

The Temple of Confucius and the Establishment of Ritual Vessels from the Qianlong Court

Wu, Hsiao-yun

Department of Antiquities

National Palace Museum

Abstract

In 1747, the Qianlong emperor reflected on the regulations governing ritual vessels from the Ming dynasty and continued to follow the Yongzheng emperor in presenting archaic-style ritual vessels to the Temple of Confucius in Qufu, in the process adapting Qing imperial ritual vessels to conform with those of antiquity. In examining related textual evidence, it becomes clearly evident that these ritual vessels reportedly based on Confucian ritual classics of the Zhou dynasty are much different from the Zhou dynasty bronzes we know today, archaistic ritual vessels of the Song dynasty, and even those found in illustrated catalogs of bronzes. This was coincidentally the time when the Qianlong emperor was examining the imperial collection of ancient bronzes and beginning to compile the *Xiqing gujian* catalog, though there is no clear indication that the forms of Zhou dynasty bronzes were consulted in the production of these ritual vessels. What was the source of the archaic style that Qianlong emperor adapted to his ritual vessels? Did the numerous ritual vessels from the “Three Dynasties” of high antiquity at the court influence ritual vessels or the rites? These are the questions that the present study seeks to address.

The present research analyzes the ritual vessels presented by the Yongzheng emperor to the Temple of Confucius in Qufu and the ritual vessels adapted to conform to antiquity made in the reign of the Qianlong emperor. The study proposes that the antiquity upon which the latter was based actually followed the idea of the explanation provided in the Confucian classics, the imagery of ancient ritual vessels gained from the Confucius temple and school system, and some elements from Ming dynasty ritual vessels along with some new innovations of the time. Furthermore, focus on the Temple of Confucius in Qufu brought about changes in the placement of Zhou dynasty bronzes in the Temple of Confucius for the personal sacrifices of the emperor. The present study traces the production of three sets of bronzes gifted to the Temple of Confucius by the Qianlong emperor, demonstrating an appreciation and knowledge of ancient bronzes in the imperial collection as well as how the method of display influenced the choice and production of

accessories for the three sets of bronzes. This in turn changed the appearance of displays for ritual vessels used in the Confucius Memorial Ceremony.

Keywords: Qianlong emperor, ritual vessels, ancient bronzes, Temple of Confucius

(Translated by Donald E. Brix)