tomb of King Jinggong of Kingdom of Qi, and got two ox-shaped bronze vessels. "A scholar in the Song Dynasty named Wang Yinglin wrote in his book *Yu Hai -Collection of Jade* that," In October of the 13th year of Kaiyuan Reign, 5 precious bronze tripods were discovered and presented to the Emperor. 4 of them had inscriptions." Generally speaking, bronze wares unearthed during this period of time were presented to emperors and preserved in the royal palace. Ruan Yuan, a scholar in the Qing Dynasty, concluded that, " Since bronze wares were rare from the Tang Dynasty to the Han Dynasty, ancient bronze wares were gained by chance, and would be recorded and referred as a token of good fortune. Those who could recognize the inscriptions on the bronze wares were generally referred as gifted people."

The market of Chinese bronze ware was formed in the Song Dynasty, which was the first zenith in the



development of Chinese bronze ware collection. According to History of the Song Dynasty-Treaties on Rites, the Bureau of Rites was established at the beginning of the Song Dynasty, specifying in the collection of ancient bronze wares and in the production of the bronze ware imitating in ancient styles. A bureau for the production of ritual objects was later established in the royal palace, hence the large production of bronze wares in ancient styles. Ouyang Xiu, in the postscript of his Collection of Ancient Antiques, mentioned that in the reign of Emperor Taizu, a craftsman named Wang Pu was very good at making chimes, in the same style of those in the Zhou Dynasty. In the 3rd year of Xianping Reign, one ancient bronze object was presented to the emperor from Gangzhou area. This object, cube-shaped and four-footed, had an inscription of 21 characters, which was identified as a bronze Yan (one kind of ancient cooking vessel with a grid on it) made by Mr. Shi Xinfu. Emperor Huizong was fond of ancient antiques, and ordered the royal workshop to produce bronze wares according to the ancient style. It was recorded that the royal workshop produced the fine and exquisite Dasheng Chime, based on the style of Gongshu Bell in the Spring and Autumn Period. During the whole Song Dynasty, on the one hand, the imperial family had played a very important and efficient role in the collection of bronze wares. It had been recorded that there were merely 500 bronze wares at the beginning of Daguan Reign. The number of the collected bronze wares had reached 6,000 in the Zhenghe Reign. On the other hand, the high officials, aristocrats and famous scholars of this time were also fond of the collection of bronze wares. According to Picture Album of Antiques of the Northern Song Dynasty and the Continuation of Picture Album of Antiques of the Southern Song Dynasty, there were over 40 famous collectors of bronze ware in the Northern Song Dynasty, while over 30 in the Southern Song Dynasty. A lot of famous scholars, such as Kou Zhun, Wen Yanbo, Liu Chang, Su Shi, Li Gonglin, Ouyang Xiu, Lü Dalin, Zhao Mingcheng, boasted of the collection of bronze wares. Su Shi had the famous Bell of King Chu in his collections. Liu Chang, a famous scholar in Jixian College and the owner of a large number of bronze wares, wrote a book titled Collection of Bronze Wares in the Early Qin Dynasty. Liu Chang was crazy about 11 bronze wares that had inscriptions out of all his collections. He had spent plenty of time in appreciating and studying them, till the end of his life. He told his offsprings that "Do not forget to use these 11 bronze wares to offer sacrifices to me after my death". Ruan Yuan concluded that "Starting from the Northern Song Dynasty, as more bronze wares were excavated from ancient tombs, bronze wares were no longer regarded as auspicious items. Scholars came to appreciate these bronze wares and research them with more accuracy".

As Wang Guowei (a famous scholar in the late Qing Dynasty) said, the terminologies of ancient ritual bronze objects were determined in the Song Dynasty. "Each bronze item had its name in ancient time, but without a specific explanation. Scholars in the Song Dynasty borrowed these names to describe the found bronze wares according to the size of each item. That is why the name of the bronze ware, such as Jue, Gu, Zhi, Jiao and Jia, was established and used till today." It is in the Song Dynasty that the foundation of the bronze ware research was established. The method of describing and recording of bronze wares was first demonstrated by Picture Album of Antiques and Picture Catalogue of Antique Collection in Xuanhe Reign, which is still a valuable reference for the research of bronze wares today.

The Appreciation and collection of bronze wares experienced another zenith in the Qing Dynasty, due to Emperor Qianlong's great advocacy. Besides the imperial family, high officials and scholars were also fond of the collection of bronze wares, and produced a large number of collectors during that time. In 1749, Emperor Qianlong ordered one of his officials Liang Shizheng to compile *Xi Qing Gu Jian*, a 2-part 40-volume catalogue of the appreciation of imperial collections of antiques, following the style of *Picture Catalogue of Antique Collection* in Xuanhe Reign. This book includes descriptions of 1436 bronze wares collected by the imperial family. *Xi Qing Xu Jian*, another 2-part 40-volume catalogue of the appreciation of antiques of imperial collections was compiled by Wang Jie, containing descriptions of 1642 items. The collection of antiques in Ningshou Palace was also compiled into a 16-volume catalogue, called *Appreciation of Antiques in Ningshou Palace*, which contains 600 bronze wares and 101 bronze mirrors. These three books roughly reflect the whole collection of bronze wares of the imperial family in the Qing Dynasty.

The collection of high ranking officials and literary scholars of the Qing Dynasty is more significant in the archaeological research. Qian Dian (1741—1806), a native Jiading people, wrote a 4-volume *Research and Description of the Antiques of the Collection from Shi Liu Chang Yue Tang*, containing 25 bronze articles from the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, and 24 other antiques. Ruan Yuan (1764—1849), a successful candidate in the highest imperial examinations in Qianlong Reign, had been appointed subsequently as the vice-minister of the Ministry of Revenue, War, and Works, Governor of Yunnan and Guizhou Province, and Senior Imperial Advisor. Ruan Yuan was also a great antiquarian at the time, and, based on his own collections, he compiled two books: *Catalogue of Collection of Ji Gu Zhai*, including 74 pieces of bells and tripods; and *Inscription on the Bronze Ware from Ji Gu Zhai*, including 446 pieces of bronze wares from Shang and Zhou Dynasties and 105 pieces of other antiques. As a private collector, Ruan Yuan was unmatched for his personal collection of bronze wares. Among Ruan Yuan's collections, there used to be two Leis of the Marquis of Qi, which were regarded as treasures ever since then. Wu Yun, another famous collector of antiques, owned these two Leis later, and renamed his home as "House of Two Leis". Chen Jieqi (1813—1884), a native people of Shandong Province, was appointed as a member of Imperial Academy. Chen was crazy about antiques all his life, and had written a lot of books about the appreciation of bronze wares and the research and explanation of the inscriptions on them. Chen was also famous to be the owner of Mao Gong Tripod and many other precious bronze antiques from Shang and Zhou Dynasties. Many other scholars of this time had written books on the collection and research of bronze wares. Among all these books, Fang Shuirui's 30-volume *Study and Explanation of the Inscription of the Bronze Wares from Zhui Yi Zhai* is comprehensive and valuable, for it includes over 1,000 pieces of bronze items, and adds explanations to all the famous inscriptions. Especially, on the preface of the book, Fang had recorded faithfully and carefully the collection and trading of all the famous bronze wares before the Qing Dynasty.

Pan Zuyin, a minister of the Ministry of Works in the Qing Dynasty, was fond of the collection of bronze wares. Among his collections, the most famous ones were Da Ke Tripod and Da Yu Tripod of the Western