



The Glorious Traditions of Chinese Bronzes

Xueqin Li

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Anthony Hardy's Sze Yuan Tang Collection of ancient Chinese bronzes had its inspirational beginnings in the early 1950s when, as a schoolboy in England, he was struck by the architectonic beauty of a solitary Shang jue tripod wine vessel in his father's collection of predominantly Western medieval art. There is little doubt that his early encounter with the archaic jue led to an intense interest in early Chinese art and in ancient Chinese ritual bronzes in particular.

Hardy started collecting bronzes seriously in the early 1980s and places great importance on what he calls the "Four P's" - Patination, Pictogram, Precision and Provenance.

To Hardy, a bronze vessel worthy of collecting must have a good natural Patination, nature's contribution to a great work of bronze art; a Pictogram or inscription of historic significance; Precision and sharpness of casting; and also Provenance recording the academic history of the piece, the collections it has been in, where it has been exhibited and what has been written about it.

When Hardy married Susan Chen they decided that the exhibition of Hardy's principally Shang ritual bronzes scheduled for late 2000 at the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore should be expanded to include sculptural animal bronzes and the more feminine and jewel-like inlaid bronzes of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods belonging to Chen's own collection. Together the two collections offer a more extensive view of the glorious traditions of ancient Chinese bronzes.

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