

***Timeless Splendour: Treasures from the National Museum of China.* Ban Seng Hoe. Gatineau, QC: Canadian Museum of Civilization, Distributed by the University of Washington Press, 2008. 32 pp.\***

Reviewed by Xiaohong Chen

This small booklet, with 32 dazzling images of ancient Chinese treasures and interesting descriptions of each entry, conveys four thousand years of Chinese cultural history and artifacts to the modern audience. It acclaims Chinese people's wisdom, technological achievement, and marvelous artistic creativity. It suggests that ingenious human creation has eternal and universal value, across time, space, and cultures.

The 32 objects in this catalogue are drawn from 120 artifacts displayed in the exhibition "Treasures from China," a celebration of cultural exchange between the National Museum of China and Canadian Museum of Civilization. The foreword and preface in the booklet, respectively contributed by the two national museums and the two nations' ambassadors, shed light on the profound meanings of the exhibition from the perspectives of cultural diversity, cultural sharing, and cultural appreciation, as well as understanding among different nations in the world.

The catalogue demonstrates the evolution of Chinese civilization and the consistency of Chinese cultural values and aesthetics. The selected objects in this booklet represent a long period of human history, from Neolithic period Yangshao pottery, bronze vessels of the Shang dynasty, and pictorial bricks of the Han, to the paintings of the Ming and porcelain vases of the Qing, etc. This historical selection leads the modern audience to trace the progress of human ability in the creation of beauty and quality of life. The catalogue also illuminates the richness and the diversity of Chinese cultural heritage through presenting a wide range of items made with various materials and styles such as pottery, tortoise shell, metalwork, stone, brick, paper, cloth, and porcelain. A Buddhist Statue of Guanyin and a Xianbei ethnic group's Gold Ornament in the catalogue display to the audience diverse cultural influences in the historical formation of Chinese culture.

Besides the exquisite images of the objects, another valuable part of this catalogue is the description of each entry. The descriptions contextualize the objects by providing detailed historical and socio-cultural information: the time period, the location of excavation, and the physical data of each object. The captions also explain to the audience how the objects were made and used, as well as the symbolic meanings of the patterns, such as the motifs of fish, dragon, phoenix, and peony. These descriptions build a link between objects and audience, the ancient world and the modern world, and effectively help a modern Western audience to appreciate and understand objects from an unfamiliar world.

When the modern Western audience comes to appreciate ancient Chinese artifacts through the instrument of this catalogue, the booklet achieves its mission. This mission is to convince the

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audience that valuable human cultural heritages are timeless and borderless. Ancient Chinese cultural heritage is also an expression of world cultural heritage.

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