

EARLY CHINESE INSCRIBED BRONZES IN EUROPEAN PUBLIC COLLECTIONS: CRAFTSMANSHIP / PROVENANCE / PRESERVATION

Workshop

Museum für Asiatische Kunst / Takustraße 40, Berlin / 7 July 2023

Programme:

2:30–3:00pm

Edward L. Shaughnessy / Chicago

Chen Mengjia in Chicago

3:00–3:30pm

Maria Khayutina / Munich

Inscribed Vessels in the Museum Rietberg's Collection and Aristocratic Lineages of the Late Shang and Western Zhou Periods

3:30–4:00pm

Olivier Venture / Paris

Cernuschi Museum Ancient Chinese Bronzes Catalogue Project

4:00–4:30pm Break

4:30–5:00pm

Huan Limin / Mainz

Seeing Chinese Bronzes from Different Perspectives: Integrating Scientific Data with Historical Studies

5:00–5:30pm

Ondřej Škrabal / Hamburg

Between Looted Art and Socialist Diplomacy: Pathways of Ancient Chinese Bronzes to Czechoslovakian Collections

5:30–6:00pm

Roundtable: The Future of Research of European Collections of Chinese Bronzes



Abstracts

Chen Mengjia in Chicago

Edward L. Shaughnessy (University of Chicago)

In 1945, Chen Mengjia 陳夢家 (Ch'en Meng-chia) went from war-time Kunming to Chicago to begin a two-year stay at the University of Chicago. While there, in addition to teaching classical Chinese and paleography, his main purpose was to collect materials for a book to be entitled *Chinese Bronzes in American Collections: A Catalogue and Comprehensive Study of Chinese Bronzes*. Although he completed this work before returning to China in August, 1947, and had a contract with the Harvard-Yenching Institute to publish it, for various reasons the book was never published in America and the manuscript was lost. Fortunately, a copy was discovered in the archives of the Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, and was finally published, together with a Chinese translation, by Zhonghua Shuju in 2016.

Inscribed Vessels in the Museum Rietberg's Collection and Aristocratic Lineages of the Late Shang and Western Zhou Periods

Maria Khayutina (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München)

Twenty-nine objects in the Museum Rietberg's collection of early Chinese bronzes carry inscriptions cast on their inner or, more seldomly, outer surfaces. Many include signs that are understood as referring to aristocratic lineages or clans that coexisted and interacted with the Shang royal dynasty. After the Zhou conquest of Shang in 1046/45 BCE, the old aristocracy began cooperating with the new supreme power and were incorporated into the Zhou elite. Their support was a key factor in the success of Zhou's state-building and colonization projects, but their memory has been erased from transmitted history and is embodied only in bronze inscriptions. By correlating objects from the collection with excavated archaeological sites, this paper discusses the roles of related kinship groups in Shang and Zhou history, aiming to give credit to them as co-designers of the cultural and political entity that we define today as "early China."

Cernuschi Museum Ancient Chinese Bronzes Catalogue Project

Olivier Venture (Université Paris Sciences et Lettres)

Cernuschi Museum ancient Chinese bronzes collection was founded at the end of the XIXth century. Since then, it has grown following successive curators' acquisitions, resulting in one of the largest ancient Chinese bronzes collection in Europe. In 1977, Cernuschi Museum's former curator, Vadime Elisseeff, wrote the first volume of a catalogue entitled *Archaic Chinese Bronzes*, introducing to a selection of 59 bronzes. But other volumes were never published. Moreover, since 1977, Cernuschi Museum was able to purchase, or received from donators, many other ancient Chinese bronzes.

In 2019 an agreement was signed between Paris Musées and the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes for a global research project on Cernuschi Museum's ancient Chinese bronzes collection, which includes the edition of a new catalogue. After four years of collaboration with the museum, this communication will provide an overview of the work that has already been done, as well as the difficulties that have been encountered, and on the work that still has to be done.

Seeing Chinese Bronzes from Different Perspectives: Integrating Scientific Data with Historical Studies

Huan Limin (Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie Mainz)

Traditionally, scientific studies of ancient bronze objects have focused on metallurgical questions such as the manufacturing and mechanical properties of the objects. However, in recent years, archaeological scientists have become more interested in questions shared by archaeologists and historians such as understanding how the objects were commissioned, used, and distributed. By combining scientific studies with studies on the styles and inscriptions of the bronze objects, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of ancient Chinese bronzes. In this talk, I will use Shigushan as an example to discuss whether the chemical data of the objects can be used with other methods to answer general research questions such as the provenance of the objects and the nature of the cemetery.

Between Looted Art and Socialist Diplomacy: Pathways of Ancient Chinese Bronzes to Czechoslovakian Collections

Ondřej Škrabal (Universität Hamburg)

With more than 90 pieces, the National Gallery in Prague is currently home to the biggest collection of ancient Chinese bronzes in the Eastern Europe. This collection took shape gradually between the 1950s and 1980s and reflects several paths through which ancient Chinese art flowed to Czechoslovakian collections. In this talk, I will focus on the provenance of a dozen inscribed pieces, with a special attention to those acquired in the P.R.C. after 1949, highlighting the diplomatic dilemma of Chinese authorities vis-à-vis the unscrupulous art collectors from a friendly socialist country.