Ancient Chinese Ritual Bronze Vessels

International Antiques Fair / Hong Kong October 25th—27th, 2014
Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, Hall 5G
Booth D2 — 1 Expo Drive, Wanchai, Hong Kong
For my third exhibition in Hong Kong, I am presenting a number of exceptional ritual bronze vessels from major international private collections, such as those of C.T. Loo, Chester Dale and Dolly Carter, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery and Rikunosuke Ogawa. Most of the objects are already well known, having been recorded in important European and Japanese publications, and some have also been included in major Chinese art exhibitions held in such renowned institutions as the Art Museum at Princeton University, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, etc.

Three objects included in this exhibition deserve special note:

- The exceptional bronze vessel *bu* from the Anyang period of the Shang dynasty (13th-11th centuries BC.) coming from the Chester Dale and Dolly Carter Collection. (Cat. no. 2),

- The rare bronze vessel *fangyi* from the Anyang period of the Shang dynasty (13th-11th centuries BC.) previously in the Albright-Knox Art Gallery (Buffalo). (Cat. no. 3),

- The superb late Shang or early Western Zhou (11th century BC.) bronze bell *nao*, published by major Japanese scholars including Mizuno S. and Umehara S. (Cat. no. 4),

I hope this, my latest exhibition of Ancient Chinese Bronzes, will contribute to the ever-growing interest in Chinese Art.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who have helped me in the various stages in the production of this exhibition and this catalogue. I should especially like to thank Ms. Raphaele de Sigalony, my assistant, for her invaluable help, Mr. René Bouchara for producing this catalogue and for organizing the presentation of the objects, as well as designing and setting up my booth in the Hong Kong International Art and Antiques Fair and Mr. Ed O’Neill for translating the manuscript into English. I should also like to express my gratitude to Mr. Vincent Girier Dufournier for devoting several days to the photographing of the objects.

Christian Deydier
Chronology

Xia Dynasty 夏
• Erlitou Culture 二里頭文化 19th – 16th centuries BC.

Shang Dynasty 商
• Erligang Period 二里岡 16th – 14th centuries BC.
• Yinxu Period 興墟 14th – 11th centuries BC.

Zhou Dynasty 周
• Western Zhou Dynasty 西周 11th – 8th centuries BC.
• Eastern Zhou Dynasty 東周
  ○ Spring and Autumn Period 春秋 8th – 5th centuries BC.
  ○ Warring States Period 戰國 5th – 3rd centuries BC.

Western Han Dynasty 西漢 206 BC. – 9 AD.
1. Ritual bronze food vessel *ding*

**Shang dynasty, Yinxu period, circa 13th – 11th centuries BC.**

An archaic bronze food vessel *ding* supported on three columnar legs. The round bowl-shaped body is decorated with three large *taotie* masks cast in high relief. Each mask is formed of a pair of confronting large-eyed *kui* dragons shown in profile meeting at a central vertical flange and is separated from its neighbor on each of its sides by yet another vertical flange. The horns of each *taotie* are cast in the shape of curled *kui* dragons shown in profile. On each side of the separating vertical flange a smaller *kui* dragon shown in profile is cast in high relief in a vertical position. The narrow rim of the vessel is topped with two upright semi-circular handles.

The vessel has an olive green patina.

**Inscription:**
- An inscription consisting of an elaborate bordered clan mark and two characters cast inside the wall of the vessel’s bowl reads: “Ya X (clan insignia) Father Ding” 《亞X父丁》.
Provenance:
- Private Collection.

Exhibited:

Published:

The inscription seems to be the one published in:

Notes:
- Similar inscriptions appear on bronze 10 vessels: two you, a he, a zun, a gu, a jue, a jiao, a jia and two liding, and are published in Hayashi M., In Shu Jidai Seidoki no Kenkyu (In Shu Seidoki Soran Ichi), Conspectus of Yin and Zhou Bronzes, Tokyo 1984, Vol. I, p. 19 - 20 no. 26.
2. Ritual bronze vessel *bu*

*Shang dynasty, Yinxu period, circa 13th – 11th centuries BC.*  
*商代殷墟時期獸面紋青銅瓿*

**Height: 18.4 cm, Diameter: 31.1 cm**

An attractive and unusual ritual bronze vessel *bu* supported by a high ring foot and cast in the shape of a compressed jar with a wide bulging lower section that gradually narrows and slopes inwards as it rises towards its rimmed neck.

The vessel’s sloping shoulder is decorated with a frieze of six *kui* dragons shown in profile, with protruding round eyes, and all on a *leiwen* background. The wide rounded lower part of the vessel’s body is entirely covered with lozenge and triangular motifs, each of which is bordered with bands of rectangular-shaped *leiwen* and centred by a bulbous eye-like protrusion. The foot of the vessel is decorated with a single frieze of bordered square, fingerprint-like spirals.

The exact function of this type of vessel is controversial, with many scholars believing it was used to hold fermented beverages and others saying it was used to hold various sauces, and still others claiming it was used to hold water.

The vessel has a fine green patina.
Provenance:
- Chester Dale and Dolly Carter Collection, U.S.A.
- Sotheby's New York, November 2nd, 1979, catalogue lot no. 215.
- Private Collection, U.K.

Exhibited:
- The Art Museum, Princeton University, U.S.A.
- Sotheby's New York, November 2nd, 1979, catalogue lot no. 215.

Published:
- Sotheby's New York, November 2nd, 1979, catalogue lot no. 215.

Similar examples:
3. Ritual bronze vessel *fangyi*

**Shang dynasty, Yinxu period, circa 13th – 11th centuries BC.**

商代殷墟時期獸面紋青銅方彝

**Height: 20.3 cm**

A ritual bronze vessel *fangyi* used to hold fermented beverages. The vessel’s long rectangular body is supported by a high foot with arched openings and each of its sides is cast with two large friezes of decoration, a narrower upper frieze decorated with two birds with long tails in high relief separated by a vertical flange and a longer lower frieze, covering two thirds of the vessel’s body and decorated with a large *taotie* mask in high relief, with protruding round eyes, triangular ears, and large horns, separated down its centre by a vertical flange. The vessel’s foot is decorated on each of its sides with a frieze of two confronting *kui* dragons in high relief, shown in profile, and separated by a vertical flange and an arched opening.

The vessel’s large, sloping, roof-like cover is topped by a small, similarly shaped knob decorated on each of its sides with *taotie* masks. Each side of the cover’s sloping surface is cast with a large *taotie* mask composed of two confronting *kui* dragons in high relief, facing each other over a vertical flange.

The vessel has a fine reddish patina with areas of green.

**Inscription:**
- A single pictograph in the form of an elaborately-horned animal’s head, probably a clan mark, is cast inside the vessel.
Provenance:
- Arthur B. Michael Collection, Newton Center, MA (bequest of 1942).
- Private Collection.

Exhibited:
- Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York, U.S.A.

Published:

Similar examples:
4. Ritual bronze bell *nao*

**Late Shang dynasty - Early Western Zhou dynasty, 11th century BC.**

*商代晚期 - 西周早期雷紋青銅鐃*

**Height: 46.4 cm**

An extremely fine and rare archaic ritual bronze bell *nao*. The bell’s elliptically shaped body is supported by a long, thick, cylindrical handle which serves as the bell’s base, since *nao* bells are always placed with their openings facing skywards. The lower section of each of the bell’s sides is divided down its centre into two sections by a vertical panel decorated with spirals, flanked on each side by six horizontal friezes of spirals, with the top frieze of each pair embellished with bosses in high relief, cast in the form of outwardly coiling dragons alternating with hooked scroll motifs.

The upper part of each of the bell’s sides is decorated in its centre with a protruding horizontal plaque-like section in low relief, decorated with an elaborate stylized *taotie* mask formed of spirals and hooked scrolls, and flanked on both of its sides and below with yet more spiral and hooked scroll motifs.

The bell’s cylindrical handle-like base with its protruding globular upper section is elaborately cast with similar scroll and spiral motifs.

The bronze bell has a pleasant green patina.

**Inscription:**

- An elaborate clan insignia in the form of a four-part pictograph is cast on the flat surface of the vessel’s shank and consists, from left to right, of a man holding a halberd in his right hand standing above a long vessel-like motif and a stylized chariot-like motif above a galloping horse.
Provenance:
- Rikunosuke Ogawa Collection, Kyoto, Japan, prior to 1935, 1935前日本東京小川睦之輔氏舊藏.
- Private Collection, Japan.
- Christie’s New York, March 21st – 22nd 2013, lot no. 1224.

Exhibited:

Published:
- Mizuno S., In Shu Seidoki to Gyoku (Bronzes and Jades from the Yin and Zhou Dynasties), Tokyo 1959, p.113.

Similar pieces:
- Another similar bell from the Shumei Family, now in the Miho Museum, is illustrated in Arnold D., & others, Ancient Art from The Shumei Family Collection, New York 1996, and p. 96 - 97 no. 38.

Notes:
- Large nao are also called zheng.
- This type of bell, generally found alone, was used during sacrifices to the natural elements, such as the wind, the rain, the stars, etc. as well as to mountains and rivers.
CCLXXXV BRONZE BELL ‘CHÉNG’ WITH DRAGON AND SPIRAL ORNAMENT

Total Height 44.5 cm.

Yin Dynasty

Late C. Ogawa Collection, Kyoto
5. Ritual bronze food vessel *li*

**Early Western Zhou dynasty, late 11th – early 10th centuries BC.**

西周早期青銅鬲

**Height: 37.7 cm, Width: 36 cm**

An archaic bronze food vessel *li* supported on three hollow legs rising into three clustered bulbous swells. Each swell is decorated with a large *taotie* mask cast in low relief, with protruding round eyes, triangular ears, and C-shaped horns, all on a *leiwen* background. Each *taotie* mask is flanked on its sides by a long vertically positioned *kui* dragon cast in profile with its head looking downward on a *leiwen* background.

Two upright U-shaped handles are set on the upper part of the vessel’s body which is topped by an everted rim.

The vessel has a green and reddish patina.

**Inscription:**

- A partially corroded multiple-character inscription cast inside the wall of the vessel reads: “XX made (this. May) grandsons (and) sons eternally treasure (and) use it” 《XXX 作孫子其永寶用》.
Provenance:
- Reputed to have come from C.T. Loo, Paris, France.
- Private Collection.

Similar examples:
- A similar li, but with the handles set on its rim, now in the Avery Brundage Collection, is published by Lefebvre d’Argencé R.Y., *Bronze Vessels of Ancient China in The Avery Brundage Collection*, San Francisco 1977, p. 72, no. B60 B1081

Notes:
- Large li vessels like this one are extremely rare.
- The upright U-shaped handles set on the sides of the vessel’s body are typical of bronzes produced during the early Western Zhou dynasty.
6. Pair of ritual bronze wine vessels *hu*

**Late Western Zhou dynasty, Early Spring and Autumn period,**
9th – 8th centuries BC.
西周晚期 - 春秋早期青銅壺 (一對)
**Qin culture.** 秦文化
**Height: 34.7 cm**

A pair of archaic bronze wine vessels *hu* of rectangular shape. Each has a double-tiered rectangular cover and is supported on a rectangular flaring pedestal foot. The body of each vessel is decorated with interlaced serpentine scrolls in high relief and its neck is flanked by two elaborate loop handles issuing from horned dragons’ heads spouting stylized phoenixes with cascading plumes on each side of their heads. A large flat ring hangs from the bottom of each of the vessel’s loop handles, touching the vessel’s bulbous lower body. The cover is cast with dragon scroll motifs. The two vessels have a green patina with areas of blue and red patina.
Provenance:
- Frank Arts Collection, Belgium.

Exhibited:
- The Frank Arts Collection, Hong Kong/Art Asian Fair/October 2nd – 7th, 2011, catalogue no. 16, p. 50 – 53.

Published:
- Deydier Ch., The Frank Arts Collection, Hong Kong/Art Asian Fair/October 2nd – 7th, 2011, catalogue no. 16, p. 50 – 53.

Similar examples:
- Similar hu vessels, with more elaborate decors, excavated in 1998 from tomb 98LDM2 in Yuandingshan, are illustrated in Qin Xi Chui Ling Qu, Beijing, Wenwu press, 2004, p 78 - 85 plates 18 – 21, 《秦西垂陵區》文物出版社, 北京2004年版, 第 78 - 85頁, 圖18-21.
Eastern Zhou dynasty, Warring States period, 4th century BC.

Height: 37.8 cm

A rare archaic bronze ritual wine vessel hu cast with its cover in the form of a bird’s head. The vessel’s plain pear-shaped body, with just a simple protruding, undecorated rounded band around its waist and a small circular handle at its back, is supported by a low round foot.

Both sides of the bottom of the vessel’s neck have an arm-like attachment rising from them and passing through wide rings on the vessel’s cover to join at the cover’s back in a handle that can be manipulated to open the top of the bird’s beak and the rest of the vessel’s lid.

The cover is cast in the shape of the stylized head of a bird of prey, with large eyes and a sharp downwardly curved moveable beak.

The vessel has a pleasant bluish and dark green patina on its body, and a light green patina on its handle and cover.
Provenance:
- Private Collection.
- Galerie Christian Deydier, Paris, France.

Exhibited:
- Archaic Bronze Vessels from Private Collections, Hong Kong/ Art Asian Fair/ October 4th – 7th, 2012, catalogue no. 17, p. 60 – 33.

Published:
- Deydier Ch., Archaic Bronze Vessels from Private Collections, Hong Kong/ Art Asian Fair/ October 4th – 7th, 2012, catalogue no. 17, p. 60 – 33.

Similar example:

Notes:
- Bronze bird-headed vessels hu are extremely rare. Hayashi M. records only four examples of this type.
- The bodies of some of these are encircled by plain concave bands.
Previous Exhibitions

December 1985  Chinese Gold, Silver and Gilt Bronze up to the Tang Dynasty, London
December 1987  Opening Exhibition, London
June 1989  Archaic Chinese Bronzes from Shang to Zhou Dynasties, London
June 1990  Imperial Gold from Ancient China, London
June 1991  The Art of the Warring States and Han Periods, London
September 1992  XVIe Biennale des Antiquaires, Paris
December 1992  An Exceptional Horse from the Han Dynasty, London
November 1994  L’Or des Qin, XVIIe Biennale des Antiquaires, Paris
January 1996  Le Banquet des Dieux, Bronzes Rituels de la Chine Ancienne, Paris
September 1996  XVIIIe Biennale des Antiquaires, Paris
February 1997  Arts de la Chine et de l’Himalaya, XIVe s. av. J.-C.—XVe s. ap. J.-C., Paris
January 1998  L’immortalité de l’Âme chez les Han, Paris
March 1998  Timeless China, New York
October 1998  L’Art et la Matière, Paris
October 1999  Caravanes sur la Route de la Soie, Paris
September 2000  XXe Biennale des Antiquaires, Paris
October 2000  Twentieth Anniversary, Paris-London
September 2002  XXIe Biennale des Antiquaires, Paris
September 2004  L’or des Qidan, XXIIe Biennale des Antiquaires, Paris
September 2006  XXIIIe Biennale des Antiquaires, Paris
April-May 2007  L’Inde Sensuelle : Terres Cuites de l’époque Gupta, IVe—VIe siècles, Paris
February 2008  Exposition Inaugurale, Paris
September 2008  XXIVe Biennale des Antiquaires, Paris
March-April 2009  Treasures from Ancient China—I, New York-Paris
Feb.-March 2010  Treasures from Ancient China—II, New York-Paris
September 2010  XXVe Biennale des Antiquaires, Paris
March-April 2011  Treasures from Ancient China—III, New York-Paris
September 2011  Extraordinary Animals from Ancient China, Paris
October 2011  The Frank Arts Collection, Fine Art Asia Fair, Hong Kong
September 2012  XXVIe Biennale des Antiquaires, Paris
October 2012  Archaic Bronze Vessels from Private Collections, Fine Art Asia Fair, Hong Kong
October 2013  Ancient Chinese Ritual Bronze Vessels, Fine Art Asia Fair, Hong Kong