

# Helping more cultural relics return to China

By Liu Gonghu

Last month, the "2014 Great Rivers Forum" was held in Wuhan. A special guest was invited to the forum, Mr. B. Gomez, a professional French auctioneer. His efforts to help recover China's cultural relics which have been lost overseas are greatly respected and appreciated.

With Gomez's hard work, the two bronze statues of the Old Summer Palace — the Rat Head and the Rabbit Head were returned to China three years ago. About ten years ago, a bronze tripod made around 300 B.C. went back to Xi'an after its hundred years' stay overseas. The return was achieved by Mr. Gomez with the help of a bidder's purchase and their donation. Not long ago, an illegal auction of a jade seal was stopped by Gomez. It was used by an emperor in the Qing Dynasty. The seal will be returned to China very soon.

Having two talks with Mr. Gomez, our journalist got to know him better and learned some stories of the tortuous experiences required to return some of these Chinese cultural relics.



B. Gomez Photo by Peng Nian

## Trading cultural relics disrespects history

**Journalist:** What motivates you to help China to get back lost cultural relics?

**Mr. Gomez:** I am engaged in the artwork industry, witnessing the work of many archaeologists, including Chinese. On the one hand, archaeology studies the market value of artwork; on another more important side, it seeks the origin of human beings, which is my inspiration for this work. I think every piece of art treasure should be kept at the place where it belongs and where it is treasured as heritage. One may not be affected by the historical importance of the relic if it is only seen as an item to be sold. If one has seen those relics in their birthplaces, known how they were found and excavated, and visited the birthplaces of human civilization, one cannot bear to see those cultural relics dismembered from their original culture. In my point of view, the transaction of relics disrespects history and civilization.

**Journalist:** How did you get to know about China?

**Mr. Gomez:** I knew China through books when I was young. I know better through traveling in China as an adult. My first visit to China was in 1982. I have visited many provinces famous for cultural relics. Whenever I go, the local museums are always my first destination.

## "I am just an ordinary person, doing whatever I should"

**Journalist:** Have you ever faced dangerous situations?

**Mr. Gomez:** When I proceeded against the Gannet Museum, I experienced the toughest time in my life. I was threatened and warned that I should give up my principles. I was defamed and they claimed that I sold fake antiques. I received an audit, as I was suspected to have committed economic crimes. I was even forced to return to France when I was on a business

trip to China, and was accused of fraud. I had to explain the truth to the judges, and this accusation became the reason why I left France to live in Spain.

**Journalist:** Have you ever felt that you should give up?

**Mr. Gomez:** I feel very strongly about what I have been doing. Don't ask me how I get the courage or whether I have any grand plans. I am just an ordinary person, doing whatever I should.

## An imperial jade seal is on its way back to China

**Journalist:** What kind of role did you play in helping the bronze Rat Head and Rabbit Head statues return to China?

**Mr. Gomez:** These two bronze statues from the Old Summer Palace were lost in other countries. Cai Mingchao, a Chinese collector, won the auction for these two statues with 31.49 million Euros, but he claimed in public that he wouldn't pay the money to the auction company. After Cai Mingchao's claim to pay nothing, the auction of the bronze animal heads was laid aside. Then, Bergé, who had had the items and authorized the auction, contacted me and hoped I could find a Chinese buyer. I thought the auction lacked justice, and with persistent efforts, I finally contacted the Pirault family in France. They bought the animal head statues and donated them to China.

**Journalist:** What's your next target to send back to China?

**Mr. Gomez:** I do not have any new target at present, but I know an imperial jade seal is on its way back to China. Four years ago, Artcurial Auction House planned to auction off a jade seal used by an emperor in the Qing Dynasty. I talked to the auction agent and persuaded them not to auction off the imperial piece in public, but I failed. Later, the jade seal was sold for one million Euro. Finally, the auction house canceled the transaction. Under our joint efforts, the jade seal is now on its way back home to China.



The bronze statues of the Rat Head and the Rabbit Head



The imperial jade seal

The bronze tripod