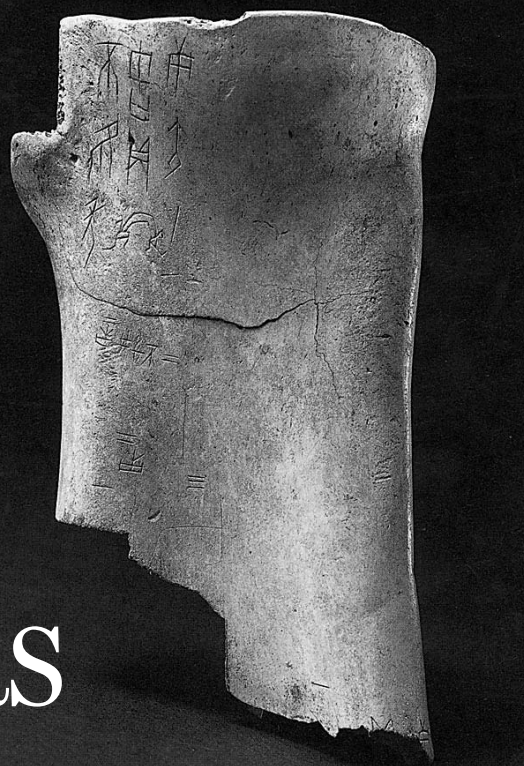


Oracle bones were medicine, not archaeological relics. Thanks to the efforts of two men, these historical relics escaped the fate of being all ground up and digested. Zhao Ruixue reports from Shandong, where the museum is now home to a rich collection.

## THE BONE COLLECTORS



Wang Yirong was a scholar and high ranking official in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), and we would never have known his name if he had not fallen ill one day with malaria in 1899. To make him feel better, he was given a prescription by his doctor that included "dragon bones".

These dragon bones were occasionally unearthed by local farmers, and sold to traditional Chinese medicine practitioners, who often prescribed them whole or crushed for certain diseases. Wang's doctor decided he needed a dose of ground-up "dragon bones".

Wang got curious about these so-called dragon bones. What were they? To find out, he sent a servant out to buy a whole

bone, and he found some strange hieroglyphics on them. He looked closely and saw that the scratches resembled the earliest Chinese writing from almost 13 centuries ago.

His discovery shook the academic world of that time and the history of Chinese writing was, well ... rewritten. The dragon bones were recognized for what they really were — oracle bones used for divination.

But it was thanks to Luo Zhenyu (1866-1940), a famous Chinese antiquities collector, that the Shandong Provincial Museum now has a rich collection of oracle bones on

exhibit, with some pieces that are of particular significance to ancient China.

"The oracle bones left by Luo Zhenyu contain very important historical information for the study of etymology," says Yu Qiuwei, an archeologist at the Shandong Provincial Museum.

Two significant pieces in Luo's collection are the Ma Divination Bone (马卜骨) and the Rainbow Divination Bone (虹不韦年卜骨), both of which are from the later Shang Dynasty, from 16th century to 11th century BC.

The first bears a Chinese word "鑄" with the word for gold as a prefix. And since "gold" was also used as a general term to denote metals, it was interpreted as proof that bronzes were already popular among high-ranking officials of that period.

The Rainbow Divination Bone bears the Chinese characters that literally mean "the year that rainbows appear", which does not augur well for agriculture, according to Xu Bo, another archeologist at the museum.

"The information on the Rainbow Divination Bone is China's earliest record of rainbows," he says.

The Shandong Provincial Museum has 1,319 pieces from Luo's oracle bones collection.

They were recovered from a Japanese arsenal at Dalian in Liaoning province after China won the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression.

In the 1950s, the oracle bones were sent to Shandong and kept in the Shandong Provincial Museum.



### IF YOU GO

SHANDONG PROVINCIAL MUSEUM  
9 am-5 pm, daily except Mondays  
11899 Jingshi Donglu,  
Jinan, Shandong province  
Free admission

How did Luo's collection end up in enemy hands in the first place?

Luo was the first academic who collected oracle bones being excavated near the present site of Xiaotun Village at Anyang in Henan province. This was where the capital of the Shang Dynasty was located.

After Luo died, however, his descendants sold his collection, with many of the oracle bones scattered both inside and outside China.

Another important collector was James Mellon Menzies, a Canadian

who came to China in 1910, and who had gathered about 50,000 pieces of oracle bones by 1917.

He brought his collection to the Jinan-based Qilu University in 1932 when he went there to teach. In 1936, he returned home, and never came back because of the wars.

Menzies' collection later went to several museums in China, and 8,000 pieces are now with the Shandong Provincial Museum.

Unfortunately, many of those are small or crushed, and only 3,668 pieces are inscribed, according to Xu Bo.

The oracle bones are testaments to the shaman practices of the Shang Dynasty, when every important occasion involving kings and aristocrats needed divinations. The oracle bones themselves, contrary to belief, are not from dragons. They were mostly the shoulder blades of oxen, and the shells of tortoises and turtles.

During the divination ceremony, the date, the diviner's name and the question to the oracle were written on the bones, which were then heated until cracks appeared. These cracks were read as signs from the gods.

"When the kings wanted to make decisions, whether it be on national affairs or on going out hunting, they would seek an oracle for the success or failure," Xu explains. But for us, the oracle bones do not hold answers for the future. Instead, they tell us much about the past.

You may contact the writer at zhaoruixue@chinadaily.com.cn.

## Common art in regional memory

By ZHANG KUN  
CHINA DAILY

China, South Korea and Japan share much in culture, philosophy and values, and the three countries have had a long and sophisticated relationship throughout history. An art exhibition at the Shanghai Museum of Contemporary Art hopes to improve understanding by looking back at some shared memories.

"Nostalgia" was put together by South Korean curator Kim Sun-hee.

"Last year I went back to Seoul after living abroad for 12 years," Kim told the media at the opening of the show. A lot had changed, and reunion with old friends and families brought back warm memories. Then she was invited by the Korean Foundation, which is dedicated to promoting South Korea to the world, to put up an exhibition of contemporary East Asian art.

Kim wanted to make the show "happy, warm and comfortable", because too often, contemporary art can be cynical, bitter and cryptic for audiences.

When the show was presented in Seoul last year, 12 artists from China, Japan and South Korea were featured, and this year when it arrived in Shanghai, the large space of MoCa allowed her to include two more artists.

The exhibition brings together paintings, photography, video and more complex installations.

"The exhibition provides a strong disposition of a large country of China, a delicate sensibility of Japan, and a conceptual character with folk elements based on nature of South Korea," says Kim. "What has already become dull in West is being reinvented in a refreshing and exciting way in East Asia."

The exhibition aims to provide a cultural platform to cultivate closer ties between the three East Asian states in the "new Asian age" or "East Asian age," according to Kim Byung-kook, president of the Korea Foundation.

In 2007, top diplomats of the three countries agreed to make this exhibition part of the celebrations of the 20th anniversary of Sino-South Korean diplomatic ties and the 40th anniversary of Sino-Japanese diplomatic ties.

"Looking back is a way to look into the future," says Samuel Kung, chairman and director of MoCA Shanghai. "A new journey is born out of retrospection towards the future of contemporary art."

Tu Weicheng, an artist from Taiwan, created an interactive installation with handcrafted details that looks like an antique closet. He Tu incorporated clockworks that play simple melodies, and presented animated images relating to today's social life and news events.

"I call it archaeology narration," Tu says. "It looks antique but is totally contemporary." Audiences are encouraged to play with the installation and it was the most popular piece when the show was in Seoul, the curator says.

All three countries went through huge social changes in the 20th century, when their traditional arts were suddenly overshadowed by Western arts.

As Kim Sun-hee says: "We sort out our memory of the past ... It is a continuation of our tradition and a beginning of the future for East Asian arts on the global art landscape."

You may contact the writer at zhangkun@chinadaily.com.cn.



PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Won Seoung-won's work presents a landscape of traditional country life in South Korea.

## cityguide

### BEIJING

## China's young rockers abroad

By HAN BINGBIN  
CHINA DAILY

Some may deprecate China's indie rock scene, but some local indie groups are proving the critics wrong by reaching up to a whole new level. They have the success to prove it — having taken their music overseas in a way their mainstream competitors can only dream about.

The lineup for this year's highly influential South by Southwest Festival, to be held in March in Austin, Texas, will feature four young bands from Beijing: Carsick Cars, Nova Heart, Rustic and Deadly Cradle Death.

The seasoned indie rock band Carsick Cars will be returning to the festival while the others are making their debut. Though relatively new, the bands have all had considerable experience performing overseas.

Rustic, for example, beat dozens of leading bands worldwide at the London Scala and took the top spot in the Global Battle of the Bands, the largest live talent competition for musical groups of all genres. It won for its pioneering effort in incorporating a clarinet into Rustic's music.

Chris B, GBOB China's director-general of distribution, says Rustic's success at the global competition broadened the horizon for performers in Beijing and the entire country.

In September last year, Rustic toured six cities in the United Kingdom



PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Li Yan, lead singer of Rustic.

### IF YOU GO

8:30 pm, March 1  
Yugong Yishan, west courtyard of former site of Duan Qirui Government, 3-2 Zhangzizhong Lu, Dongcheng district  
010-6404-2711

including London and Manchester and recorded two singles with Norwegian songwriter and producer Mads Hauge at Rak Studio in London.

Li Yan, lead singer of the band, says such singing experiences overseas really helped him mature, both as a musician and performer.

"The interaction with foreign musicians and the traveling experience itself always give me a lot of inspiration. I've

created some new songs out of that," he says. "Moreover, because I don't know how the audience will react, I really try my best with every performance and they all turned out to be rewarding."

But there is at least one connection Li shares with the audiences: He sings songs in English.

That's something Rustic has in common with many other local indie rock bands. They may not be fluent, but their decision to sing in English has been an effective tool in attracting foreign audiences at clubs and bars.

Besides the fact that English is phonetically more suitable for the straight-forward rock style, Li says, he writes songs in English also because he wants them to be heard by more people.

But Zhang Shouwang, lead singer of Carsick Cars, doubts that language has been a factor in their success overseas and rejects the idea that many see them as "being fashionably international".

"Western audiences accept you only because you have good music. That has nothing to do with being so-called international," Zhang says firmly.

"To use English or Chinese is just like a choice between whether to use piano or guitar. I'll make the choice according to what I want to express at that moment."

You can listen to the bands at a preview performance this week.

You may contact the writer at hanbingbin@chinadaily.com.cn.

### BEIJING

#### Gothic rock

The German Gothic rock band Lacrimas Profundere will perform in Beijing on the final stop of its first concert tour in China. The 19-year-old band, whose name means "to shed tears" in Latin, combines angst and rock 'n' roll and creates a unique music style.

It is frequently on music bulletin boards around Europe and has cooperated with top producers both in Germany and overseas.

7 pm, March 4, Tango Club, 79 Heping Xijie, Dongcheng district. 400-6103-3721

#### Russian music revisited

Russian composer Valery Gergiev will lead the London Symphony Orchestra in a concert in Beijing.

The 59-year-old musician is famous for his strong Russian flavor and he chooses a repertoire including the works of Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich and Prokofiev this time.

Since his debut in China in 1998, Gergiev has visited Beijing many times, but this is the first time he brings his own orchestra.

7:30 pm, March 1, National Center for the Performing Arts, 2 West Chang'an Avenue. 010-6655-0000

#### Spotlight on the dragon

Capital Museum holds a special exhibition of antiques relating to the culture of the Chinese dragon throughout ancient dynasties.

The exhibition, mainly composed of sculpture, ceramics, painting and daily-use articles, presents a detailed explanation for the evolution of dragon images in Chinese life, religion, politics and many other aspects. It also covers the antiques in many areas in China, giving a panorama of dragon culture.

9 am-5 pm, until March 20 except Mondays. Capital Museum, 16 Fuxingmenwai Dajie, Xicheng district. 010-6337-0491

### Aussie ales and pies

The Hutong will host Pies and Ales Night, serving up homemade Aussie-style meat pies with music and merriment. You can taste the genuine Aussie flavor in 100 percent pure beef brisket, and take a private cooking class if you wish.

7-10 pm, March 2, The Hutong, 1 Juidaowan Zhonglu, Dongcheng district. 159-0104-6127. Book in advance at www.thehutong.com

### SHANGHAI

#### Baroque on the rebound

The Freiburg Baroque Orchestra from Germany was founded in 1987, aiming "to enrich the world of Baroque music with new sounds". A concert under the direction of Gottfried von de Goltz features Bach's suite for orchestra series. The orchestra tours extensively around the world. Both of its musical directors, Von der Goltz and Petra Müllejans, are violinists.

7:30 pm, March 9, Shanghai Concert Hall, 523 Yan'an Donglu. 021-6386-2836

#### Of boys and men

Boy: A Contemporary Portrait is a group exhibition features recent and commissioned new works by contemporary visual artists. This show attempts to portray young men of the times and to redefine manhood within a global context. It includes a series of male portraits that are multifaceted and conceptual. Many works in the exhibition probe ideas about masculinity and male identity.

10am-6 pm, Tue-Sat; 12-6 pm, Sun and Mon by appointment, until April 8. Leo Xu Projects, Lane 49, Building 3, Fuxing Xilu. 021-3461-1245

### HONG KONG

#### British scene

The Union Jack marches in with the launch of White Cube, a leading

contemporary art gallery. White Cube's first foray outside of England adds a 550-square-meter space in the stately Robert A.M. Stern-designed building to its galleries in London's Bermondsey, Mason's Yard and Hoxton Square. The inaugural exhibition is the world premiere of Gilbert and George's London Pictures. The dynamic duo has been working together since 1967 and promotes the concept of art for all using its trademark format of a large grid broken into a matrix of signs and images.

Grand opening March 2; exhibition ends May 5. White Cube, 50 Connaught Road, Central. 852-2592-2000

#### Banana split



One of the city's wackiest charity events is a race for a great cause. Returning for its seventh edition, Beat the Banana! Charity Run raises support for cancer prevention while promoting the benefits of regular exercise. Participants dress up in yellow and chase a fellow runner posing as a giant banana. This year, runners have to catch Shane Bourk, head of Fresh Food at Wellcome supermarkets. The 3- and 6-kilometer runs are organized by the World Cancer Research Fund Hong Kong. The winner of the 6-km race gets a Virgin Atlantic return flight to London to compete in the Beat the Banana! there on May 17.

8 am and 9 am, March 4. Tsim Sha Tsui East Promenade between Hong Kong Cultural Center and International Mail Center. To register: www.wcrf-hk.org or 852-2529-5025