

A Comparative Research on the Decoration of Ancient Bronze Drums and Bronze Lifting Cylinders*

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Abstract—Among the many bronzes in the Bronze Age culture of South China and Southeast Asia, bronze drums and bronze lifting cylinders are the most representative artifacts. As the most revealing elements of cultural connotation, they adopt very similar and even the same decoration, indicating that the relationship is very close. Based on the data of archaeology, museums and related cultural institutions, this paper compares and analyzes the decoration types and contents of ancient bronze drums and cylinders. At the same time, combined with archaeological, historical, ethnological and other disciplines for comprehensive research, the conclusion is as follows: In the Bronze Age culture in Southeast Asia and southern China, bronze drums and bronze cylinders both are the most important bronze rituals, and they are also the most local bronzes in different regions. The cultural connotations of their decoration shows that not only their users are from different branches of the unified ethnic origin, but also maintain frequent exchanges in their respective developments, and also show that there are relatively mature Bronze Age cultures in this vast area.

Keywords—ancient bronze lifting cylinder; bronze drum; decoration; Southern China; Southeast Asia

I. INTRODUCTION

Among the Bronze Age cultural relics of Southeast Asia and southern China, the bronze drums and lifting cylinders are the most representative bronzes. Although the Bronze Age culture in this vast area has not yet found words, there are a large number of decorations on these two bronzes, which intuitively and figuratively reflects the social appearance of the time and shows a rich cultural connotation. Therefore, a comparative research of the pattern of these two kinds of rituals will help us to analyze the social culture of the times and the exchanges between the social culture and regions of the era.

At present, the bronze drums in Southeast Asia are distributed in Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Malaysia. In China, they are distributed in Yunnan, Guangxi, Guangdong, Hainan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Chongqing, and Hunan provinces (see "Table I" and "Table II"). The bronze cylinders are found in Vietnam, Guangdong, Guangxi, and Yunnan (see "Table I" and "Table II").

TABLE I. STATISTICS ON BRONZE DRUMS AND BRONZE LIFTING CYLINDERS FOUND IN CHINA

Provinces	Yunnan	Guangxi	Guangdong	Sichuan	Guizhou	Shanghai	Henan
Number of bronze drum	102	15	1	3	2	2	1
Number of bronze lifting cylinder	4	9	12	0	0	0	0

TABLE II. STATISTICS ON BRONZE DRUMS AND BRONZE LIFTING CYLINDERS FOUND IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Countries	Vietnam	Indonesia	Thailand	Laos	Myanmar	Malaysia	Cambodia
Number of bronze drum	145	12	11	9	5	4	2
Number of bronze lifting cylinder	4	0	0	0	0	0	0

Due to the rich type of bronze drums and the long span of use, the ancient bronze drums discussed in this paper refer to those that were produced and used in the Bronze Age. While there are not many types of bronze cylinders, and there is not much change in the shape, only the degree of sophistication

of the decoration is different. Most of these two artifacts are unearthed or collected in tombs.

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II. ANALYSIS OF THE DECORATION TYPES OF ANCIENT BRONZE DRUMS AND BRONZE LIFTING CYLINDERS

A. General Introduction

In terms of structure, the bronze drum includes the top, the chest, the waist, the foot and the ear from top to bottom. The bronze lifting cylinder includes the chest, the waist, the foot and the ear, part of them include the lid. Decoration types of them all include flat patterns and three-dimensional sculptures. Most of the cover of drum-top and lid are decorated with sun-pattern, one-to-many circles of characters or animal figures from the inside to the outside. The chest is decorated with a circle of motif pattern; and three to four layers of motifs are decorated at the waist. These motifs are separated by geometric patterns.

B. Flat Pattern

The flat patterns mainly include the figure image as the theme and the geometric pattern as a foil. Both of them were engraved with bas-relief techniques.

1) *The geometrical pattern:* The geometric pattern consists of points, lines, and circles, squares, triangles, etc... Its kinds include comb pattern, sawtooth pattern, circle,



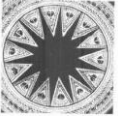
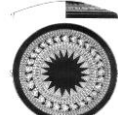
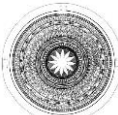
triangle, etc. They are all decorated on the surface of the bronze drum top and cylinder lid.

The geometric motifs are themed motifs that express a certain theme. Some of them are generally used as an interval between the two layers of the main pattern and at both ends for a more aesthetically pleasing visual effect.

2) *The figure image pattern:* The figure image pattern is the theme decoration of the bronze drum and the bronze cylinder which including natural objects, animals and characters. Among them, the most important are the depictions of real life such as sun, flying heron, cow, deer, fish, turtles etc. and character activities. These patterns are the most direct and most vivid reflection of the most valuable elements of social life content at the time.

The most important thing in nature is the sun pattern that is decorated on the center of the cover of drum-top and the cylinder lid. It is the earliest and most basic pattern on the drum. Except for a very small number of the earliest bronze drums without sun patterns, almost every bronze drums were decorated it. The sun pattern generally consists of two parts: center circle and light. The earliest bronze drums have only a central circle and no light which expressing its originality (see "Table III").





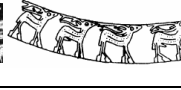


TABLE III. LEGEND OF THE SUN PATTERN

Country and utensil name		Legend
China	Bronze drum	
	Bronze lifting cylinder	
Vietnam	Bronze drum	
	Bronze lifting cylinder	
Thailand	Bronze drum	

Among these animal images, flying heron pattern is the most important motif pattern of the cover of bronze drum-top, while the cover of cylinder lid is not decorated, but a small amount are other animal patterns. On most bronze drums, there are a circle of herons that fly around the sun in a counterclockwise direction. Most of them are even, mostly 4 or 6, and 8-20, and they are connected end to end. Sometime of them are decorated on the body. Deer and cattle are also common animal images on drums and a small number of

cylinders. They are mostly decorated on the waist of drums and cylinders. The image of the cow is quite special. Its ridge is close to the neck and rises like a mountain. It is a unique species of cattle in southwestern China, Southeast Asia and South Asia. In addition, a small number of fish and turtles were found, often dotted between the boats, indicating the scene of the boat in the river or sea. The above animal images are more realistic and figurative images (see "Table IV").

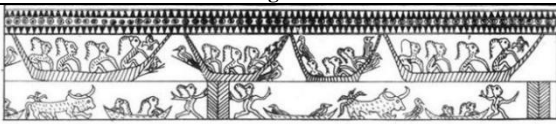




TABLE IV. LEGEND OF THE ANIMAL IMAGES

Country	Legend		
	Flying heron	deer	cow
China			
Vietnam			
Thailand		--	--

The character images are combined images, mainly representing feather dancing and husking rice with mortar and pestle. The former is a circle of figure wearing a feather crest, wearing a feather, and dancing, a few of them are decorated on the bronze drum-top, and most of them are attached to the waist. The husking rice image is only decorated on the cover of the drum-top and the body of cylinder body of Vietnam. It is actually a dance image.

The boat pattern is one of the main patterns of ancient bronze drums and cylinders. It shows people doing various activities on board, including sacrifices, fishing, competition, war, games, and transportation and so on. Each group is consisted of 4 or 6 boats, each of which is independent, connected end to end. They were decorated around the chest or waist of the bronze drum and cylinder. There are fish, donkeys and birds in the gap between these boats (see "Table V").

TABLE V. LEGEND OF THE BOAT PATTERNS

Country and utensil name		Legend
China	Bronze drum	
	Bronze lifting cylinder	
Vietnam	Bronze drum	
	Bronze lifting cylinder	
Thailand	Bronze drum	

C. The Three-dimensional Sculptures

The sculpture is one of the plastic arts. It is processed into a three-dimensional image with a variety of materials that can be carved, engraved, showing a sense of reality that can be seen and touched.

In the Bronze Age culture, there are fewer ancient bronze drums and lifting cylinders decorated with the three-dimensional sculpture. They are usually decorated on the cover of drum-top, including figures, animals, etc., and a few are decorated on the foot or the waist. The specific image includes frogs and lizards decorated on bronze drums, and

human, preying beast, ostrich and cow decorated on the lid of cylinder.

In a Bronze Age tomb group in Chenggong, Yunnan, China, three bronze lifting cylinders were unearthed from a tomb at the highest level. One of them is a special case. The sun pattern decorated on the center of the lid is replaced by a

standing cow, and four head-to-tail standing cows are surrounded. At the same time, a Zhubeiqi (one dedicated seashell memory in the area only locally of that era.) was unearthed in another tomb that is second only to the former. Its lid is also decorated sculpture of five-dimensional standing cows similar to this lifting cylinder (see "Table VI").

TABLE VI. LEGEND OF THE THREE-DIMENSIONAL SCULPTURES

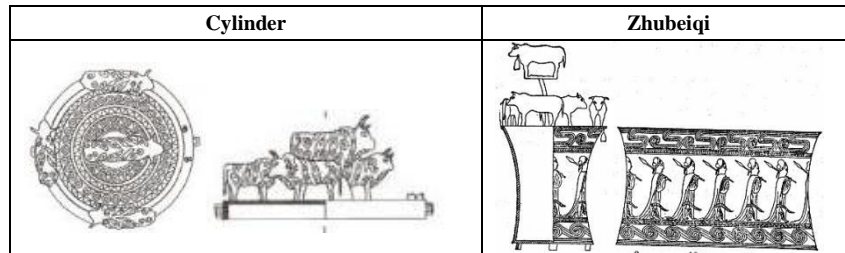
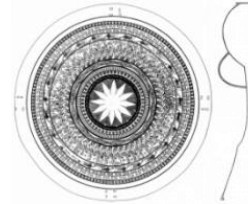
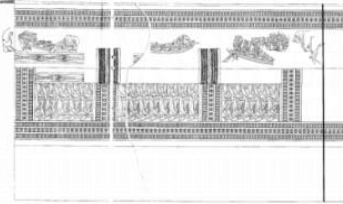


TABLE VII. LEGEND OF THE OVERALL DECORATION OF THE BRONZE DRUM AND CYLINDER

Country and utensil name	Legend
<p><i>China</i></p> <p>Bronze drum</p>	
<p>Bronze lifting cylinder</p>	
<p><i>Vietnam</i></p> <p>Bronze drum</p>	
<p>Bronze lifting cylinder</p>	

Country and utensil name		Legend	
Thailand	Bronze drum		

III. ANALYSIS OF THE DECORATION FUNCTION OF ANCIENT BRONZE DRUMS AND BRONZE LIFTING CYLINDERS

As the image history book of the Bronze Age in this vast area, the decoration of ancient bronze drums and cylinders not only shows the beauty, but more importantly. Their rich decoration content vividly shows the social scenes of production, life and religion at that time and provides a wealth of imagery for our research (see "Table VII").

A. The Decoration Content

From an economic point of view, the scenes of glutinous rice, boats, ostriches, fish, etc. reflect that people lived mainly on the banks of rivers and lakes at that time, and the economic structure was dominated by agriculture, supplemented by animal husbandry and fisheries.

From a religious point of view, the sun, the herd, the feather dance, the frog, the deer, etc. reflect the original nature worship at that time which is the consciousness of "all things are alive". Because relying on these conditions to survive, people pray for the blessing of these "natural gods", therefore, the natural worship and related ritual activities have appeared, which is also the germination of human rational thinking about the relationship between man and nature.

From the perspective of social life, a large number of sacrifices and war scenes reflect the social life situation that the great event of the country was the sacrifice and war at that time. Among them, activities such as competitions, sacrificing cow and husking rice are still popular in this vast area today. But the original religious nature has gradually disappeared.

B. The Decoration Artistic Characteristics

Decorating such a beautiful and delicate graphic pattern on a large-volume bronze is unique in the history of world art.

First of all, compared with other regions which are decorated with abstract images in the Bronze Age culture, the decoration of the early bronze drums and cylinders in this area are all figure images, such as figures and common animals. Secondly, the decoration content on a utensil is so rich, for example, the body of a bronze is decorated with three to four layers of body decoration, including two layers of different scenes of the boat pattern, two layers of animal image, extremely rare in other areas. Third, the ability to cast these decorations also reflects the fact that this vast area has developed higher bronze casting techniques more than two thousand years ago.

IV. CONCLUSION

As the most important and representative bronzes in the Bronze Age of South China and Southeast Asia, these two bronzes contain rich cultural connotations. This paper only analyzes their decoration. Through the comparative analysis of the decoration, the cultural factors reflected by these two bronzes are more common, but the decoration expressions are slightly different. Take the boat pattern as an example: it is more realistic on bronze drum in China, which is relatively abstract on the bronze drum and the cylinder in Southeast Asia.

From the perspective of cultural psychology, in the same stage of cultural development, the use of cultural elements are very similar or even identical, especially the ritual instruments that best reflect national identity and the ritual system that they reflect, illustrate that the psychological tendencies and spiritual thoughts are similar of these human groups who should have a closer relationship.

Comprehensive archaeological, historical, ethnological, anthropological and other multidisciplinary studies, it can be speculated that the users of the early bronze drums and cylinders in southern China and Southeast Asia are different branches developed by the same ethnic origin. They have maintained long-term peaceful exchanges in the course of historical development until today.

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