

Collections of the Palace Museum

In ancient China, there were various timekeeping devices very early on, such as sundials, fire clocks, and copper clepsydras (water clocks), etc. However, the modern mechanical clocks, invented in Europe after 1300 AD, were only introduced to China via Macao after the mid-16th century.

More than 400 years ago, after numerous explorations, missionaries who came to Macao from the West started to figure out the strategy of facilitating their missionary work in China, by presenting the achievements of the advanced science and art in Europe. In the 10th year of the reign of Wanli (1582), two Jesuit missionaries, Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607) and Francesco Pasio (1554-1612), presented a Western chiming clock which had never been seen or known to the Chinese to a Guangdong official, in exchange for a stay of four to five months in Zhaoqing. Missionary Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), who arrived in Macao after Ruggieri, also went to Beijing after many twists and turns in 1601. Ricci presented two precious chiming clocks to the Ming Emperor Wanli as gifts and his permanent residence in the capital was granted. From then on, the solemn and majestic Chinese palace began to ring with the tick tock sound of Western clocks.

In the Qing dynasty, the royal family, officials and civilians all showed great interest and enthusiasm in these imported Western clocks that had exquisite decorations, beautiful shapes and accurate timekeeping. Later, China also began its own production of mechanical clocks.

As the largest museum in China that houses collections of treasures in the possession of the imperial families through the dynasties, the Palace Museum has well preserved more than 1,000 pieces of clocks from Britain, France, Switzerland and some other countries, as well as those manufactured by the imperial workshop of the Qing dynasty, dating from the 18th century to the early 20th century. The meticulous mechanical work and the extravagant decorative workmanship of these pieces represent the highest level of clock-making technology at that time and have made the Palace Museum one of the best museums of its kind in the world.

In December 2004, during the celebration of the 5th anniversary of the establishment of the Macao Special Administrative Region (Macao SAR), collections of clocks from the Palace Museum in Beijing were exhibited in Macao and were highly appreciated by the residents and visitors at home and abroad. As the Macao SAR is celebrating the 25th anniversary of its establishment this year, it is of great significance for Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau to issue philatelic products of the collection of clocks from the Palace Museum. On the one hand, the stamps showcase the rich and impressive collections of the Palace Museum. On the other hand, they highlight Macao's role as an important bridge for cultural exchange between the East and the West.

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