

Retrospect and Reflection on the Study of Early Bronze Drums in China and Vietnam

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Abstract: *Bronze drum research is the focus of ancient bronze culture research in southern China and Southeast Asia. Due to different archaeological excavations and academic research traditions, Chinese and Vietnamese scholars have formed completely different views on the development and evolution of early bronze drums. In recent years, reflections on the methods haven been conducted. Some scholars have tried to put the development and evolution of bronze drums in the overall framework of the bronze cultures in China and Southeast Asia, and have obtained some new understandings. Of course, in addition to the change of research paradigm, we also need to strengthen the scientific detection of early bronze drums and the employment of various theories, in order to further expand the breadth and depth of the bronze drum research, and promote it into a new stage.*

Keywords: *The Wanjiaba-Type Bronze Drum, The Shizhaishan-Type Bronze Drum, The Dong Son Type Bronze Drum*

1. Introduction

Bronze drum is a kind of ritual and musical instrument widely distributed in southern China and Southeast Asia. From ancient to present, all ethnic groups in the area have attached great importance to it, making it sang between villages and hidden in mountains. Europe, as the initial center, firstly saw the scientific researches toward it. After the end of World War II, this center gradually transferred to China and Vietnam, two countries with a large number of bronze drum collections. Study on early bronze drums, which is related to significant issues like the origin, distribution and evolution of bronze drums, has always been the focus of research in China and Vietnam. Early bronze drums were roughly in use from the fifth century B.C. to the first century A.D., which was exactly the Bronze Age to the early Iron Age in southern China and Southeast Asia. Chinese scholars often name it the Wanjiaba-Type and the Shizhaishan-Type bronze drums, while Vietnamese scholars mostly refer to Heger I Type or the Group A and Group B of Dong Son drums. Under their respective academic traditions, Chinese and Vietnamese scholars have formed very different understanding. This article put forward shallow views on the development of bronze drum research based on a review of studies on early bronze drums by Chinese and Vietnamese scholars.

2. The Beginning of Different Understanding of the Early Bronze Drums

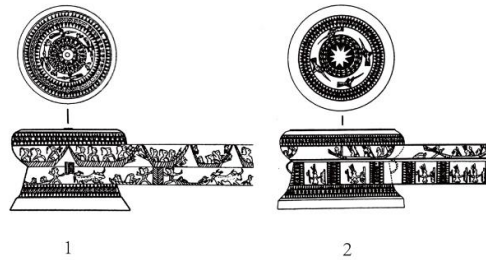
Since the second half of the 19th century, diplomats, antique dealers, and missionaries of European countries have successively brought bronze drums from China and Southeast Asian countries into Europe, which has attracted the attention of European scholars and prompted the earliest research. The European scholars should at first figure out what these bronze drums are and where they are from. Around these two issues, they carried out preliminary material collection and analysis. Among these achievements, the most influential one is the book *Alte Metalltrommeln aus Su'dostasien* by the Austrian archaeologist Fraz Heger (1902), who classified 165 bronze drums into 4 types (I, II, III, IV) and believed that Type I (Including the Shizhaishan-Type) was the earliest which originated in Southeast Asia. This classification method has a far-reaching influence on later research of Chinese and Vietnamese scholars, who usually follow or at least refer to it especially in early works.

In 1957, Wen You published the first Chinese book using modern scientific methods to study bronze drums, in which 36 bronze drums were divided into Type Jia (the East Type), Type Yi (the Western

Type), and Type Bing. The bronze drum was believed to be the product of the brothers of Han nationality in the south.

After the liberation of northern Vietnam in 1954, more Vietnamese scholars participated in the study of bronze drums. Tran Van Giap pointed out bronze drums distributed from southwestern and southcentral China to Thanh Hoa, Vietnam, which is similar to Wen's point of view.

Dao Duy Anh claimed that Ma Yuan won the Luoyue (雒越) bronze drums in Han Dynasty based on the records of the Chinese historical book Houhanshu (後漢書), which proved that the Luoyue (雒越), one group of Baiyue (百越) people, was the creator. Also, the bronze drum is a representative artifact of Dong Son Culture, a kind of Luoyue (雒越) culture. Đào asserted that the origin place was northern Vietnam, which inherited the views of F. Heger and V. Goloubew. The book also specifically introduced the Shizhaishan-Type bronze drums excavated in Jinning, Yunnan, China (Figure 1).



1. Bronze Drum M1:58 in Shizhanshan 2. Bronze drum M14:1 in Shizhaishan

Figure 1. Bronze drums in Shizhaishan, China and Tinh Lào Cai, Vietnam.

From the late 1950s to the early 1960s, a number of Dong Son Culture sites were excavated in Vietnam, including the important Yuexi bronze age tomb group. In the campaign to collect antiquities, certain amount of bronze drums was also found in Yen Bai, Lao Cai, Kien An, Thanh Hoa and other places. In 1963, *The First Bronze Age Sites of Vietnam* by Le Van Lan, Pham Van Geng and Nguyen Linh, the earliest Vietnamese archaeology book of this period, believed that the bronze drum was the most typical relic in the Vietnam Bronze Age and Dong Son Culture. They also held that Heger Type I bronze drums could be further refined and classified and more than 70 such drums were divided into 5 types in the book. Later, Nguyen Van Huyen and Hoang Vinh divided Dong Son bronze drums into 3 groups (A, B and C), of which group A consisted of 2 subgroups, A and A'. Tran Manh Phu divided Dong Son bronze drums into 4 groups. Chu Van Tan divided Dong Son bronze drums into 2 groups made up of 5 subgroups. Although the division criteria are different, they all accepted F. Heger's taxonomy.

Chinese scholars have also published several important papers in succession. Huang Zengqing divided Guangxi bronze drums into 4 types. In 1974, the research team of the Guangxi Museum published *A study of the ancient bronze drums of Guangxi* under the name of Hong Sheng, which divided Guangxi bronze drums into 4 types (Jia, Yi, Bing and Ding) and the Shizhaishan-Type belonged to Type Bing. These classifications basically followed Heger's way. In the same year, Feng Hanji discussed geometric ornaments, dancers, feathers, flying birds and boat-shaped decorations on 17 Shizhaishan-Type bronze drums and 31 shell containers by drum retrofitted excavated in Jinning, Yunnan and indicated that this decorations represented the cultural characteristics of the ancient Dian(滇) people. Feng also realized that the bronze drums in Jinning might originate from the bronze Fu in copper coffin of Dabona, Xiangyun and earlier bronze drums (the Wanjiaba-Type).

In summary of the early studies of bronze drums from the 1950s to the early 1970s, we can see that scholars from China and Vietnam gradually paid more and more attention to it. With limited excavation materials, the F. Heger classification method was mostly used whose standards were mainly based on shape and decoration. Chinese scholars mostly focused on domestic materials, and rarely took early bronze drums of Southeast Asian countries into consideration. At this time, the archaeological data of tombs with the Wanjiaba-Type bronze drums had not been published, therefore academic discussions about the origin and development of early bronze drums mostly stayed in the stage of speculation.

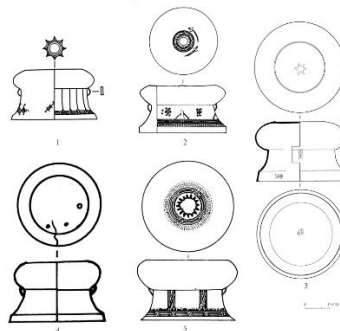
Since the early bronze drums unearthed in Vietnam were relatively scattered, the Vietnamese researches were mostly centered on Dong Son Culture. During this period, more and more scholars, in favor of their European counterparts, agreed the age of Dong Son Culture was from the fourth century B.C. or the third century B.C. to the A.D. first century (equal to China's Warring States Period to Han Dynasty), but the cultural time span is too large for the periodization of bronze drum research.

Vietnamese scholars disagreed with the European scholars' statement that the Dong Son Culture bronze casting technology originated from China. For them, the origin was believed to be from northern Vietnam. The academic differences between China and Vietnam have initially appeared.

3. Establishment of Early Bronze Drum Classification System

With the publication of new bronze drums materials unearthed from the ancient tombs of Lijiashan, Jiangchuan and Wanjiaba, Chuxiong in Yunnan, China, the research on early bronze drums has been greatly promoted. Wang Ningsheng proposed a new research way employing the methodology of bronze vessels research of the Central Plains in Yin and Zhou dynasty, which firstly finds the standard artifacts as reference for dating and zoning and then compares other bronze drums with the standard ones for further typological analysis. This method no longer follows the predecessors to conduct complicated queuing based on shapes and decorations to determine the age. With the development of Chinese archaeology, the methodology has been mature in the research of bronze vessels of Yin and Zhou dynasty, and it is obviously more scientific to apply it to the research of bronze drums. Later, Li Weiqing divided the drums in southern China into 3 types and 7 subtypes according to the ¹⁴C data. His actual aim was to infer the specific age of each typical bronze drums in scientific way, which was more detailed than that of Wang. However, they all believed that the earlier types of the Shizhaishan-Type bronze drums should be the Wanjiaba-Type and those in Dabona, Xiangyun. Li Kunsheng and Huang Derong formally proposed that the initial region to manufacture and use bronze drums was western to central Yunnan and pointed out the propagation route of the early bronze drums.

These studies have had an important impact on the consensus reached by the Chinese academic world on bronze drums. The Chinese Association of Ancient Bronze Drum Studies was established in 1980 to promote a comprehensive investigation of ancient bronze drums in China. In 1988, Chinese Ancient Bronze Drums, a masterpiece of Chinese bronze drums study, was published. The book continued Wang's research method of setting standard artifacts, used eight division method to divide the bronze drums into 8 types, each having a set of standard artifacts and determined their names: the Wanjiaba-Type, the Shizhaishan-Type, the Lengshuichong-Type, the Zunyi-Type, the Majiang-Type, the Beiliu-Type, the Lingshan-Type, and the Ximeng-Type, of which the Wanjiaba -Type (Figure 2. 1-3) and the Shizhaishan-Type were in the early bronze drum stage. The book also clarified the development and evolution relationship from the Wanjiaba-Type to the Shizhaishan-Type.



1. Bronze drum M23: 159 in Wanjiaba, Chuxiong 2. Bronze drum M1: 1 in Batatai, Qujing 3. Bronze drum C: 1025 in Yanyuan 4. Shangnong bronze drum in Vietnam 5. Songlin bronze drum in Vietnam

Figure 2. The Wanjiaba-Type bronze drums in china and the group D bronze drums in Vietnam

With the development of Vietnamese archaeology, the study of bronze drums has become a key research topic in Vietnamese archaeology and history circles after the 1970s. In 1975, the Vietnam History Museum published the book Dong Son Bronze Drum Discovered in Vietnam edited by Nguyen Van Huyen and Hoang Vinh, a great achievement at that time. 52 Dong Son bronze drums (including the Chinese Kaihua-Type drums) were classified in this book, but it was believed that bronze drums originated in northern Vietnam, and the Heger I type represented by the Yulou-Type drum was the earliest in the world. In 1982, Pham Minh Huyen, Nguyen Van Huyen and Trinh Sang classified Dong Son bronze drums into 5 groups of 18 types. Later in 1987, a typological study was conducted on 148 Chinese and 55 Vietnamese Dong Son drums from Southeast Asia by them and were divided into 5 groups of 22 types. In 1990, Pham Minh Huyen, Nguyen Van Huyen, and Lai Van De divided the collected 119 bronze drums into 5 types (A, B, C, D, E) of 22 subtypes and agreed with the F. Heger classification and equaled the Dong Son bronze drum to the Heger I Type, of which the group A and B

were equivalent to the Shizhaishan-Type in China, and the group D was equivalent to the Wanjiaba-Type (Figure 2. 4-5). Based on such classification, Vietnamese scholars believed that the group D was the latest and degenerated drum (Figure 3), which was diametrically opposed to Chinese scholars who believed that the Wanjiaba-Type bronze drums were the earliest.

All along, American and Japanese scholars have paid attention to the existence of a kind of bronze drum earlier than the Heger I Type. Emma C. Bunker named it the pre-Heger I type. Kaimura Imamura specifically discussed it and according to the archaeological materials of China at that time that the Wanjiaba-Type was earlier and the Dong Son bronze drum was derived from the Shizhaishan-Type or some other similar type.

F. Heger	China	Vietnam	America and Japan
	The Wanjiaba-Type	The Group D of Dong Son Bronze Drums	Pre-Heger I Type
The Heger I Type	The Shizhaishan-Type	The Group A & B of Dong Son Bronze Drums	

Figure 3. Classification and comparison of early bronze drums

Overall, from the late 1970s to the early 1990s, the study of bronze drums both reached to a peak in China and Vietnam with a great amount of investment and many new materials published. The different classification of bronze drums between China and Vietnam was essentially due to the distinct understanding of the origin. Chinese scholars believed that it was scientific to conclude the tombs with the Wanjiaba-Type bronze drums were popular between the Spring and Autumn Period and the late Warring States period based on C14 data and chronological analysis of coexisting objects. However, Vietnamese scholars believed that from a methodological perspective, the standard instrument artifacts used by Chinese scholars to represent a type was not comprehensive enough.

Chinese and Vietnamese scholars have established separate classification systems for research. The focus of divergence was that Chinese scholars believed the Wanjiaba-Type bronze drum was most primitive, the western Yunnan was the origin place and the bronze drums in other areas were the results of the outward spread of the Wanjiaba-Type based on archaeological materials and the rule that evolution process is from simple to complex. Vietnamese scholars, based on the relative late age of coexisting artifacts of group D of Dong Son bronze drum (the Wanjiaba-Type bronze drum) unearthed in Vietnam, claimed the group D to be a degenerated type of group A and B (the Shizhaishan-Type) and thus northern Vietnam was the birthplace of bronze drum.

4. The Reflection and Advancement of the Study on Early Bronze Drum

The long-standing differences in typological research have led some scholars to explore the source of the bronze drums through modern scientific analysis. There already existed the metal composition analysis in F. Heger's work mainly to trace the origin of minerals, but the complexity of the development and exchanges of culture cannot be fully solved relying only on metal composition and metallographic analysis. The application of modern lead isotope detection technology has brought new hope as the ratio of lead isotopes can help study the mineral source of artifacts containing lead. In 1992, Li Xiaocen et al. proposed that the minerals of early bronze drums in Yunnan almost all originated from the Dianchi Lake area in western to central Yunnan and the early bronze drums did tend to migrate southward, which supported the topology of Chinese bronze drum. Afterwards, Li in 2000, Cui Jianfeng and Wu Xiaohong in 2008 all compared the lead isotope ratios of the Wanjiaba-Type, the Shizhaishan-Type, and the Dong Son bronze drum. In 2002, Wei Dongping et al. tested 56 Vietnamese Heger Type I bronze drums. Wan Fubin et al. conducted a comparative analysis of tested bronze drums in China and Vietnam. Scholars finally found that the early bronze drums of the two countries may be made from local materials, but exchange also existed, which meant the south-to-north or north-to-south propagation based on topology were both too simple and the development and evolution of the early bronze drum might be far more complicated.

In the 21st century, under the influence of the eight divisions method prompted by the Chinese Association of Ancient Bronze Drum Research, Chinese scholars have published many books one after another. Li Weiqing demonstrated the bronze drums were created in Yunnan by analyzing the evolution of decorations and pointed out that the core of copper drum decorations is the mentality of people

praying for a good harvest, and a regional cultural phenomenon combined with the mysterious concept of reproduction. In 2006, Jiang Tingyu discussed the origin, type, craftsmanship and art of bronze drums. According to archaeological data, he believed that the bronze drum originally occurred in Yunnan. The bronze culture of northern Vietnam before Dong Son culture did not have the ability to cast large bronze containers while exquisite bronze drums emerged suddenly, which cannot prove that northern Vietnam is the origin of bronze drums convincingly.

In 2008, Li Kunsheng and Huang Derong collected early bronze drum data from China and Southeast Asian countries comprehensively, combined with the analysis of metal composition and lead isotope ratios, further confirmed the evolution from the Wanjiaba-Type to the Shizhaishan-Type and the later developed parallelly with the type A and B bronze drums in Vietnam, whose production were also under the influence of the Wanjiaba-Type in China. In the same year, Li Kunsheng and Li Anmin divided the Heger I Type (the Shizhaishan-Type) into 3 subtypes: the Shizhaishan-Type, the Wenshan-Type and the Dong Son Type.

In 1991, academic interaction has been increasing between China and Vietnam with the normalization of diplomatic relations. Vietnamese scholars slowly began to reflect on the research of the early bronze drums. Hoang Xuan Chinh advocated that the origin of the bronze drums was multi-source with at least two centers: northern Vietnam and Yunnan, China, which communicated with each other. In 2012, Nguyen Van Hao revised his opinion about the time of type D of Dong Son bronze drums, some of which could be as early as the fourth B.C. to the second B.C. while some could be as late as A.D. first. Later, he believed that the Heger classification was not applicable to the Dong Son bronze drums and only the Heger Type I with unambiguous Dong Son decorations could be surly the Dong Son bronze drums. He also agreed that bronze drums with relative ages or absolute ages could be used as a standard artifact for classification, helping us understand the development of Dong Son bronze drums and other types. Despite his disagreement with the research conclusions of Chinese scholars, he believed that the standard artifact research method was suitable for the Dong Son bronze drum study in Vietnam. In 2019, he divided the 18 Wanjiaba-Type drums in Vietnam into 3 types, whose age ranged from the late Warring States Period to the early Eastern Han Dynasty. During this period, the Dong Son and Dian-Type (the Shizhaishan-Type) bronze drums both existed and developed.

The transition from the debate about who influenced who in the previous stage to the confirmation that several types of early bronze drums existed parallelly in a certain period of time is a great advancement in early bronze drum research, from which we can see that the early bronze drum research in China and Vietnam has gradually jumped out of the stereotype of single line communication theory.

Chinese scholars have also begun to reflect on the enshrined eight divisions method of the Chinese Bronze Drum Research Society. In 2003, Wan Fubin, Fang Minghui and Wei Dongping proposed the standard artifacts were all Chinese drums and thus the conclusions drawn on the pure basis of domestic materials on bronze drums were not accepted by Southeast Asian countries. What's more, from the founding of Vietnam to the normalization of relationship between China and Vietnam, the nationalism sentiments also influenced some scholars.

In fact, Li Kunsheng and Huang Derong have begun to include the Heger I Type bronze drums found in Southeast Asian countries outside Vietnam in their book, and explored the connection with the early bronze drums of China and Vietnam, which was the first attempt to do research at a large geographic horizon for Chinese scholars. In 2018, Wan Fubin and Wei Danfang also introduced the bronze drums unearthed in Southeast Asian countries, and believed that the understanding of Dong Son culture was a must for the study of Dong Son bronze drums. Coincidentally, Peng Changlin abandoned the previous research paradigm with attention only on the bronze drums, and instead placed them in the overall framework of the development of bronze culture in southern China and Southeast Asia for typological analysis. He believed the Shizhaishan-Type bronze drums originated from the Wanjiaba-Type III which first appeared in Dong Son culture, then spread to the surroundings, and evolved into the Lengshuichong-Type in northern Vietnam. Decorations of the Shizhaishan-Type bronze drums were influenced by the Wuyue culture of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty. His viewpoint that the Wanjiaba-Type bronze drum developed parallelly with the Shizhaishan-Type for a period of time was similar to that of Nguyen Van Hao.

The present research is more in-depth. In 2015, Wan and Wei first proposed the concept of the bronze drum cultural circle and discussed deeply from the geographical distribution, cultural and technological exchanges, social and cultural functions, nationality and customs, Zhuangdong language, rice culture and bronze drum place name. In 2016, Peng demonstrated the process of the formation,

development, prosperity, dissemination and inheritance of the bronze drum cultural circle combined with archaeological data. They all affirmed the important role of the bronze drum cultural circle in the study of ancient history of China and Southeast Asia and the current cultural exchanges. Other scholars suggested using historical anthropological contextual analysis methods to conduct research on the institutional behavior and social organization of the expansion of the bronze drum.

At the same time, Chinese scholars have also strengthened the collection and translation of domestic and foreign bronze drum materials. In 2014, the Chinese Association of Ancient Bronze Drum Studies and the Anthropology Museum of Guangxi compiled a book which included detailed dimensional data and decorations of bronze drums throughout China. There are also great breakthrough in the collection of bronze drums in Vietnam. The Museum of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, the Guangxi Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology and the Vietnam National History Museum co-authored the book *Vietnamese Bronze Drums*, which contains a total of 126 ancient Vietnamese bronze drums. However, it still uses the F. Heger classification. Li Fuqiang et al. compiled the book series *China-Southeast Asia Bronze Drums*, which has published 6 Heger I Type bronze drums in Laos and 11 in Cambodia, which opened the way for studies of early bronze drums by Chinese and Vietnamese scholars.

From the review on early bronze drum research, it can be seen that Chinese and Vietnamese scholars have devoted a lot of energy to the classification and typology of bronze drums, which created a very important research basic. Most of the research carried out on this basis also belongs to cultural-historical archeology, including the meaning of ornamentation, ethnicity of artifacts, etc. For the advancement of early bronze drum research in the future, we have the following thinking. Firstly, Chinese and Vietnamese scholars have made great achievements in the typological classification of their own countries based on the standard artifact research method. However, the excavation of bronze drums in various countries and the publication of documents can help scholars break through the existing national boundaries, integrate and analyze the materials from a global perspective. The new system of classification and staging needs to be tested by the development process of the bronze civilization in the entire region rather than simple analysis on bronze drums. Besides, the new typological analysis should be a long-term summary and continuous revision process. Secondly, it is necessary to strengthen the scientific and technical analysis like the metal composition and lead isotope of the copper drum. The existing detection results have reflected to us that the intra-regional propagation of the early copper drum is far more complicated and changeable than the single-line or double-line propagation theory generated by typological analysis. Of course, accumulation of scientific testing data requires a long-term process, and research conclusions are often not available at once. The microscopic observation of the early bronze drum casting technology is often difficult to achieve due to the requirement of actual observations, which is also a breakthrough point in the future. Thirdly, multiple theories can help broaden the research field of early bronze drums. For example, we can employ the scientific quantitative analysis of process archaeology to make a theoretical explanation of the early copper drum archaeological phenomenon and the reasons for the development of social culture. Unlike the previous literature research and classification dating, the symbolic archaeology theory can be used to explore the ancient Dian people's cosmology reflected in the development and evolution of the early bronze drum decoration design and their combination. It can also help understand how the aristocracy used the symbolism of early bronze drum products to manipulate social beliefs and use power. The structural archaeology theories focusing on the accompanying objects and context can contribute to interpreting the social system and rules. The Marxist archaeological theory can be applied to explore the differences between burial areas and social levels to explore ethnic interest relationships and social development dynamics.

All in all, to make full use of various theories of archaeology and even interdisciplinary theories such as ethnology and anthropology can help explore more about the social functions, system and spirit behind the early bronze drums in addition to traditional issues such as the origin, evolution, production, and dissemination of the original early bronze drums, which means we can truly see ancient people through their relics.

5. Conclusion

Early bronze drums were the treasures of ancient national culture in China and Southeast Asia. Researches on them have been carried out with modern social science theories for nearly seventy years. Through the efforts of several generations of scholars, both China and Vietnam established their own chronological sequence of ancient bronze drums. Although Chinese and Vietnamese scholars still

disagree on the origin of them, they have broken some academic barriers and reached some consensus in standard artifact method and the spread of drums. With the sharing of archaeological data and the deepening of research, it is increasingly necessary for us to jump out of the original research paradigm and figure out the emergence and development of early bronze drums based on the development process of bronze civilization in China and Southeast Asia. At the same time, we need to strengthen scientific detection and analysis, make full use of archaeology and interdisciplinary theories to expand the breadth and depth of the theme of bronze drum research, which is also an important direction for the future research.

After entering the 21st century, some scholars believe that the study of bronze drums seems to be gradually falling into silence, which is not the case. At least Chinese scholars have greatly surpassed their predecessors in the breadth and depth of early bronze drum research. As Jiang said, this is just a superficial phenomenon and we are gathering strength to advance to a higher level.

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