
A Theory of Objects: Transformations in Northern Song Conceptions of “Emblematic Forms in the Construction of Tools”

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Abstract: At the turn of the twentieth century, scholars put forward the idea of Chinese artifacts from different perspectives in order to overturn the prejudice against "artifacts" in traditional Chinese philosophy. In particular, they considered the normative role of artifacts for public literacy. Recent scholarly research shows that contemporary scholars are increasingly inclined to use Chinese artifactological ideas to explain ancient Chinese concepts and beliefs about artifacts. In fact, however, this idea of artifact design and production can be traced back to the Song Dynasty. The scholars of the Song Dynasty interpreted the contents of the I Ching about "ware" from a new perspective, legitimizing the study of "ware" and forming the original Chinese idea of artifact theory, which was widely applied to various disciplines in the Qing Dynasty. In this essay, I explore the changing conceptions of 'object' and 'emblem' through the Song, through differentiation and analysis of the differing contexts in which the phrase 'zhi qi shang xiang' occurs. Through close readings of the context in which it appears in Song official histories, incidental writings (biji) and essay collections, I am able to tease out the concrete significance of the phrase, allowing us to analyse its transformations over time. I start with analysis of the original source of the phrase to seek its earliest connotations as a basis on which to distinguish and classify the later, alternative readings it gains. Subsequently, I move into an analysis of Chen Xiliang's *Zhi qi shang xiang lun* and the debate it generated to explore the Song transformations of the meaning of the phrase and the reasons for the semantic shift which occurred during this period. From this, I determine that between the Northern Song to the Southern Song there was a shift in the approach to tools, from uncertainty to a definite affirmation of their importance and aesthetic value.

Keywords: Zhi Qi Shang Xiang, Song, Emblems, Object Theory

1. Abstract

The importance and interest attached to tools reached a peak during the Northern Song period. This peak manifested itself in the attention paid to pre-Song stone engravings and hence to bronzes of the Shang and Zhou periods, appreciation of pottery and to cultivation of flowers. They not only paid great attention to such leisure objects, but also through the creation of a supporting literature, elevated their interest into theoretical heights. This is manifested in texts such as Li Yuanfu's *Xian Qin gu qi ji*, Ouyang Xiu's *Ji gu lu* and Luoyang *mudan ji*, and Wang Fu's *Xuanhe bogu tu*. However, as they did so, they were filled with a particular uncertainty about the intellectual project they were undertaking, as

explored in Ronald Egan's *The Problem of Beauty*. However, by the time of the Southern Song, scholars had ceased to be covert in their appreciation of objects. Instead, they sought to find a theoretical basis for their appreciation of objects in even older texts. Thus, their methodology appeared to be more in line with traditional Confucian norms.

While scholars nowadays focus on the semantics and usage of the phrase "making vessels and shangxiang", they seldom pay attention to the question of when the etymology of the phrase "making vessels and shangxiang" was transferred from the I Ching to the elaboration of plastic arts. Through the CNKI system, I found the current research on the corpus and the context of "making vessels and giving images". In terms of art, clarifying this point helps us to

understand the theoretical basis for scholars' use of the phrase "making vessels and giving them an image" as a traditional Chinese view of objects.

In view of this, this paper explores the shift in the semantic meaning of the phrase "making tools and giving images" in the Song Dynasty and the motivation behind this shift, based on the corpus included in the Dingxiu Full Text Search Platform for Ancient Texts and the Aiyusheng Database of Basic Chinese Ancient Texts, in conjunction with the library's good old books.

2. Article

The phrase 'zhi qi shang xiang', which can be loosely translated as 'emblematic forms in the construction of things' originates in the *Xi ci* commentary to the Yijing. In its original context, the phrase read: "In the Yi there are four things characteristic of the way of the sages. We should set the highest value on its explanations to guide us in speaking; on its changes for (the initiation of) our movements; on its emblematic figures for (definite action as in) the construction of implements; and on its prognostications for our practice of divination." [1] The Yijing itself is a canonical Confucian text, which envisages the entire cosmos as a great and endless process, continually in motion and all-encompassing. The famous trigrams and hexagrams (*gua*) are graphic representations of the two cosmic forces of yin and yang, and can be employed both for divination and as keys to understanding cosmologies of the changes (*yi*) that define all – as signs toward the intricate interconnections between forces and movements which will determine change. By extension then, some thinkers also saw the Yijing as the path to building a perfect political system that would respond dynamically to the changes of the universe. [2] 'Zhi qi shang xiang' is a famously opaque phrase within the text on which different interpretations of the Yijing, the hexagrams and how to derive this sense of the underlying workings of the universe turns. The 'qi' of 'zhi qi shang xiang' literally translates as 'tool' or 'implement'. However, at its broadest, 'qi' can refer to all things that have a material existence, or indeed as is often the case in later commentaries, it is used more specifically to mean the tools of ritual – the bronzes, which were the only remaining material artefacts of the ancients and their perfect civilization. 'Xiang' has a multiplicity of varying meanings: it can mean the 'emblematic forms' of the trigrams, representations of the flows of the universe. By extension, it means 'symbol' or 'representation' – verbal representations and explications of the hexagrams, or the stage between idea and word. It can also mean 'phenomena', or even the patterns that underly happenings: the signs of the changes (*yi*) themselves. It is this multiplicity of interpretation that allowed Song scholars to build upon this phrase, developing new understandings to justify their interest in the collecting of ancient objects that this essay will explore. The Jin dynasty scholar Wang Bi's commentary on this passage explained that the four characteristics outlined above depend on the principle that

the underlying forms of things and objects (*qixiang*) can be obtained and thus used.[3] Hence, it can be seen that one of the primary implications of the Book of Changes is the use of 'xiang' (emblematic forms) to envision objects (*qi*). The *Xi ci* explains this further:

Of old, when Bao-xi had come to the rule of all under heaven, looking up, he contemplated the brilliant forms exhibited in the sky, and looking down he surveyed the patterns shown on the earth. He contemplated the ornamental appearances of birds and beasts and the (different) suitabilities of the soil. Near at hand, in his own person, he found things for consideration, and the same at a distance, in things in general. On this he devised the eight trigrams, to show fully the attributes of the spirit-like and intelligent (operations working secretly), and to classify the qualities of the myriads of things. He invented the making of nets of various kinds by knitting strings, both for hunting and fishing. The idea of this was taken, probably, from Lu (the third trigram, and thirtieth hexagram). On the death of Bao-xi, there arose Shen-nong (in his place). He fashioned wood to form the share, and bent wood to make the plough-handle. The advantages of ploughing and weeding were then taught to all under heaven. The idea of this was taken, probably, from Yi (the forty-second hexagram). He caused markets to be held at midday, thus bringing together all the people, and assembling in one place all their wares. They made their exchanges and retired, every one having got what he wanted. The idea of this was taken, probably, from Shi He (the twenty-first hexagram). After the death of Shen-nong, there arose Huang Di, Yao and Shun. They carried through the (necessarily occurring) changes, so that the people did (what was required of them) without being wearied; yea, they exerted such a spirit-like transformation that the people felt constrained to approve their (ordinances) as right. When a series of changes has run all its course, another change ensues. When it obtains free course, it will continue long. Hence it was that 'these sovereigns were helped by Heaven; they had good fortune and their every movement was advantageous'. Huang Di, Yao and Shun simply wore their upper and lower garments (as patterns to the people) and good order was secured all under heaven. The idea of all this was taken, probably, from Qian and Kun (the first and eighth hexagrams, or the first and second hexagrams)... Therefore, what we call the Yi is (a collection) of emblematic lines. [4]

The basic idea put forward in this passage is the following: through observation of the myriad forms in the world, the people of ancient times devised the Eight Trigrams, which were used as a method of connecting the objective world. For instance, the trigram 'Li' is formed from observation of the characteristics of water and the method for knotting a rope into a net to catch fish. The Yi trigram is derived from making wood into a plough in order to plough the land. The phenomenon of market trading gives rise to the Shihe hexagram. Huang Di, Yao and Shun, who were the descendants of Shennong, all employed this original principle to govern all under heaven, and hence, their realms were prosperous and the people at peace. The *Xi ci* holds that the

principal idea of the Yijing is that ‘xiang’, that is the emblematic lines/symbols, are ‘models’. Hence, it was through observation and understanding of the objective patterns of the emblematic lines that form the trigrams, and through the establishment of ‘tools’ on this basis that the ancient people were able to establish a mutual, resonant connections between the material world of objects, including human spiritual phenomena, and the objective universe.

The *Xi ci* holds that a person of wisdom will be able to comprehend the deep mysteries hidden in the myriads of things and can then use the ‘emblematic lines’ to convey their understanding of those deep mysteries to others. ‘Tools’ (qi) are manifestations of the ‘emblematic lines’. The Wei dynasty scholar Wang Bi further advanced a theory which sought to integrate the Yijing with the philosophy of Laozi, proposing that “on gaining the emblematic lines, we lost the words”, and “on gaining the Way, we lost the emblematic lines”. [5] The Tang writer Kong Yingda further developed this theory, elevating the Yijing to the status of doctrine. By the Song, the Rationalistic School, as exemplified by Zhu Xi, had taken hold, thereby enshrining Neo-Confucian thought which emphasized the ‘emblematic lines’ over the ‘tools’ of the Yijing in mainstream scholarly thought. However, over the course of the Song dynasty another scholarly current was taking shape. It too was founded on interpretations of the ‘zhi qi shang xiang’ phrase, but it came to emphasize the content of ‘qi’, that is to say the objects. Works from this new tradition, including *Xuanhe bogu tu* and *Kaogu lu*, were the first entry in the subsequent line of scholarship on the ‘manufacture of objects’ (zhi qi) familiar from later Chinese history.

The phrase ‘zhi qi shang xiang’ has attracted much debate among twentieth century scholars, many of whom singled out the interpretation of ‘xiang’ as a particular problem. On one hand, Gu Jiegang (1893-1980) held that the ‘xiang’ in ‘zhi qi shang xiang’ represents the emblems (xiang) of the Yijing, and hence that the phrase means that objects (qi) are created on basis of divination using the trigrams, the emblematic lines of the Yijing. On the other side of this debate, Hu Shi (1891-1962) held that the ‘xiang’ of the phrase referred to observation of phenomena, rather than divination based on the trigrams, and hence that the phrase meant that implements should be created based on observation of the world. In Hu Shi’s conception, manifestations of ‘observing phenomena to create tools’ could then include Watt’s invention of the steam engine or Newton’s derivation of the theory of gravity from watching an apple fall to the ground. In truth, the debate between Hu Shi and Gu Jiegang has its origins in different readings of ‘zhi qi shang xiang’ from the Han dynasty. Li Qi and associated scholars held that the Yijing meant that tools and created objects should be derived from the trigrams. This line of interpretation has always integrated its approach to the Yijing into Confucian philosophy. The *Bai hu tong de lun* authored by Ban Gu and others, on the contrary, held that it was through observation of things that the emblematic lines (xiang) were derived.

The process by which the original text of the Zhouyi,

which read “its emblematic figures for (definite action as in) the construction of implements” (zhi qi zhe shang qi xiang) was simplified to the four characters of ‘zhi qi shang xiang’ began with the Wei dynasty thinker Hang Kangbo (332-380). From the Jin through to the Tang, ‘zhi qi shang xiang’ rarely occurred as a phrase, and it was only during the Song that it came into wide usage. In extant works from the 11th to 12th centuries, there were 44 passages including the phrase ‘zhi qi shang xiang’. Among these, twenty were works on the Zhouyi and its related commentaries. Thirteen were concerned with the making of implements, a further three were calligraphic assessments; four were works on ritual and music, and the final three were on Daoists and Daoism. The three essays on calligraphy were all discussing Chen Xiliang’s *Zhi qi shang xiang lun*, whilst the works on ritual and music were mostly dedicated to descriptions of ritual items and musical instruments.

From the above, it can be seen that Song scholars had expanded the scope of ‘zhi qi shang xiang’, and their works can be divided into two main interpretative approaches. The first group of works were concerned with interpretation of the Yijing and the meaning of change (yi), the second group were dedicated to describing objects and the processes by which they are made. The first group are philosophical studies of change, as exemplified by Chen Xiliang’s *Zhi qi shang xiang lun*; the second group of works, which begin to appear during the Northern Song, take ‘zhi qi shang xiang’ as a basis for expounding what can be described as the study of material things.

The differing contextual usages of ‘zhi qi shang xiang’ later evolved in two different directions: theories on the phrase concerning the Yijing and explanations of the changes were later incorporated into a unified approach to the Yijing. However, the approaches which tied the phrase into the study of material objects later evolved into a number of projects cataloguing the material world, such as the Ming dynasty encyclopaedia *Tian gong kai wu*, and a series of epigraphic Qing studies such as *Sui xuan jinshi wenzi*, *Jinshi tushuo*, *Zhong ding yi qi kuan shi*, *Liang Han jinshiji*, studies on the technology and art of ceramics, such as *Jindezhen tao lu* and *Zi liang shi xun*. In literature, the *Wentong* can also be placed within this movement.

Although today scholars generally regard epigraphy, design, art and the study of the Book of Changes as separate fields of study, in fact, the philosophical bases of these disciplines can be found in a process of reconciliation between ancient Chinese classics and the natural world. However, Confucian thought has a tradition of neglecting ‘implements’ (as in the *Yijing: Xi ci shang*, “that which is antecedent to the material form exists, we say, as an ideal method; that which is subsequent to the material form exists, we say, as a definite thing”; “the gentleman is no mere implement”). [6] This tradition, combined with the large quantity of scholarship on ‘zhi qi shang xiang’ produced from the Song onwards which is all concerned with the interpretation of the changes, has led many 21st century writers to neglect the full spectrum of usage of ‘qi’ in ancient

texts, seeing it only as piece of the theories on the trigrams of the Yijing and the issue of 'xiang'.

2.1. Chen Xiliang's *Zhi Qi Shang Xiang Lun*

The original text of *Zhi qi shang xiang lun* (A Theory on Zhi qi shang xiang), authored by Song scholar Chen Xiliang (1014-1077), is unfortunately lost. [7] However, it is possible to indirectly reconstruct the arguments it put forth through analysis of other works from the same era. In Yu Chen duguan shu, Chen Bi (1004-1083) [8] praises the work highly, saying: "A Theory on Zhi qi shang xiang is exquisite, an unanticipated delight for men of talent and virtue. Whilst researching and ruminating for a number of months, I have confined myself solely to this book." Subsequently, Huang chao wenjian and Song wen jian both incorporated a number of Ouyang Xiu's essays. Chen gong bi zhuan, by Su Shi (1037-1104), also gives a brief introduction to the content of this work: "The author is a talented writer, and particularly adept in [studies] of the Changes. His collected works amount to 10 volumes, including the *Zhi qi shang xiang lun*, in 12 chapters, and the *Ban gou yin tu*, in 54 chapters." [9]

These introductions make clear three things: first, Chen Xiliang was a talented writer and essayist. His work developed on the thought of Han Kangbo, and this resulted in the *Theory on Zhi qi shang xiang* as a commentary on the Yijing. From this, I propose that it is likely that he interpreted 'qi' as all things in the world, and understood 'xiang' as objective, natural laws in his analysis of the Zhouyi. Secondly, *Theory on Zhi qi shang xiang* was commended by Chen's contemporaries, who promoted this work of his in their commentaries and biographical accounts of his work. Thirdly, courtesy of the societal influence and writings of his fellow scholars, his work was copied and reprinted many times and provided a new perspective on the Yijing and the theory of things.

It is unclear whether Li Ji, [10] in his *Yong Yi xiangjie*, was setting forth the original intent behind Chen Xiliang's use of 'zhi qi shang xiang' to explicate the Yijing: "The study of the classics cannot be verified by history, yet the study of the classics must be verified by history... It cannot only be the 13 trigrams that allow us to make objects from the emblematic lines, and who is willing to only comment on dead texts? [11] Li Ji was a highly important figure within the movement to verify the classics through the study of history. He added a requirement for empirical proof to the traditional theory of using the emblematic lines to observe objects, making clear the importance of objects (qi) in disproving symbols (xiang). In this passage, Li argues that the principal argument of the entire Yijing is contained within 'zhi qi shang xiang'. From the above quotation, we can see the dialectical relationship between 'qi' (objects) and 'xiang' (symbols): 'xiang' cannot be proven by use of 'qi'; 'xiang' must be proven by 'qi'. That is to say, a material thing cannot represent the laws underpinning all things, yet a material thing can embody the laws underpinning all things. Hence, after discovering such a law by means of thought experiments, we must verify that law using material objects.

From Chen Xiliang onwards, ever more scholars of the Yijing employed 'zhi qi shang xiang' to interpret the Yijing. However, their viewpoints were not united. There were two main schools of thought, the first continuing the Xi ci interpretation in holding that xiang should be used to observe qi. The second held that xiang must be derived from qi. Below, I give a brief outline of the two schools.

Observing objects (qi) to obtain emblematic forms (xiang)

The use of symbols to discuss objects is the methodology underpinning a school of philosophy that derives from Confucian and Mencian thought. I above have argued on basis of Li Ji's description of 'zhi qi shang xiang' that Chen Xiliang must also have maintained this view. Song scholars added contemporary interpretations of 'pattern' (li) to these theories, holding that the logic of all things in the material world was contained in the Yijing. Cheng Yi (1033-1107) was one such thinker; on the basis of Cheng's thought, Zhu Xi (1130-1200) also treated the Yijing as a work describing the treatment of objects (qi). He held that the Yijing was first and foremost a book of divination, and secondly as containing the logic of all things.

Zhang Jun (1097-1164), in his *Zi yan yi zhuan* said: "The yi are the heart of heaven and earth. The sages first observed heaven and earth and embodied their heart in the xiang. Hence, in order to 'zhi qi shang xiang', the path lies through our spiritual essence (shen). The opening and closing functions of *qian* and *kun* are embodied in our tools (qi), and none under heaven do not benefit from it." Here, Zhang Jun puts forward the scholarly viewpoint of the tradition from the Han onwards that had emphasized the importance of symbols (xiang), arguing that one must first experience the internal spirit of all things. In this fashion, one would then be empowered to produce objects that corresponded to natural laws which would benefit the user.

Dong Kai (1226-?) in his *Zhouyi zhuan yi fu lu* expressed in the relationship between tools, trigrams and symbols (xiang) in a more clearly dialectical fashion:

"Symbols/phenomena can be obtained from the manufacture of objects, so are the symbolic objects themselves the trigrams [divinatory]? Answer: the manufacture of objects (qi) is derived from symbols/phenomena (xiang). The emblems are contained in the trigrams (gua), but the trigrams do not necessarily predate objects (qi). When making objects, the sages did not wait to see the trigrams to then know phenomena (xiang). As the masses were unable to know the symbols/phenomena for themselves, the trigrams were created to show them. The order in which trigrams and objects were devised is not inimical to righteousness. It is even possible that cauldrons (ding) are not natural symbols/phenomena, but are man-made.... Although objects precede the trigrams, and what is derived from them is the symbols underpinning the trigrams, that the trigrams repeatedly use the objects is right." [12]

Dong Kai held that people design and manufacture objects on basis of the objective laws of the natural world. The sages mapped out divinatory symbols on basis of the forms of objects, and from this arrived at the laws and order

underpinning all matter. The divinatory symbols they arrived at can thus be used to alert people to their behaviour. It is not that objects are manufactured on basis of the divinatory symbols and what they represent (*gua xiang*), but rather than objects can be manufactured on basis of objectively occurring phenomena (symbols, *xiang*), and hence from these objects, the divinatory symbols and emblematic lines can be derived. Although there must first be objects for there later to be divinatory symbols, objects in their forms also can express the connotations of the trigrams.

The Southern Song scholar Fan Yingyuan brought certain aspects of his interpretation of the *Daodejing* to bear on this theory, arguing that “The ancients used the emblematic forms to construct objects (*zhi qi shang xiang*). A wheel has thirty spokes in order to symbolize (*xiang*) a month. The hub of a wheel must be hollow in order for the wheel to travel. Hence, there are thirty spokes and collectively one hub, but it is only with this hollow space that the wheel can be of use.” [13] In order to explain ‘*xiang*’, the symbolic connections between objects, the natural world, and the divinatory hexagrams, Fan makes a connection between the spokes of a wheel and the number of days in a month. This seems relatively strong, but nevertheless it is certain that it was only after Chen Xiliang’s work that using the idea of emblematic forms and phenomena (*xiang*) to talk about objects (*qi*) began to attract scholarly attention.

Examining the emblematic forms (*xiang*) to understand objects (*qi*)

The second line of interpretation of *zhi qi shang xiang* has recently begun to attract more scholarly attention, that is ‘the observation of objects to obtain [knowledge of] the emblematic forms (*xiang*)’. This philosophical viewpoint originates in the ancient classification system for musical instruments based on the material of which the instrument is made, namely the ‘Eight Sounds’ (*bayin*). The *Baihu tong de lun* describes it as follows: “The method underpinning the Eight Sounds is like that of the Eight Trigrams. The Eight Trigrams are the enumeration of all things. The Eight Sounds are the voice of all things.” [14] As this says, the Eight Sounds are based on the Eight Trigrams of the *Yijing*. The Eight Trigrams are embodiments of the numerology that underlies all things, the Eight Sounds are the embodiment of the sounds and voices of all things. This explanation shifts the logic of *Yijing* treatment of ‘all things’ onto an understanding of music, and thereby moves from ‘using emblematic forms (*xiang*) to speak of the changes (*yi*)’ to ‘using emblematic forms (*xiang*) to speak of objects (*qi*)’. As developed by Song thinkers, this evolves into a theory of making objects that prioritises the observation of things to obtain understanding of emblematic forms and phenomena.

The Song thinker Zhai Ruwen (1076-1141) used *zhi qi shang xiang* as a basis for his own theory on the manufacture of objects. In *Zhonghui ji*, he writes:

The sages’ use of emblematic forms to construct objects both carry the Way and the warning, and conveys a depth of meaning that words cannot convey. Ritual vessels used to offer sacrifices (*zunyi*) cause people to approach those

vessels in search of emblematic forms. They approach the emblematic forms in search of meaning and enlightenment, that they might have the secrets of fate and things that are contained in the rites and music but that cannot be spoken. In their residences and when eating, day and night they can seek for fault and virtue. This is why Yao and Shun delineated clothing and belts as a form of discipline and their people did not offend. Hence, *suoxiang*, *zun*, *yi*, *ding*, *lei*, *dou* and *bian* are all different in use and all have different meanings for the rites. The office of the Vice Minister of Rites during the Zhou distinguished and name six *zun* and six *yi* vessels, and specially established officials to oversee their use. Inscriptions of their names are all in tadpole (*kedou*) script. [15]

Zhai’s theory here has three primary points: firstly, the form objects take embodies the thinking and knowledge of their makers; secondly, the different forms objects can take point towards specific values, hence when people observe objects, they are able to come to an understanding of their meaning. Thirdly, writing is a means for the embodiment of thought. Hence through the naming of objects through the writing that is carved on their bodies, the observer can be still clearer as to the intentions of the maker. Moreover, Zhai linked the forms of objects to the Shang-Zhou era system of rites (*lizhi*). The different forms of the objects and the different names engraved on them record different rites, and he explains that this demonstrates the existence of a tradition that had continued all the way of the Song. This theory begins to emphasise the importance of “objects” (*qi*) themselves, and further stresses the relationship between the form and usage of any tool or object.

In truth, Zhai Ruwen’s theory was anticipated in the *Zuozhuan*, but the *Zuozhuan* instead did so in order to describe the moral actions of the superior man (*junzi*):

The Viscount of Chu asked about the size and weight of the *ding* [of Zhou]. [Wangsun Man] responded: “[The matter] lies with one’s *de* [i.e. power derived from Heaven’s approval], not with one’s cauldrons (*ding*). In the past, when the region of Xia had virtue, distant regions made images of creatures, and sent the Protectors of the Nine Provinces to make offerings of metal. They cast cauldrons with representations of the creatures, including all varieties of them, so as to let the people know what is divine and what is depraved. Thus when the people entered river valleys, marshes, mountains, or forests, they did not encounter anything untoward, nor did any goblins or banshees meet with them. By this means, they were able to forge cooperation between above and below, thereby securing Heaven-sent blessings. King Jie’s virtue was dimmed and the cauldrons were moved to Shang, where they remained for six hundred years. King Zhou of Shang was cruel and tyrannical, and the cauldrons were moved to Zhou. When one’s virtue is felicitous and brilliant, one’s cauldron will be heavy even if they are small. When one is depraved, refractory and disorderly, they will be light even if they are large.” [16]

When the kings of the house of Zhou declined, the Viscount of Chu wished to compel the King of Zhou to

abdicate his throne and take rule of all under heaven for himself. He asked the Zhou minister Wangsun Man about the size of the Zhou King's cauldrons (ding), as he was seeking to assess the strength of the Zhou kingdom – ritual vessels are a symbol of the strength and solidity of dynastic strength as they are passed down through the generations. Wangsun then explains that their vessels were cast with all manner of images from the Nine Provinces, and that their purpose was to inform the people with regard to societal morals and to restrain their actions. The emblematic forms represented in the vessels (xiang) can be understood as the legal clauses of antiquity. Wangsun Man then gives an example in which due to the depraved behaviour of a ruler, his great cauldrons were stolen. Hence, the passage examples that the size of a cauldron does not represent the strength of a state, but rather is related to the individual moral character of the ruler.

When compared with Zhai Ruwen's writing, it can be seen that Zhai has removed the background information from this tale and has used the content from the middle of the passage to further explain the relationship between objects (qi) and ritual (li), and on that basis to advance a proof of the importance of objects (qi). To this day, there are many scholars who cite this passage as the earliest attestation of 'observing objects to obtain the emblematic lines (xiang)'.

On basis of the above research, Chen Xilang's *Theory on Zhi qi shang xiang* was widely read by Song scholars and can be considered part of a transformation in the Northern Song from 'using the emblematic forms to speak of objects' to 'observing things to obtain the emblematic forms'. That is to say, from the Northern Song onwards, scholars began to prioritise the relationship between the forms and making of things and the emblematic forms or phenomena of the natural world.

2.2. Song Materialism

The rise of Neo-Confucian thought (*lixue*) during the Song meant that scholars not only began focus their research on Confucian rites and ritual, but also to explore – and increasingly doubt – the origins of some antique objects. With the intention of verifying the textual origins of the classic texts, many scholars turned to researching antique objects. To prove the orthodoxy and indeed the necessity of their line of research, many of them turned to even older texts in order to justify this new object-centred research methodology. It was thus that 'zhi qi shang xiang', a phrase originally used to describe the operative laws behind the objective existence of things (*shiwu*), was re-interpreted to refer to the basic principles for the making of objects (*qiwu*). For a period, research into ancient objects flourished.

The work of Liu Chang is typical of the kind of interest Song scholars had in researching antiquities; he was followed by Ouyang Xiu, Lu Dalin, Li Gonglin, Huang Bosi, Cai Xiang and Su Shi who all manifested similar interests. At the state level, Emperor Huizong further provided institutional backing for research into objects, laying down the research methodology and theoretical bases for the study of objects.

As the research methodology employed by scholars like those mentioned above gradually became more sophisticated,

their scholarly outputs likewise diversified, as they produced catalogues, collectanea and textual analysis studies. The scope of their studies also broadened, from the study of ancient objects, to studies of painting and the pictorial, books-as-objects, calligraphy and written material and seals. Studies of ancient objects included those devoted to ancient objects, catalogues of ancient objects, research into tea utensils and the study of ancient bronzes and stones and their associated inscriptions.

Their research was not only rich in content but also broad, and moreover initiated an entirely descriptive method, constituting a theoretical basis for empirical study of the world rooted in a Sinitic philosophical tradition. For instance, among the 44 Song-era passages concerning 'zhi qi shang xiang', several concern antiquities, such as Wang Pu's *Chongxiu Xuanhe bogu tu*, Zhai Qian's *Zhou shi* and *Ming chen bei chuan wan tan ji*. Several more concern books and calligraphy, such as *Li dai Zhong ding li qi kuanshi fatie* and the *Ji gu lu*. Others concern songs such as the *Gui shan ji*, and still others cover tea, such as the *Cha lu*, *Xuanhe bei wan cha lu* and the *Cha qi tu zan*. Below, I explore some representative examples.

Ouyang Xiu: Research into steles

Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072) is renowned for having established a paradigm for research into stele carvings and inscriptions. He had great interest in the steles scattered throughout the realm, and was willing to lay out significant sums of money in his quest to collect them. In his afterword to *Ji gu lu*, Ouyang repeatedly emphasized that his research therein 'was not without merit'. [17] However, in fact this is simply a modest Chinese reminder to readers that in fact, his work has significant value to both historical and art historical fields. His research also attracted much interest from fellow scholars of his era, such as Ouyang Fei, Chen Si, Zeng Gong, Zhao Mingcheng, Hu Zi, and incited much debate. Practically all Qing authors writing on bronze and stone inscriptions cited Ouyang Xiu's work, a sign of its lasting influence.

In *Ji gu lu*, Ouyang Xiu explored three interrelated points concerning the study of ancient objects. First, traces of the ancients. Ouyang argued that although the collection of ancient objects at the time did not necessarily fit with the needs of contemporary society, those same objects nevertheless contain signs and information left by people of previous eras. Neglecting them is equivalent to abandoning what traces are left of the forebears, and therein lies the value of collecting ancient objects. Secondly, their historical value. By means of his research into inscriptions, Ouyang Xiu was able to either verify or disprove numerous theories of the time and was able to assist the state in resolution of a number of concrete issues. He himself said: "I myself have collected together ancient texts, not only in order to correct errors in transmitted texts but also to aid the court in resolving points of controversy." [18] Thirdly, the aesthetic value of such stele texts. Ouyang Xiu was not only collecting stele inscriptions relating the deeds of loyal ministers and brave scholars, but was also collecting even those steles he considered lacking

from an aesthetic standpoint.

Ouyang Xiu held that to be a collector one must meet two basic requirements. Firstly, one must enjoy the act of collecting itself, and secondly, one must have sufficient capability (financial means, physical capacity and dynamism). Neither capability that lacks enjoyment or enjoyment that lacks capability will be sufficient to build a true collection. Ouyang Xiu himself conducted field surveys in order to collect and later organise scattered stele texts. He pondered the content of the texts he found and then compared it the histories contained in other records to compose a passage to follow each stele text giving his research conclusions and viewpoints. This work began in the 10th year of the Tiansheng reign (1032) and continued until the 8th year of the Jiayou reign period (1063), a total of thirty-one years. He did not himself feel this research process to be arduous, but instead held continued to hold a great passion for his research topic. In his self-authored preface to his own work he wrote “To [collect these objects] satisfies my love for such things, and to appreciate them until I am old will be quite enough for me.” [19] Today, the research methods we use are much the same as those Ouyang Xiu developed.

Li Gonglin: the Depiction of Ancient Objects

Li Gonglin (1040-1106) was an artist of the Northern Song period. He was the first person to make a pictorial record of ancient objects, and his works include *Kao gu tu* and *Zhou lan tu*. [20] Although both works are now lost, some of his work was copied into Lu Dalin’s *Kaogu tu*, and the *Xuanhe bogu tu* also adopted his style of illustration in their depictions of ancient objects. The suite of depictive techniques developed by Li enriched Song research methods in the study of ancient objects, allowing viewers far greater insight into the forms and manufacture of objects. Moreover, through comparison of the images, researchers can construct evolutionary histories for the objects they are investigating.



Figure 1. *Kaogutu* [21].

The appreciation of the Northern Song court for studies of ancient objects began during the reign of the Renzong Emperor (1010-1063), as shown by the publication of the *Huangyou sanguan guqi tu* and the *Hu mian guqi tu*. [22] Huizong (1082-1135) continued the research begun under Renzong. Establishing the Xuanhe Hall as a centre, Huizong

oversaw the editing and compilation of a series of publications on ‘things’ (wu): the *Xuanhe bogu tu*, *Xuanhe ruilan ce*, the *Xuanhe huapu*, the *Xuanhe shupu* and the *Xuanhe yinpu* (now lost). The publication of this series of works provided a state-legitimized foundation for the study of ancient objects, bronze and stone inscriptions, art and art history and seals. Huizong employed the cataloguing and sorting of ancient objects and the study of the ancient, transmitted classics to provide proof for his notion that ‘objects are containers of the rites’. Moreover, through the compilation, editing and dissemination of the publications mentioned above, Huizong did much to popularize his particular ideology of statecraft.

Of all Huizong’s publications on objects, the *Xuanhe bogu tu* is the one that best embodies Huizong’s ideas on the relationship between objects and the rites (li). In Huizong’s conception, ancient objects can be considered the material proofs of their designer’s ideology and beliefs. Hence, research into the forms of ancient objects and their inscriptions has the potential to confirm the correct form of the rites, developments which were then filtered back into the political thinking of the time.

The *Xuanhe bogu tu* integrated content from Lü Dalin’s *Kaogutu* and Li Gonglin’s *Kaogutu*. Work on the catalogue began in the 3rd year of the Zhenghe reign (1113), and the book was completed in the 13th year of the Shaoxing reign (1133). The content included depictions of the ritual vessels stored in the Xuanhe Hall, transcriptions of their inscriptions and conjectures on the earliest manufacturing processes of these vessels. In total, it records some 839 bronzes. The *Yuhai* says the following:

Liu Chang obtained one tenth of the ancient objects of the former Qin. He copied their inscriptions, drew their images and compiled them into the one-volume *Xian Qin guqi tu*, which is especially deserving of praise. During the Yuanyou period, Lü Dalin read Liu’s work and questioned him in his examination of the ritual vessels of the Three Dynasties, which became the 10 volumes of the *Kaogutu*. Li Gonglin composed the 1 volume of the *Guqi tu*, to which Lü Dalin also composed a preface. He also assisted Huizong in searching for ancient artefacts of the Three Emperors, and finding the many stored in imperial storehouses, to a number in excess of fifty-nine. Five hundred and thirty-seven vessels carried a huge number of these vessels as tribute, more than can be counted. During periods of leisure, he enumerated these objects, drew with likenesses, examined their names and inscriptions and finally ranked them in order. Among all the ritual objects, cauldrons (ding) are first, and fu and gui baskets next; among musical instruments the pitch-pipes are first, and bells and chime stones next... On the *jihai* day of the 7th month of the second year of the Zhenghe reign, the Bureau of Ritual Regulation was established. On the *gengyin* day of the six month of the third year, on the request of vice-minister Wang Fu, the *Xuanhe bogu tu* was promulgated... On the 14th day of the 10th month, a handwritten edict was issued, ordering that pan, yi, lei and ding of the Three Dynasties be gathered together in order to obtain their

method so that objects for the sacrifices at the imperial temples could be made, and to then to make all clear by compiling a register. The Bogu tu is in thirty volumes, whilst the Xuanhe Hall contains the collection of ancient *zun* and *yi* objects. Through drawing their forms and analysing their inscriptions, they sought to recover the sense of the original vessels to correct errors and unify difference. In the 27th day of the 2nd month of the 13th year of the Shaoxing reign, ministers requested that the Xuanhe bogu tu be promulgated. Hence, the Minister of Ritual led his officials in debating how to remain the ritual objects. They drew model forms, and handled the inscriptions, and expanded on Master Lü's work tenfold.

The *Yuhai* was written by Song scholar Wang Yinglin (1223-1296), suggesting that the information it contains should be relatively reliable. He verifies that prior to the completion of the *Xuanhe bogu tu*, Liu Chang's enthusiasm for ancient bronzes had led him to compose his *Xian Qin guqi tu*, which was followed by Lü Dalin's *Kaogutu*, Li Gonglin's *Kaogutu*. Huizong's primary motivation in commissioning the *Xuanhe bogu tu* was to advance research into ritual objects and demonstrate the historical importance of ritual, in order to educate the people.

The *Xuanhe bogu tu* mentions the phrase 'zhi qi shang xiang' a total of six times. That is, on a foundation laid by the depiction and research of ancient artefacts of the Three Dynasties, the work used the content of texts considered to be classic by Confucian scholars to explain the principles behind the creation of such objects by ancient peoples, thereby strengthening the Confucian concept of "statecraft" (*wenzhi*) and integrating this line of thinking with the twin cultures of ritual and music.

Cai Tao: "Zhi qi shang xiang" as a theory of objects

The *Tiewei shan cong tan* of Cai Tao records this phenomenon. [23] Cai was born somewhat later than Chen Xiliang, but there is no concrete evidence to show that his approach to material things was influenced by Chen Xiliang's *Zhi qi shang xiang lun*. However, his *Tiewei shan cong tan* does discuss 'zhi qi shang xiang' in some detail:

From the Xia onwards, objects were made on basis of the emblematic lines and handed down to later generations. Hence, Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty gained precious *ding* cauldrons from the Fen and Sui rivers, and so was able to extend his reign. And the Xuan Emperor also gained *ding* cauldrons at Fufeng, and the inscription said: "The king ordered his ministers and vassals: govern this town of Xun." A copy was made and used for sacrifices of skins. Later in the time of the He Emperor, Dou Xian had an inscription carved at Yanran and returned. A chieftain of the southern Xiongnu left Xian the "Zhongshanfu" *ding* cauldron, with inscription, and so Xian returned and presented it to the throne. All of these mentioned are clearly recorded in the *Shiji*. By the Wei, Jin, Six Dynasties, Sui and Tang, there were many who spoke of finding ancient *ding* vessels. Liu Zhilin of the Liang was curious about the past, and collected hundreds of ancient vessels of different kinds at Jingzhou. He also presented four vessels of different kinds to the Eastern

Palace, all made of bronze with characters cast in, but the imperial household did not make much of the matter. It is only with the present dynasty that they have gradually become precious. At first, it was Scholar Liu Yuanfu who enthused about them, and later Master Ouyang Wenzhong. Following them and in accordance with their ideas were those like my uncle and friends, and the Dongpo gentlemen. Originally, Yuanfu was known as elegant and refined, and was famous, and had been posted to Chang'an. At Chang'an were found many vessels of the *gui*, *dun*, *jing*, *zeng*, *zun* and *yi* types. So, he wrote a book titled *Xian Qin guqi ji*. Master Wenzhong took pleasure in collecting ancient stone inscriptions and authored a book know as the *Ji gu lu*, which included all the inscriptions that were on the vessels Yuanfu had collected. So it was that many scholars and learned men came to be interested in this. This fashion took off from here.

Here, Cai uses 'zhi qi shang xiang' as a starting point to reflect on the rise of interest in objects during the early Song. He also verifies that the enthusiasm for such began with Liu Chang, and continued with Ouyang Xiu, Cai Rang (1012-1067) and Su Shi (1037-1101).

The *Yuhai* recounts a key truth: beginning with ancient stele inscriptions, the Song court and scholars became fascinated with the collection, organising and studying of ancient ritual vessels and musical instruments. They prioritised not only the 'hexagrams' so worshipped by the Confucians, but also the objects (*qi*) themselves, elevating the previously 'unorthodox' objects to a theoretical level. This tendency to admire 'objects' as artistic creations in themselves was not a rare phenomenon, but in fact a matter of common consensus among Northern Song court and scholarly community.

3. Conclusion

From the Northern Song onwards, cultural technologies have flourished as never before, transportation has improved, and the economy developed. During this period, scholars elevated objects that had previously been seen as toys with no bearing on matters of philosophy or ritual to a theoretical level, arguing that 'objects' did not merely have aesthetic value but could also display 'vestiges' (*ji*) of previous lives. Although the craftsmen who had made such objects had mostly long since been forgotten amid the great river of history, their spirit, resonances and understanding of ritual and ritual objects were still manifest in the objects they left behind.

In turning their attention to ancient objects, these scholars hoped to find a more orthodox explanation to justify that their studies were in accordance with China's traditional philosophy of the rites. Thus, there was a flurry of compositions, most of which sort to employ the *Zhouyi* to interpret the era in which such objects were created, the methods employed in their creation and their use. Most such explanations were founded in an approach objects that rested in understandings of the phrase 'zhi qi shang xiang lun'.

Through research and collection of such ancient objects,

Song scholars were able to further prove that traditional objects were intimately related to conceptions of the rites and ritual. According to the Dongdu shilüe:

(Second year of the Dagan reign): Winter, the 11th month, xinchou. Search for ancient ritual objects. Renxu. Ministers were called to debate the rites. Kuihai. It was decreed that the rites return to the form of the Three Dynasties, in order to be suited to the present. The Kaiyuan rites are not sufficient for purpose.

Dagan is the reign name of the Huizong Emperor, and the second year of Dagan was 1108. This text shows that the Northern Song-era reconstitution of the rites was done on the basis of research into the ritual system of the Xia-Shang-Zhou period. Objects from the period of the three earliest dynasties were collected, sorted and studied to serve as models. In order to respect the traditional conceptions of the rites (*lifa*), the ‘zhì qì shàng xiàng’ phrase found in the Yizhuan was reinterpreted, moving from a philosophical issue to become a specific approach to the study of things. In order to educate the people, it became necessary to first understand these objects in order to correctly understand the rights. Hence, the social order that was itself founded on the ‘rites’ would be stabilised.

The social order as based in the rites is comparable to a social order today that is based in law. The original purpose of ritual objects as created during the Three Dynasties period was that people should, through the form of such objects and the inscriptions on them, come to understand the principles of behaviour, thus that all would perform their duties and society would advance in an orderly and orthodox fashion. This is the embodiment of Song dynasty statecraft.

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