

Good research paper about art and architecture

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Bianzhong is an ancient Chinese musical instrument that consists of a set of bronze bells that are played melodically. The set of bells used to function as polyphonic musical instruments and evidence shows that some of these bells have been dated between two thousand to three thousand six hundred years of age. These set of bronze bells used to be hung in a wooden frame that would be struck with a mallet (Ye et al, 98). The bronze bells were important instruments in China's ritual and court music in the ancient times along with the chimes known as "bianging". History gives information that many sets of bianzhong were imported to the Korean court especially during the Song Dynasty. Bianzhong was pronounced in Korean as "pyeonjong" and it became an important part in Korea's ritual and court music. To present, bianzhong is said to still be in use and the Japanese pronounce it as "hensho". This paper aims at researching more on bianzhong considering the appearance, where it was found, why it was made, how it was used, others objects that artists made, how to own the object and how the object entered museum's collection. This paper will thus answer several questions with regards to the bronze bell in China gallery.

Over time, many types of the bianzhong were unearthed thus the appearance differs depending with the period. The bronze object in the early ancient period was dignified and very heavy. In the middle period, the bianzhong is said to have been simple and practical whereas in the late period it was practical, simple and had graceful and intricate forms. Existing ornaments on the bronze bell were an important element of the spiritual content in all bronze wares. These ornaments that were found on the Chinese bronze bell were rich in contents. Patterns that could be identified

include; animal, plants, geometric and human face patterns. The effect was considered to be sacrificial and ritual in nature for the Chinese. Communication with divinities and frightening demons was also a belief that the ancestors had that the design could do. Warding evil spirits off and bringing luck that was good would involve enshrining the bronze ware in the temple. Inscriptions on large bronze bells helped historians and archaeologists to piece together the Chinese history. The early bronze bell inscriptions were almost cast whereas the later inscriptions were engraved often especially after the bronze was cast. The mystical taotie is mentioned to appear in the bronze vessel consisting of a zoomorphic mask as well. Many of the bronze bells are amazingly heavy and the appearances suggest a high level of technology. The Shang artists were obviously obsessed with both imaginary and real animal forms during the making of the bronze bells. As the bronze bells appear, animal form often flows into another animal form just as they do in the animal mask. Most of the masks facing viewers can be seen as dragons looking at each other in profile. A close inspection of the 5th century B. C bronze revealed lively inlaid figures playing and dancing musical instruments and battling on water and land. The bronze bell mentioned is thus among the earliest known attempts by the Chinese to show people's pictures. The "Bo" bell was made using section moulds from clay into which molten metal was poured (Zhou et al, 411). For a consistent decoration, the craftsmen created special pattern blocks making the same motifs appear across the surface. A master block could be used severally and the narrow borders of the bell filled with same dragon patterns. The ritual bronzes continued and some went up to the late Anyang tradition.

The bianzhong was found in a state of preservation while excavating the tomb of Marquis Yi. This region that was the major state of Chu is presently the Hubei province. The set of bianzhong has a total of sixteen pieces. The fourteen pieces were purchased by Shanghai Museum and it is mentioned that the purchase was from overseas (Lagerwey et al, 91). Further research shows that the two small pieces are said to have been unearthed from the tomb of Su Marquis of Jin. These two groups of bianzhong are suggested to have been molded at different times. They were later assembled according to the audio frequency and covered a complete set of sound levels after testing. Music can be played using the two groups of bianzhong even to date. The king of Zhou in history went on an expedition against the enemies and attacked the minority people as ordered. By conquering many towns and killing many enemies, Marquis of Jin bestowed on the king many horses, bows, wine and arrows. Marquis of Jin thus had the set of bianzhong cast to eulogize the moral excellence of the king. It is when Marquis died that bianzhong was extracted from his grave.

The bianzhong was made for purposes of description and symbolism. When the Chinese people want to describe something especially with glorious and solemn sound, they use an idiom. This idiom is called the “ sound of stone and gold” or “ golden sounds”. The interesting phrase of stone and gold originated from the use of two sounds considered special from the special musical instruments, zhong and qing. Qing is an instrument of percussion made of a set of chime stones whereas zhong is a set of bronze chime bells of sizes that are different. The bianzhong is thus used for expression sounds especially among the Chinese and these factors in the big, grand and

majestic complete set of bianzhong. A complete set of bianzhong is made up of more than sixty decorated bronze bells that are said to be beautiful in nature. For the purposes of symbolism, the bianzhong is a symbol of kingly authority and prestige. Bianzhong is unlike all other traditional instruments and is only meant for royal courts and noble families. Bianzhong can only be used by occasions that need glorious court music like offering sacrifices to the gods, and during the kings' banquets. With sound that varies from bright, clear high pitched sound too heavy, solemn low-pitched sound, the bianzhong can only be meant to entertain the royal majesties.

Bianzhong was used in a unique manner for purposes of musical performance by covering octaves and notes. Zhong bells have a lens-shaped section with a bell mouth that has a distinctive cutaway profile. The outer surfaces of the large bell are symmetrically placed around the body into four groups of nine. The special shape enables the bianzhong to produce two differing musical tones depending on the position struck. Interval between the two notes on each applied bell becomes either a minor third or a major that is equivalent to a distance of five or four notes of a piano. The beams of a bianzhong are separated and supported at the ends and intersections by six bronze human figurines. The figurines are upraised arms and wearing swords that cast on their own elaborately in decorated bronze pedestals. The bianzhong thus functions just as a normal piano but with differing speed and produces better sounds as researchers suggest.

Other objects that were made aside the bianzhong include the guang vessel. The guang is a particular shape that was made in the Shang dynasty and later in the Chinese porcelain. The guangaws used for pouring rice wine at

ritual banquets and often was deposited as grave goods (Yu et al, 67). The large ding was as well another piece that was made. The ding had an undulating pattern and was intended for sacrificial services that were dedicated to the Ke's grandfather. Ranging from sacrificial vessels, wine vessels, food vessels, water vessels, musical instruments vessels, ancient money vessels and miscellaneous vessels the bianzhong was complemented fully. However much researchers do not mention most of the vessels that were made alongside bianzhong, the mentioned functions are at par with the vessels that were available. Personally, I would own bianzhong as a precious gift. The object is defined as a good one with several qualities that make it attractive. The sounds produced by bianzhong if practically produced must be very loud and special. I would thus own bianzhong as a great gift and would spend even much lump sum of money to purchase it. Further, bianzhong represents royalty and no one would want to miss the royal touch in life. I would own this object as a royal person in my own way, level and lifestyle.

In concluding, the bianzhong entered the museum in a fine procedure to update the primitive objects that had existed. The taozhong was the earliest bell in the Chinese society with functions of entertaining laboring people after work. Introduction of metals came up with the tongnao. Tongnao was a bronze percussion instrument that resembled an inverted bell and was sounded by a hammer. Introduction of metal also brought up tongling and tongzhong that was a bronze bell. Evolution into bianling that was a chime of small bells came up with biannao. Biannao was a chime of percussion instruments that resembled inverted bells. Later, technology advanced and

bianzhong was established. With bianzhong's favorable chime of bells, it got its place in the museum.

Works Cited

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The Bianzhong of Marquis Yi of Zeng (simplified Chinese: 曾侯乙编钟; traditional Chinese: 曾侯乙編鐘)