

Why cauldrons come first: taxonomic transparency in the earliest Chinese antiquarian catalogues

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Introduction – antiquarianism as a comparative conceit

As material culture, materiality, thing studies, and other oscillations of the tangible have emerged in recent decades as discernible themes of interdisciplinary inquiry, scholars have increasingly sought to integrate historical discourses on material things into broader narratives of cultural history. Within the extensive vocabulary used to characterize these discourses, the term antiquarianism stands out as a recurring rubric with a rich and ambivalent pedigree. Over the past fifteen years, scholars of the Renaissance, early modern Europe, and late imperial China have begun using the term as a conceptual category and analytical heuristic for comparing different world traditions of thinking about old things. A recent and significant signpost to this endeavor is the collection of essays published in 2012 by Peter N. Miller and François Louis under the title *Antiquarianism and Intellectual Life in Europe and China, 1500–1800*. Contributing to the ongoing rehabilitation of antiquarianism as the legitimate endeavor of eighteenth-century and earlier European intellectuals previously dismissed for their ‘prescientific polymathy and dilettantism’, Miller and Louis propose the term as a collective category for early modern Chinese and European investigations into the material remains of the past.¹ Following the lead of the archaeologist Chang Kwang-chih (1931–2001), who was the first to unambiguously equate the two terms, Miller and Louis correlate the English word antiquarianism with the Chinese tradition of *jinshixue*.² Directly translated, *jinshixue* is ‘the study of metal and stone’, although it has, since its inception in medieval China, typically been understood as referring primarily to the study of writing inscribed on metal and stone. Metal (*jin*) and stone (*shi*) were regarded as worthwhile media to study principally because they had the material capacity to preserve written words that other less durable media lacked. In light of

¹ Peter N. Miller and François Louis, eds, *Antiquarianism and Intellectual Life in Europe and China, 1500–1800*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012, 1–24. ‘Antiquarianism’ is used even more broadly in the recent collection *World Antiquarianism*, where it serves as a categorical shorthand for essentially any tradition of writing about and collecting old things that predates the post-Enlightenment emergence of ‘modern’ archaeology and art history. Alain Schnapp, ed, with Lothar von Falkenhausen, Peter N. Miller, and Tim Murray, *World Antiquarianism: Comparative Perspectives*, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2013.

² Miller and Louis, *Antiquarianism and Intellectual Life*, 5–7.

this association with writing, *jinshixue* is often correlated with epigraphy. Although many of the scholars who self-consciously participated in the study of *jinshi* also collected and occasionally commented on antiquities more generally, their principal interest lay in the philological and historical mysteries that the inscriptions on these antiquities could unlock.

Chang's broader use of *jinshixue* as a collective term for all premodern Chinese scholarship on historic artifacts (inscribed or otherwise) follows the expansion of the concept that occurred in the early twentieth century as Chinese scholars sought to demarcate disciplines of traditional scholarship in response to the taxonomies of knowledge endorsed by European and American scholarly communities. In an influential 1927 article tracing the early history of *jinshixue*, Wang Guowei located the birth of the discipline in the Song dynasty (A.D. 960–1279):

Many contemporary academic fields were initiated by men of the Song dynasty. One example is the study of metal and stone. In undertaking this scholarship, Song men fully committed themselves to all its various aspects – compilation, description, identification, and utilization. In less than one hundred years, they thereby established a discipline.³

Significantly, Wang included both textually-focused studies of inscriptions and illustrated catalogs of ancient bronzes and jades within the ambit of Song era *jinshixue*. The capaciousness of the *jinshi* rubric in early twentieth-century China is clearly evident in the *Bibliography of Books about Metal and Stone (Jinshishu lumu)* published in 1930 by the famous philologist Rong Geng (1894–1983) and his sister Rong Yuan (1904–?). Featuring works from the Song dynasty to the early Republican period (1912–), the bibliography includes studies of metal objects and their inscriptions, coins, seals, stone inscriptions, jade, oracle bones, ceramics, bamboo and wood, and accounts of inscriptions from local gazetteers.⁴ By locating these subjects within a common field, the compilers identified *jinshixue* as a collective term for all premodern scholarship relevant to the modern, evidentiary disciplines of epigraphy and archaeology.⁵

Recognizing this expansive genealogy for *jinshixue* as a modern construct exposes an implicit tension between antiquarianism and *jinshixue* as contemporary

³ Wang Guowei, 'Songdai zhi jinshi xue', *Guoxue luncong*, 1: 3, 1927, 45. Wang's study was translated into English by Liu Chonghong and simultaneously published as 'Archaeology in the Sung Dynasty', *China Journal*, 6: 5, May 1927, 222–231.

⁴ Rong Yuan and Rong Geng, *Jinshishu lumu*, Beijing: Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 1930; reprint, Taipei, 1992.

⁵ The most comprehensive English-language history of *jinshi* scholarship in late imperial China is Shana Brown, *Pastimes: From Art and Antiquarianism to Modern Chinese Historiography*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011.

analytical categories. If European antiquarianism was rehabilitated as a legitimate subject of historical inquiry, in part, by rejecting modern value judgments, does it make sense to then compare antiquarianism to a Chinese discipline anachronistically constructed on the basis of precisely those modern values? Logic demands that we approach our two categories with the same sensitivity to historical circumstances.

When this sensitivity is applied to China's earliest catalogues and inventories of antiquities, distinctions previously masked by the anachronism of *jinshixue* emerge. Foremost among these are the distinctions between inventories of stone and metal inscriptions and illustrated catalogues of ancient bronzes and jades. Inventories were composed exclusively of words; catalogues were made up of images and words. This essay will argue that this simple distinction between the two kinds of books—one entirely textual, the other significantly visual—resulted from fundamentally different intellectual concerns on the part of their authors. The compilers of inscription inventories were principally interested in the passage of time, both as a visible trace evident in the degraded, timeworn logographs of the inscriptions, and, most importantly, as the wellspring of historical error. They recognized inscriptions as sources that they could use to fill gaps, corroborate details, expose mistakes, and otherwise redress the distortions inherent in the transmission of knowledge across time. Although they recognized that texts imperfectly mediated the truth of historical experience, they accepted these imperfections as intrinsic to human engagement with the phenomenal world. They thought about, through, and with texts.

The compilers of the earliest illustrated catalogues, by contrast, were interested in the timeless moral and cosmic order that they regarded as immanent in the antiquities themselves. By visualizing these antiquities in pictures and naming their formal features, they endeavored to make this order accessible to men in the present day. These scholars agreed that texts imperfectly represented this timeless order, but instead of accepting these imperfections as inherent to all forms of human cognition, they argued that the durability and physical presence of antiquities gave them the capacity to catalyze moral transformation without the mediation of textual representation.

To elucidate this essential distinction between Song antiquarian catalogues and inventories, this essay begins by summarizing the content and structural characteristics of the earliest examples of both genres. It then proceeds to close readings of each of the two genres in turn. By showing how the distinctive rhetorical positions staked out in the inventories and catalogues stem from the relative temporality and materiality of the inscriptions and bronzes documented therein, it argues that the formal distinctions between the two categories of antiquarian publication embody the central epistemological debate of their time. In the process, it explains how the symbolic prioritization of bronzes cauldrons—the conviction

that of all ancient things, they came first—was elaborated into a formal taxonomy and semiotic hermeneutic for ancient bronzes in general.

Recording antiquities in the Song dynasty

The most famous extant early inscription inventories are the *Record of Collected Antiquities*, written by the influential intellectual and statesman Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072), and the *Record of Metal and Stone*, compiled by Zhao Mingcheng (1081–1129) and his wife Li Qingzhao (1081–ca. 1141). The earliest extant catalogues of bronzes and jades are the *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquity*, written privately by the moral philosopher and scholar Lü Dalin (ca. 1040–1193), and *Manifold Antiquities Illustrated*, compiled under imperial auspices on the basis of bronzes and jades collected by the emperor Huizong (r. 1100–1126).

Internal evidence demonstrates that the authors of the later texts were familiar with the inventories and catalogues that preceded their work. The *Record of Metal and Stone* and *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquity* both cite the *Record of Collected Antiquities* by name, and although *Manifold Antiquities Illustrated* does not name *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquity* as a source, its structure and the content of its entries demonstrate that its authors were clearly familiar with Lü Dalin's work.⁶ Most of the texts also contain references to similar works that are no longer extant, such as *Ancient Vessels of the Pre-Qin Era* by Liu Chang (1019–1068). Both the inventories and the catalogues also display a consistent interest in representing the logographs of bronze inscriptions.

Yet the commonalities among these works mask the basic distinction between them. The *Record of Collected Antiquities* and *Record of Metal and Stone* are records (*lu*) composed exclusively of text. *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquity* and *Manifold Antiquities Illustrated* are catalogs of pictures (*tu*) with appended notations. The organizational structure of these inventories and catalogues reveal different attitudes toward time and form. Inscription inventories are organized chronologically, whereas antiquities catalogues are organized taxonomically by

⁶ Although this paper stresses the continuities between *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquity* and *Manifold Antiquities Illustrated*, there are significant differences between the two works. Hsu Ya-hwei explains these distinctions through reference to the factional politics of the late Northern Song; 'Antiquaries and Politics: Antiquarian Culture of the Northern Song, 960–1127', in *World Antiquarianism*, 230–248, which revises her 'Reshaping Chinese Material Culture: The Revival of Antiquity in the Era of Print, 960-1279', PhD diss., Yale University, 2010, 47–57. Yun-Chiahn Sena contrasts the scholarly, 'historical' approach of *Illustrated Investigations* with the imperial, 'ritual' focus of *Manifold Antiquities Illustrated*; Yun-Chiahn Sena, 'Cataloguing antiquity: A comparative study of the *Kaogu tu* and *Bogu tu*', in Wu Hung, ed, *Reinventing the Past: Archaism and Antiquarianism in Chinese Art and Visual Culture*, Chicago: The Center for the Art of East Asia, Chicago University, 2010, 200-228.

object type. The former prioritize time as their primary index, the latter prioritize shape.

Chen Fangmei was the first modern scholar to clearly distinguish *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquities* and *Manifold Antiquities Illustrated* from the wider body of texts lumped together under the rubric of Song *jinshixue*. In a series of articles published between 2000 and 2005, Chen examined the role of antiquity catalogues in the development of *gu qiwu xue* (the study of ancient three-dimensional antiquities).⁷ A cardinal term in modern Chinese taxonomies of art, *qiwu* is an old word that was redefined across East Asia at the turn of the twentieth century in the context of emerging discourses of heritage preservation. As explained by Wang Cheng-hua in a recent study:

The traditional term *qiwu*, which denoted any kind of tool or vessel, did not assume categorical meaning or classifying capacity. As classification was a prerequisite for future research on antiquities, *qiwu* was adjusted to meet the need for a unified term referring to the study of three-dimensional antiquities made of bronze, clay, jade, glass, silver, gold, iron, bone, wood, bamboo, and other materials. While traditional *jinshi* never covered all three-dimensional antiquities regardless of material or paleographic value, the *qiwu* category could easily include various kinds of antiquities as long as they were not calligraphy (including rubbings), painting, embroidery, or tapestry.⁸

As a collective term for all objects outside the scope of the traditionally valorized category of *shuhua* (painting and calligraphy), *qiwu* became a meta-category for all three-dimensional artifacts deemed significant in traditional Chinese discourse, Western aesthetics, or modern archaeology. As a field of research in contemporary East Asia, *gu qiwu xue* is roughly analogous to the object-focused, curatorial studies of the decorative arts familiar to the Euro-American academy, with the key difference that because *gu qiwu xue* includes such traditionally celebrated things as ancient bronzes and jades, it has not suffered the same history of aesthetic derogation endured by the decorative arts in the West. By examining the central role that Song-era catalogs played in establishing bronzes and jades as objects of elite

⁷ Chen Fangmei, 'Zaixian sandai—Cong Gugong Songdai fanggu tongqi shuoqi', in Lin Boting, ed, *Qianxinian Songdai wenwu dazhan*, Taipei: Gugong bowuyuan, 2000, 293–320; 'Songdai guqiwxue de xingqi yu Song fanggu tongqi', *Meishushi yanjiu jikan*, 10, March 2001, 37–160; 'Zhui sandai yu dingyi zhi jian—Songdai cong 'kaogu' dao 'wangu' de zhuanbian', *Gugong xueshu jikan*, 23: 1, 2005, 267–332.

⁸ Wang Cheng-hua, 'Luo Zhenyu and the formation of *qiwu* and *qiwxue* in the first decade of the Republican era', in Yang Chia-ling and Roderick Whitfield, eds, *Lost Generation: Luo Zhenyu, Qing Loyalists and the Formation of Modern Chinese Culture*, London: Saffron Books, 2012, 44.

discourse, Chen Fangmei's studies explain the historical echoes that make the modern study of *qiwu* different from the study of decorative arts. But in relating these catalogs to the genealogy of a modern discipline, she necessarily reproduces the anachronism of *jinshixue* by biasing herself toward the features of these catalogues most relevant to later scholars of *qiwu*.⁹ Nevertheless, although our perspectives may differ, Chen's identification of antiquities cataloging as a distinctive historical phenomenon in its own right is an essential foundation for the present analysis.

My own approach to the inventories and catalogues of the Song era is to set aside what they came to mean in the late imperial and modern eras and to focus instead on what they meant to their makers. In adopting this more historically contextual approach, I echo the perspectives that scholars such as Yun-chiahn Sena and Patricia Ebrey have brought to the catalogues, but arrive at different conclusions.¹⁰ Whereas Sena and Ebrey emphasize social tensions between the court and literati elite as the principle context for interpreting the catalogues, I see debates over the epistemology of language and ontological status of antique forms (which bisect the court-literati divide) as ultimately more relevant. The problems with positing the court-literati distinction as a structure for analysis are beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice is to say that such analysis necessarily reads predetermined terms of social differentiation into the catalogues as their 'context'. I prefer to work in the other direction, starting from what the catalogues themselves say and do, and extrapolating out.

Inscription inventories

Ouyang Xiu built a large collection of rubbings during the last several decades of his life. Although the precise means by which he acquired each rubbing is not always recorded, comments in his *Record of Collected Antiquities* indicate that many were obtained from fellow collectors, such as Xie Jiang (994–1039), Yin Shu (1001–1047), and Liu Chang (1019–1068).¹¹ Ouyang characterizes these men as like-minded participants in a shared and passionate hobby that he enjoyed as a leisurely diversion from the trials of political office and his more formal scholarly

⁹ This echoes Maurice Mandelbaum's old, well-known critique of Arthur Lovejoy and genealogical 'special' histories in general. Maurice Mandelbaum, 'The History of Ideas, Intellectual History, and the History of Philosophy', *History and Theory*, 5: 5, 1965, 33-66.

¹⁰ Yun-chiahn Sena, 'Cataloguing antiquity'; Patricia Ebrey, *Accumulating Culture: The Collections of Emperor Huizong*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008.

¹¹ Both Xie Jiang and Yin Zhu were prominent scholar-officials. Ouyang Xiu specifically heralds their enthusiasm for his collection of old rubbings, and laments their early deaths, in a colophon appended to his preface for the *Record of Collected Antiquities*. See Ouyang Xiu, *Ouyang Xiu quanji*, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001, f. 134, p. 2061.

commitments.¹² Ouyang ultimately assembled a collection of more than a thousand rubbings. As time allowed, he wrote colophons for many of these rubbings and then, in the year 1062, composed a preface for a collection of four hundred of the colophons. Thereafter, he continued collecting new rubbings and writing additional colophons up until the final year of his life. After his death, the colophons were organized chronologically, apparently by his son Fei, who had inherited the collection. The colophons were then released, under the full title *Colophons to the Record of Collected Antiquities (Jigulu bawei)*, when Ouyang's collected works were published in the Southern Song (1127–1279).¹³ This text, organized into fascicles, became the basis for all subsequent editions. Although inclusion of the *Record of Collected Antiquities* in Ouyang Xiu's collected works helped ensure its preservation, it also meant that what was preserved was principally Ouyang's writing about the inscriptions rather than the content or appearance of the inscriptions themselves. With the exception of a handful of bronze inscriptions in the first fascicle, virtually none of the inscriptions from Ouyang's enormous collection were transcribed into the *Record*.

Apart from chronology, the *Record* does not organize its content by any other explicit categories. Nevertheless, to understand how the text took shape, it is important to recognize that it includes two distinctive types of inscriptions. Rubbings of bronze inscriptions generally represented texts dating to the Western Zhou period (eleventh to eighth century B.C.), during which time the practice of casting long commemorative inscriptions on ceremonial bronze vessels flourished. The chronological arrangement means that these are all grouped in the first of the book's ten fascicles. Fascicles 2 through 10 concentrate upon rubbings of stone inscriptions, which typically represented public writings commemorating such things as the erection or restoration of an important building. The practice of inscribing these writings on large stone steles and tablets became widespread in the Qin (221–206 B.C.) and Han dynasties (206 B.C.–A.D. 220), and persists to this day. As material objects and paleographic artifacts, bronze and stone rubbings have distinctive characteristics. Because most bronze inscriptions were cast on the inside wall or floor of a vessel, they tend to cover a relatively small area. This meant that it was relatively easy to mount the rubbing of a bronze inscription in a conventional handscroll or album format, with the colophon immediately following. Mounting

¹² These included, among other projects, directing the recompilation of the official, imperially endorsed *History of the Tang Dynasty* and *History of the Five Dynasties*.

¹³ This textual history of the *Record of Collected Antiquities (Jigulu)* is based on Ouyang Fei's *Lu mu ji*, in the 'first appendix to the *Jigulu bawei*' (*Jigulu bawei fulu yi*), *Ouyang Xiu quanji* 143.2325, and on the account of the Southern Song editors of Ouyang Xiu's collected writings, in the 'second appendix to the *Jigulu bawei*' (*Jigulu bawei fulu yi*), *Ouyang Xiu quanji* 143.2326. For a more thorough summary of the text's formation and transmission, see Ronald Egan, *The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China*, Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006, 8–10.

rubbings of stone inscriptions posed greater challenges. Because inscriptions on the largest steles could cover an area more than a meter wide and two meters in height, it was frequently impossible to mount the full rubbing in a handscroll format, which generally limited the height of the composition to less than fifty centimeters. This meant that the rubbing either had to be mounted as a hanging scroll or cut into vertical strips and repositioned to match the dimensions of a handscroll or album.¹⁴ The other key difference between rubbings of bronze and stone inscriptions concerns the surface texture associated with their state of preservation. Since virtually all of the bronze vessels featured in Northern Song (960–1127) accounts had been buried in ancient times and only recently rediscovered, they had not experienced weathering from extended exposure to the elements or degradation from repeated rubbing. This was not the case with stone inscriptions, which had typically experienced centuries of abuse by wind and rain and the depredations of rubbing collectors like Ouyang Xiu. As Wu Hung has evocatively described, organizing multiple rubbings of a given stele into a chronological sequence necessarily traces ‘a history of ruination’.¹⁵ The unfamiliarity of the archaic script of the bronze inscription highlights the gap between the ancient past and the present; time is experienced as a rupture between now and then. The relative familiarity of the standard and clerical scripts used in stone inscriptions narrows this gap, while the traces of erosion impressed on the rubbing evoke the vicissitudes of age; time is expressed as an ongoing process of destruction. The former evokes a lost world to recover, the latter recalls the inexorability of loss. Bronze is more optimistic than stone.

The material differences between rubbings of stone inscriptions and rubbings of bronze inscriptions may explain why only the bronze inscriptions were transcribed when Ouyang Xiu’s *Record* was set down in print. The length and visual complexity of pockmarked stone inscriptions made them considerably more challenging to re-carve on wooden printing blocks than the comparatively terse, undamaged bronze inscriptions. The relative difficulty of reproducing stone inscriptions is also evidenced by a handscroll in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taiwan (Fig. 1). The scroll bears manuscript versions of four of Ouyang Xiu’s colophons (which differ from the versions in his collected works in a number

¹⁴ This latter technique, known as the cut-mounting method, involved slicing each vertical column of text into a separate strip and then cutting each strip into segments matched to the vertical dimensions of the handscroll. In this way, a 1.5 meter tall rubbing composed of twenty columns of text could be rearranged into a 30 cm tall rubbing composed of one hundred columns. A good example of the technique is illustrated in Robert H. Harris, Jr. and Wen Fong, eds, *The Embodied Image*, Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999, 99. For a discussion of the process, see R. H. van Gulik, *Chinese Pictorial Art as Viewed by the Connoisseur*, Rome: Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East, 1958, 94–98.

¹⁵ Wu Hung, ‘On Rubbings: Their Materiality and Historicity’, in Judith Zeitlin and Lydia Liu, eds, *Writing and Materiality in China*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, 29–72.

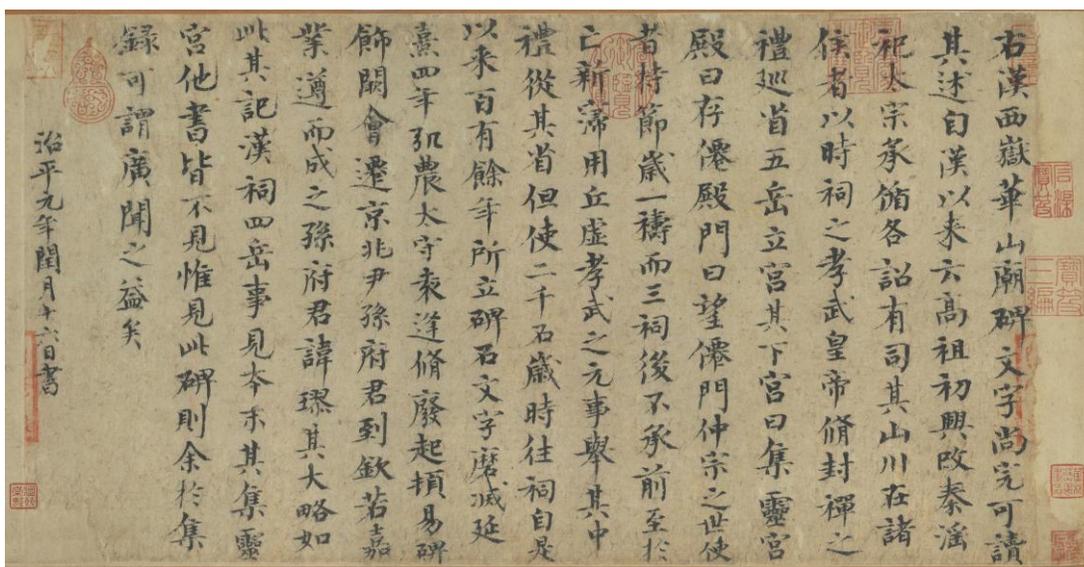


Figure 1 Ouyang Xiu, Colophon to the *Western Marchmount of Huashan Temple Stele*, first of four mounted on a handscroll. Dated July 3, 1064. National Palace Museum, Taiwan.

of places). In all four cases, the stone inscription to which the colophon refers is not reproduced on the scroll. A hand-written comment by Zhao Mingcheng just after the last colophon indicates that the four were mounted together as a group, independent of their inscriptions, by the early twelfth century.

Ouyang Xiu was intensely aware of the qualities of ephemerality and fragmentariness that stone rubbings evoked. He comments repeatedly on these characteristics in his colophons, to the extent that the pathos of loss often seems to overshadow his aesthetic interest in their calligraphy and scholarly interest in the historical personages and events that they record. For example, in a colophon on a rubbing taken from what was apparently a heavily degraded, partially illegible inscription by the Tang dynasty (618–907) calligrapher Li Yangbing, Ouyang writes: ‘Many examples of Yangbing’s calligraphy in seal script have been passed down to the present. This one is rubbed down and barely survives. It is particularly worth cherishing’.¹⁶ In an illuminating analysis of this passage, Ronald Egan emphasizes that it was precisely the damage preserved by the rubbing that made it so appealing.¹⁷ Ouyang did not value this particular rubbing because it preserved something that had not survived elsewhere; there were plenty of examples of Li Yangbing’s seal script in circulation.¹⁸ Rather, he valued the rubbing because it

¹⁶ Ouyang Xiu *quanji* 140.2244. Quoted by Egan, *The Problem of Beauty* 46, who offers an alternative translation.

¹⁷ Egan, *The Problem of Beauty*, 46.

¹⁸ Li Yangbing (fl. ca. 759–780) was the most famous Tang master of seal script, and an important model for Song and later calligraphers. His seal script was based ultimately on the

visually instantiated the capacity of time to obscure the past. It mattered not because of its age but because it was aged.

Ouyang recognized that the inconstancy of things—their tendency to break, degrade, and disperse—made collecting no more than a rearguard action against an implacable foe. He concludes his preface to the *Record* with a defensive apology:

Some may criticize me, saying, ‘When things are accumulated in such quantity, it becomes difficult to keep them together. Since nothing can be accumulated for long without ultimately being dispersed, what is the point of making such a fuss over this?’ To this I retort, ‘Doing so gives me what I cherish. It is enough to grow old amusing myself with these things. As for the accumulating of ivory and rhinoceros horn, gold and jade, does it not also ultimately end in dispersal? I simply cannot exchange this for the other’.¹⁹

Ouyang recognized that human beings only possess in passing. But in a world of material goods, was it not preferable to possess artifacts of learning like rubbings instead of mere luxuries like ivory and jade? More than simply satisfying historical curiosity, rubbings catalyzed feeling by reminding us of our own mortality. Their collecting also helped Ouyang and like-minded scholar-officials differentiate themselves from the conspicuous consumption of the nouveau riche created by the Song commercial revolution.²⁰

The *Record of Collected Antiquities* became a model for later collectors of rubbings. In his preface to the *Record of Metal and Stone*, composed a half-century later, Zhao Mingcheng (1081–1129) highlighted Ouyang’s work as the inspiration and foundation for his own project. The desire to compile his own *Record* stemmed, he claimed, from his admiration for the scholarly value of the *Record of Collected Antiquities*, and from his dissatisfaction with its lacunae and lack of chronological arrangement (which incidentally indicates that Ouyang’s *Record* was in circulation in pre-diachronic form prior to its incorporation into his collected writings).²¹ In the two decades leading up to the Jurchen conquest of North China in 1126–27, Zhao

standard small seal script codified in the Qin dynasty (221–207 B.C.), and is thus distinct from the ‘seal’ scripts found on Zhou dynasty bronzes. Shen Fu, *Traces of the Brush*, New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1977, 43–44.

¹⁹ Ouyang Xiu, *Ouyang Xiu quanji*, 42.599–600.

²⁰ The agricultural development, commercial expansion, and social transformation of the Song put unprecedented new wealth in the hands of new elites. For the most cogent, English-language syntheses of these changes in the *longue durée*, see Mark Elvin, *Pattern of the Chinese Past: A Social and Economic Interpretation*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973; and Robert Hartwell, ‘Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations of China, 750–1550’, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 42: 2, 365–442.

²¹ Zhao Mingcheng, *Jinshilu jiaozheng*, annot. Jin Wenming, Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2005, preface, 1–2.

Mingcheng and his wife Li Qingzhao acquired an enormous collection of antiquities of all sorts. In a moving account of the couple's collecting habits and wartime tribulations, Li Qingzhao recounts how the Jurchen invasion forced them to abandon all of the heavy artifacts in their collection and flee with a 'mere' 20,000 scrolls of calligraphy and 2000 scrolls of rubbings.²² These 2000 scrolls became the subject of the thirty-fascicle *Record of Metal and Stone* that Zhao and Li compiled during the chaotic period between their flight from the North and Zhao's early death in 1129. The first ten fascicles feature a chronologically organized list of the 2000 rubbings with terse annotations that are each little more than a few words in length. The remaining twenty fascicles contain longer colophons that Zhao had written to 502 of the rubbings over the preceding twenty years.

Zhao is rather more aggressive than Ouyang in asserting the scholarly worth of their endeavor. His preface highlights the extraordinary effort that he put into the project, and emphasizes that the rubbings are categorically not 'mere playthings'. Nevertheless, like Ouyang he recognizes that collections are temporary and that the objects in them will ultimately disappear. In an evocative declaration of the unique transmissibility of writing, he states: 'The two thousand scrolls themselves will ultimately cease to be, but this book of mine may be passed on'.²³ For Ouyang and Zhao alike, writing was a weapon against the inherent perishability of things. Although the things themselves may cease to be, their past presence echoes through the ages in the words of those who experienced them. The writing of the *Records* was thus an effort to remember things that were in the process of un-being. Despite the physicality of the artifacts themselves, both men agreed that it was ultimately through the mediation of writing that they could and would persist into the future.

Antiquities catalogues

The earliest illustrators of antiquities spoke about their subjects in a different way. One of the first was the aforementioned scholar Liu Chang, who is cited repeatedly by Ouyang Xiu in the *Record of Collected Antiquities* as an authority on the paleography of ancient bronze inscriptions. In the mid-eleventh century, Liu Chang gathered a collection of eleven inscribed ritual bronzes dating to the first millennium B.C. For each bronze, he commissioned pictures of its external appearance and had its inscriptions carved into stone from which rubbings could be made. He then compiled the pictures and rubbings into a catalog known as the

²² Although absent from the earliest Southern Song editions of the *Record of Metal and Stone*, Li Qingzhao's account was eventually incorporated in the text as a postface. One of the most widely reproduced and anthologized prose writings in later Chinese history, this 'Postface' ultimately became far more famous than *Record of Metal and Stone* itself. See Zhao Mingcheng, *Jinshilu jiaozheng*, 531–40. For an English translation, see Stephen Owen, trans., *An Anthology of Chinese Literature*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1996, 591–96.

²³ Zhao Mingcheng, *Jinshilu jiaozheng*, preface, 1.

Ancient Vessels of the Pre-Qin Era. Although the catalog does not survive, the dedicatory inscription that Liu wrote for it is preserved in his collected writings. He writes:

The eleven ancient pre-Qin objects gathered here are all finely crafted, and all bear inscriptions written in ancient seal script. Of those who engage in the study of antiquity, there are none who can comprehend them fully. By comparing them to other writings, I have been able to understand about fifty to sixty percent of their content. In collating the age of those that can be dated, [it is clear] that some hail from the time of Kings Wen and Wu of the Zhou dynasty, meaning that they are already more than two thousand years old. Alas! Of the myriad accomplishments of the Three Kings, not one survives. What the Odes and Documents record and what the Sage Kings established, of all these things whose passing we mourn, all that survives are [these] implements.²⁴

Like many of his contemporaries, Liu Chang believed that civilization had declined dramatically since the legendary golden age of high antiquity. The ritually-ordered, perfectly functioning society that the Sage Kings once created had long since ceased to exist, leaving only a memory recorded in classical Confucian texts like the *Classic of Odes* (*Shijing*) and the *Book of Documents* (*Shangshu*). What made the bronzes so special is that they were actual material remnants of this ideal society. Their existence as a physical trace made it possible to overcome the mediation of textual representation and directly experience the handiwork of the Sages.

In *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquity*, completed a couple of decades later, the compiler Lü Dalin carried this line further. Featuring over two hundred entries on objects from nearly forty state and private collections, *Illustrated Investigations* was, at the time it was finished, the most extensive illustrated catalogue of antiquities ever compiled. Each entry followed the model described by Liu Chang—a line-drawn image of the object (Fig. 2), followed by a white-on-black reproduction of a rubbing of its inscription (if present) (Fig. 3), followed by a colophon (Fig. 4). In addition to Lü's own remarks, the colophons frequently contain long quotations from the collector to whom the item in question belonged or other experts who could shed light on its ritual function, historical context, or the paleographic content of its inscription.

²⁴ The Three Kings were the celebrated founders of the earliest dynasties, the Xia (ca. twenty-second–sixteenth cen. B.C.), Shang (ca. sixteenth–eleventh cen. B.C.), and Zhou (ca. eleventh century–256 B.C.). The Sage Kings was a collective term for the progenitors of classical civilization. Liu Chang, 'Xian Qin guqi ji', in Zeng Zaozhuang and Liu Lin, eds, *Quan Song wen*, vol. 59, Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2006, 363.

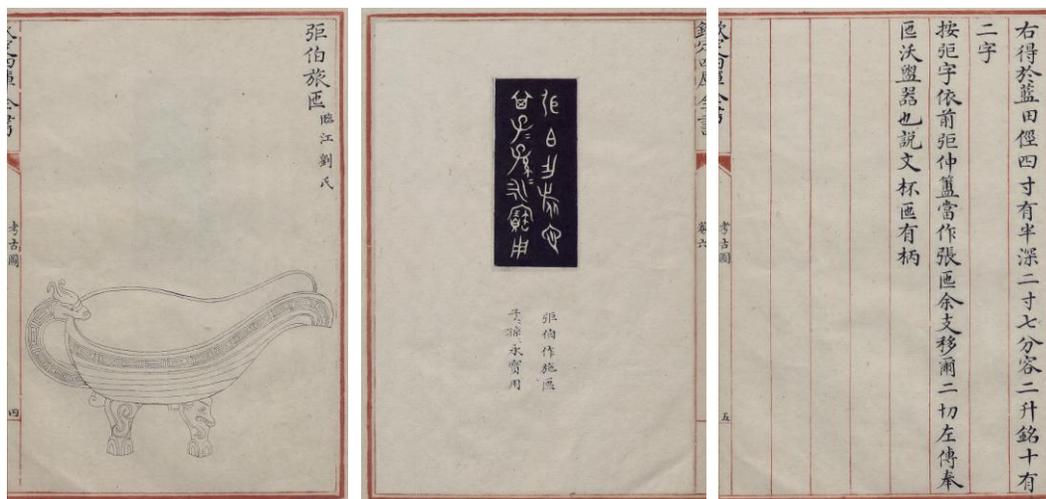


Figure 2 Line drawing of *yi* vessel, labeled 'Ranked *yi* vessel of Uncle Ju, [collection of] Liu [Chang] of Linjiang'. Lü Dalin, *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquity*, Four Treasuries edition [late eighteenth century], f. 6, 4a. National Palace Museum, Taiwan. **Figure 3** Facing page, showing inscription, with transcription into standard script below. Lü Dalin, *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquity* 6.4b. **Figure 4** Colophon to the *yi* vessel. Lü Dalin, *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquity* 6.5a.

This format was largely followed by the early twelfth-century editors of *Manifold Antiquities Illustrated*, and it lasted down to the nineteenth century as the basic format for antiquities cataloguing in general. Although the various editions of the early Song catalogues vary somewhat in layout and quality (Fig. 5), the primary characteristics of the illustrations are consistent.²⁵ Each object is represented with a single picture from a slightly elevated angle that reveals the curvature of its lip. Vessels with more complicated shapes, such as the spouted *yi*, are shown in profile (Fig. 2). Simpler, round vessels are shown from an angle that conveys the symmetry of their décor (Fig. 6). It is clear from some images that the illustrators were more concerned with conveying information about form than with verisimilitude; for example, comparison with a modern photographic representation (Fig. 7) demonstrates that the loop handles on the rims of the *ding* cauldrons in the illustrations were pushed back into an asymmetrical arrangement in order to reveal the perforation at their centers (Fig. 8).

²⁵ For a survey of these editions, see Hsu Ya-hwei, 'Reshaping Chinese Material Culture', 275–78, 281–84. Although the quality of the illustrations in the earliest extant edition of *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquity*, dated 1299, is considerably lower than that of some later editions, circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that the high quality, fine-lined images preserved in the eighteenth-century Four Treasuries edition more closely approximate those of the original, lost Northern Song edition. See Jeffrey Moser, 'The Ethics of Immutable Things: Interpreting Lü Dalin's *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquity*', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 72: 2, 2012, 261, n. 4.



Figure 5 Line drawing of *yi* vessel, labeled 'Ranked *yi* vessel of Uncle Ju, [collection of] Liu [Chang] of Linjiang'. Lü Dalin, *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquity*, 1299 edition, f. 6, 3b. Harvard-Yenching Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts. **Figure 6** Line drawing of *hu* vessel, labeled 'First *hu* vessel with beast ring and fine décor, [collection of] Li [Gonglin] of Lüjiang'. Lü Dalin, *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquity*, Four Treasuries edition, f. 4, 64a. National Palace Museum, Taiwan.

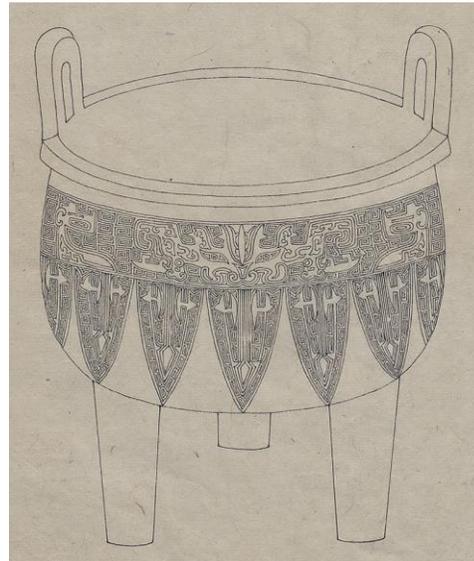


Figure 7 Photographic reproduction of a Shang dynasty cauldron. After *Zhongguo qingtongqi quanji* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1993), f. 2, pl. 30. **Figure 8** Line drawing of *ding* cauldron, labeled 'Gui ding, same [collection] as previous entry'. Lü Dalin, *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquity*, Four Treasuries edition, f. 1, 3a. National Palace Museum, Taiwan.

This emphasis on the schematic expression of form over the visual impression of the individual bronze extends to the treatment of surface. There is no effort to represent patina, corrosion, or other traces of time. Unlike the rubbings of stone inscriptions, Song illustrations of antiquities represent their subjects in pristine form. In part, this tendency can be ascribed to the limitations of the medium. The technique of woodcut printed illustration in China, from the earliest dated examples of the ninth century until well into the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), was principally an art of line.²⁶ There is very limited evidence of shading, stippling, and other texturing effects in early woodblock printing. Yet the elision of patina, by reinforcing the sense that the bronzes existed outside of time, was also conceptually consistent with the aims of the catalogues' compilers.²⁷

In his preface to *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquity*, Lü described the antiquities therein as objects that 'have remained unchanged for a hundred generations', and therefore preserve the essential principles of the Sages.²⁸ Like Ouyang Xiu before him, Lü agreed that the information gleaned from the inscriptions on the bronzes could be used to emend the historical record, and that the shapes of the bronzes provided models for ritualists to use in reconstructing the ceremonial implements of ancient rites. Yet ancient bronzes were not simply a new source of historical data for Lü, but a means by which men in the present could learn to behave like the sages of the past. He writes:

By beholding the [sages] objects, reciting the words [in their inscriptions] and describing their general shape, we pursue the residual moralizing influence of the Three Dynasties. It is as if we are beholding their people (the sages). In so doing, our intent returns to the aims [of the sages] or explores the source of their creations, and we can emend what the classics and commentaries have lost and correct the mistakes of Confucian scholars.²⁹

Engaging ancient bronzes with one's senses—feeling the sounds of their inscriptions reverberate in the mouth and echo in the ear, gazing upon their forms and putting these forms to words—exposed one to the vestiges of the Sages' moralizing power stored in the bronze. Receptivity to this influence aligned one's will with the intent

²⁶ For a concise, art historical synopsis of early Chinese pictorial woodcut printing, see Max Loehr, *Chinese Landscape Woodcuts from an Imperial Commentary to the Tenth-Century Printed Edition of the Buddhist Canon*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1968, 1–12. For the wider history of woodblock printing in China, see Tsien Tsuen-Hsuei, *Paper and Printing*, vol. 5, pt. 1 of Joseph Needham, ed, *Science and Civilization in China*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

²⁷ Brown, *Pastimes*, 16; Christian de Pee, *The Writing of Weddings in Middle-Period China: Text and Ritual Practice in the Eighth through Fourteenth Centuries*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007, 48.

²⁸ Lü Dalin, *Kaogutu*, Wenyuange Siku quanshu, Taipei: Taiwan yinshuguan, 1983, preface.

²⁹ Lü Dalin, *Kaogutu*, preface.

of the Sages, thereby ensuring that whatever one did in the here and now was consistent with what the Sages did back then. This was not a matter of merely aping the past by formally reproducing past acts. The world had changed, and the needs of the present were different from the needs of the past. Acting in accordance with the Sages meant responding with the same sensitivity to circumstances with which they had responded. Emending what the classics had lost and correcting what past scholars had mistaken was not, therefore, limited to specific errors that could be corrected by comparing canonical texts with texts preserved in the bronze inscriptions. Instead, aligning with the Sages meant knowing what was right in all circumstances. From Lü's perspective, ancient bronzes enabled the elimination of error writ large.³⁰

Even grander claims were made by the court. In the years leading up the Jurchen conquest, a team of scholars working under the direction of the court official Wang Fu compiled a catalogue of more than eight hundred antiquities, four times the number of *Illustrated Investigations*, drawn from the massive collection of more than four thousand bronzes and jades acquired by Emperor Huizong (r. 1100–1126).³¹ The catalogue went through several iterations at court and has a complicated textual history. It is preserved today in a number of imprints under the complete title *Manifold Antiquities of the Xuanhe Era, Illustrated and Revised* (*Chongxiu Xuanhe Bogutu*), or *Manifold Antiquities Illustrated* (*Bogutu*) for short.³²

The court compilers composed separate prefaces for each category of object. As in *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquity*, cauldrons came first. In part, this privilege stemmed from the by then well-established association of the cauldron with political legitimacy and numinous power. Among all of the ancient things that had survived into the Song dynasty, cauldrons had a uniquely storied legacy. Legends described how the sage king Yu, who ruled at the dawn of civilization, had received metal in tribute from the nine regions of the settled world. He cast this metal into nine great cauldrons to symbolize his dominion over these regions. By sculpting representations of the spirits and demons of each region on the surfaces of these tripods, he further transformed them into apotropaic talismans to keep his subjects from harm. Other stories associated the Nine Cauldrons with the Nine Elixirs that the Yellow Emperor had drunk to achieve immortality. During the Han and later

³⁰ This interpretation of Lü Dalin's preface is developed more thoroughly in Moser, 'The Ethics of Immutable Things', 274–80.

³¹ For detailed descriptions of the collecting and cataloguing activities of Huizong's court, see Patricia Ebrey, *Accumulating Culture*.

³² The textual history of *Manifold Antiquities Illustrated* is traced by Xu Yahui, "Zhida chongxiu Xuanhe Bogutulu' de banben tedian yu liuchuan—Cong Zhongyanyuan Shiyusuo cangpin tanqi", *Gujin lunheng*, 18, October 2008, 76–96.

dynasties, discoveries of ancient cauldrons were treated as omens of sagacious rule on the part of the reigning emperor.³³

The compilers of *Manifold Antiquities Illustrated* took these associations a step further. In light of the fact that one of the sixty-four hexagrams in the famous divinatory text known as the *Book of Changes* (the *Yijing* or 'I Ching') was called the 'Cauldron', they asserted that the material forms of the cauldrons illustrated in their catalogue, like the graphic forms of the hexagrams featured in the *Changes*, constituted a semiotic system.

Of the sixty-four hexagrams that make up the Zhou *Changes*, all denote images. But only the Cauldron [hexagram] is itself called an image. It must be that the Sages perceived the profundity of all under heaven, and so sculpted shapes and appearances to visualize its things. It is fitting that for this reason they called them images. They proceeded to in close proximity find images in their bodies and more distantly find images in the many things. Looking up, they observed them in the heavens, looking down, they sought them in the earth. By thus sculpting [their implements] as images for things, they encompassed comprehensively all the multitudinous things, and thus comprehended the virtue of divine clarity, and thereby cataloged the sentiments of the myriad things. Thus they made round cauldrons as images of Yang [the male principle], square cauldrons as images of Yin [the female principle], three legs as images of the Three Dukes, four legs as images of the four supporting ministers, yellow handles as images of median talent, and a metal bar as an image of extreme talent. They crafted the image of the Taotie [a legendary monster] to warn against its greed. They crafted the image of the long-tailed monkey to lodge their wisdom. Cloud and thunder [patterns] were made as images of the merit for good deeds, Kui dragons were fashioned as images of changing without going awry. As for the cow cauldron, goat cauldron, and pig cauldron, the image of each was used as décor. Thus when the cauldron was made a vessel, the myriad entities were complete in it.³⁴

Thus the bronze cauldrons collectively constitute a microcosm of the world as both a collection of entities and a system of relationships whereby these entities interact productively with one another. By implication, learning to look correctly at a bronze meant learning to recognize the normative pattern of all things.

³³ For details on these and other antecedents, see François Louis, 'Cauldrons and mirrors of yore: Tang perceptions of archaic bronzes', *Zurich Studies in the History of Art*, 13 /14, 2006/2007, 202-35. For the nine cauldrons in particular, see Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, 1-10.

³⁴ Wang Fu, ed, *Xuanhe bogutu*, Wenyuange Siku quanshu, Taipei: Taiwan yinshuguan, 1983, f. 1, 3.

These are heady claims that, when juxtaposed with the rather more mundane content of the catalogues' entries, bristle with potential contradictions, even if one grants their operating assumptions. Time and topic preclude even a cursory examination of such details in this essay. Both *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquities* and *Manifold Antiquities Illustrated* deserve book-length studies that take seriously the distinctiveness of their respective intellectual arguments. What matters for the present discussion is the grandiosity of the claims in general, which cuts across the prefaces of the catalogues and clearly distinguishes their tone from that of Ouyang Xiu and Zhao Mingcheng's inscription inventories. Why did some scholars find ancient bronzes so compelling?

One answer is that these claims are simply elaborations of the numinous power attributed to ancient bronzes in the centuries preceding the Song. Stories abounded of bronzes rising out of the waters of rivers under their own volition upon the ascension of a moral ruler.³⁵ Like other miraculous phenomena, bronzes partook in a correlative universe where the movements of comets and the birth of anomalous animals constituted Heaven's comment on the affairs of human beings.

Although such notions no doubt resonated for Song collectors of antiquities, a more persuasive explanation for the power of bronzes lies in the particular intellectual culture of the mid to late Northern Song (ca. 1023–1127). Scholarship on this period has identified the epistemological status of *wen* as a key point of debate. *Wen* denoted both culture, in the sense of the shared amalgamation of practices by which civilized human beings interacted, and the literary expressions of this culture. It was a collective category for literature and writing in all forms. Although some Confucian scholars recalled the classical idea that *wen* was the natural reflection of cosmic patterns on earth, most agreed that *wen*, as a phenomenon in the present, was principally a human construct. Some of the most influential thinkers of the day, men like Ouyang Xiu and Su Shi (1036–1101), believed that *wen* necessarily mediated the human perception of reality and that there was therefore no way to recognize and communicate reality without engaging the subjective verbal expressions of other human beings. But others began to see *wen* as an obstacle to the recognition of reality. They argued that there were ways to perceive reality without *wen*, and that the only way to interpret *wen* correctly was to have a complete comprehension of reality already in place. They called this comprehension the Way (*dao*). For this latter group, the purpose of reading was not to gather new information, but to locate in a new vessel the common truth they already knew.³⁶ These two positions are no more than constellations; individual thinkers worked out the iterations of the relationship between *wen* and *dao* in different ways. What is relevant for understanding why bronze catalogues were written and organized as they

³⁵ Robert Ford Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996, 121.

³⁶ For eleventh-century debates on the ontological and moral status of *wen*, see Peter Bol, *This Culture of Ours*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.

were is the fact that the epistemological status of writing, especially the writing in normative texts like the Confucian classics, was profoundly fraught. Throughout the period, scholars considered the questions: What truth underlay the classics, and what was its relationship to the words in which they were written?

In debating this issue, Northern Song thinkers drew upon a long Confucian tradition of demanding transparency in language. The locus classicus for this assertion is an exchange between Confucius and his disciple Zilu in the *Analects*:

Zilu said, 'If the Duke of Wei were to employ you to serve in the government of his state, what would be your first priority?' The Master answered, 'It would, of course, be the rectification of names.' Zilu said, 'Could you, Master, really be so far off the mark? Why worry about rectifying names?' The Master replied, 'How boorish you are, Zilu! When it comes to matters that he does not understand, the gentleman should remain silent. If names are not rectified, speech will not accord with reality; when speech does not accord with reality, things will not be successfully accomplished. When things are not successfully accomplished, ritual practice and music will fail to flourish; when ritual and music fail to flourish, punishments and penalties will miss the mark. And when punishments and penalties miss the mark, the common people will be at a loss as to what to do with themselves. This is why the gentleman only applies names that can be properly spoken and assures that what he says can be properly put into action. The gentleman simply guards against arbitrariness in his speech. That is all there is to it.'³⁷

For language to operate as an effective instrument for regulating human affairs, the names given to phenomena of all forms – both entities in themselves and the relationships between these entities – needed to be transparent and unchanging. Floating signifiers were the wellspring of immorality for they allowed the mischievous to call something good when it was not, and thereby mislead people into improper conduct.

Although generally interpreted in moral terms, the 'rectification of names' also raised ontological questions. In a famously enigmatic phrase, Confucius worried, 'If a *gu* vessel is not *gu*-like, is it a *gu*? Is it a *gu*?'³⁸ What made a thing that thing? Did calling it so make it so? Or did its so-ness reside intrinsically in its material form? In the simplest terms, the Song scholars who debated *wen* explored the various ways in which these questions could be answered.

The reverberation of these debates can be felt in the ways the earliest catalogers of antiquities organized their entries. Both Lü Dalin and the compilers of Huizong's court catalog rejected a comprehensive chronological arrangement in

³⁷ *Analects* 13.3; translation by Edward Slingerland, *Confucius Analects*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2003, 139.

³⁸ *Analects* 6.25.

favor of typological categories. *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquity* is organized as follows: Fascicles 1 through 6 feature bronze ritual vessels. *Ding* cauldrons are treated in Fascicle 1, *li* vessels and *yan* steamers in Fascicle 2, *dui* and *gui* vessels in Fascicle 3, and so forth. Bells and chimes make up Fascicle 7; and jades comprise Fascicle 8. The final two fascicles feature bronze objects that were not cataloged in fascicles 1 through 6, such as lamps, basins, and burners, as well as a handful of additional *ding* cauldrons and *hu* flasks. *Manifold Antiquities Illustrated* adopts this arrangement and elaborates it by further sequencing the objects within each category chronologically.

The majority of these typological categories are derived from the names of ceremonial implements recorded in Confucian ritual liturgies. For Song ritualists, these liturgies were principally based on the so-called *Three Ritual Classics* (*Sanli*), a collective term for the *Record of Rites* (*Liji*), the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli*), and the *Book of Ceremony and Ritual* (*Yili*). All three of these texts were compiled in the late first millennium B.C. and purportedly recorded the ritualized order that had prevailed centuries earlier during the Western Zhou era.

Because Confucius and his followers heralded the Western Zhou as a golden age of social harmony and political order, the canonization of Confucian learning in the Han dynasty set off a long history of efforts (which continue in some circles to this day) to reconstruct the rites that had been practiced during the Western Zhou. Taking Confucius's exhortations seriously meant starting with the rectification of names. Rectifying the names of ritual vessels meant determining the forms that had corresponded to these names in Western Zhou times. Scholars trying to match these names to forms faced several challenges. For starters, the breakdown of ceremonial regulations during the intervening Eastern Zhou (771–256 B.C.) period allowed a host of new ceremonial implements to emerge. By the beginning of the imperial period, it was difficult to determine which implements had genuinely been used in early times, and which were later additions. This confusion was exacerbated by the iconoclasm of the First Emperor of Qin (r. 221–210 B.C.), who, in the process of unifying China, burned the books associated with Confucian learning (along with those of other schools) to eliminate competing sources of legitimacy. But even more significant was the fact that the supposedly stable order described in the *Three Ritual Classics* was itself a fiction concocted retrospectively to systematize what we now understand to have been a cacophonous and ever-changing material tradition.

The study of bronzes in the eleventh century opened new avenues of addressing these long-standing problems. For scholars of early ritual, the advantage of Western Zhou bronzes was that their long commemorative inscriptions were often self-referential. Inscriptions on cauldrons said things like 'this cauldron was made to honor ancestor X', inscriptions on *gui* vessels often remarked that 'this *gui* was cast by' so-and-so, and so forth. Such statements were a boon to Song scholars trying to establish the nomenclature of early bronzes. As Ouyang Xiu remarked in reference to an inscription taken from a bronze *dui* vessel, 'Its shape is unlike all the

ancient *dui* pictured in the *Illustrations of the Three Ritual Classics* and found in private collections. In the beginning, no one realized that it was a *dui*. Later, [we discovered] that its inscription included the words ‘treasured and esteemed *dui*’, and thus knew it was a *dui*.³⁹ This use of inscriptions to match forms with names from the ritual classics ultimately became known as the ‘self-naming method’ (*zimingfa*).

By turning their attention to the forms of the vessels themselves, Song cataloguers reversed the logic of this approach. Reading the pictures alongside the colophons in *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquity* makes it possible to reconstruct the process by which Lü Dalin organized the catalog. First he established baseline forms for each type by way of the self-naming method. Then he added similarly-shaped forms without self-naming inscriptions. Thus correlated, the collective forms revealed the common features that distinguished the named type. Shape mattered more than décor. Cauldrons had tripod legs and twin loop-handles rising vertically from their lips (Fig. 8), *hu* vessels were tall vases with ring-shaped feet and tapering necks (Fig. 6), and so on. Ultimately, the force of this visual rhetoric overcame the nomenclative authority of the inscription. In his colophon to a vessel indexed under the *dui* category, Lü wrote, ‘This vessel is a *dui*, but is inscribed *dingyi*. The term *dingyi* is a collective term referring to all ritual vessels. Thus *dui* is not mentioned in its inscription’.⁴⁰

In a world in which scholars like Ouyang Xiu were arguing that inscriptions could be used to emend the errors of the classics, Lü Dalin’s willingness to look past the inscription and visually classify the form on its own terms had profound implications. What it suggested, implicitly, is that texts were untrustworthy. Rectifying names required that one set aside preconceived assumptions about the forms that corresponded to a given word and determine through visual analysis how forms should be organized into categories.

Conclusion – bronzes and epistemological agency

By undermining textual authority, bronzes instantiated and concretized the otherwise abstract, theoretical debate over the epistemological status of *wen*. Their inscriptions provided fodder for scholars like Ouyang Xiu who were dedicated to revising and rethinking textual traditions, while their forms offered Lü Dalin and other scholars who wanted to overcome the mediation of the classic text the possibility of visually imagining the world that preceded it. In so doing, they motivated and sustained the foremost philosophical questions of the Northern Song. Although the distinction that I have drawn between the textual inventorying of bronze and stone inscriptions and the illustrated cataloging of antiquities exposes the limitations of antiquarianism as an analytical category, my conclusions are

³⁹ Ouyang Xiu, *Ouyang Xiu quanji* 134.2072–3.

⁴⁰ Lü Dalin, *Kaogutu* 3.6a.

ultimately consistent with the aims of Miller and Louis's project. Just as the resuscitation of antiquarianism allows us to examine the intellectual ambitions of European antiquaries on their own terms, freed from the anachronistic values of modern science, situating the earliest antiquity catalogues in the context of their day demonstrates that they had far greater valence than a label like *jinshixue* suggests. Disciplines draw boundaries around distinctive approaches to discrete bodies of knowledge. For Song scholars, antiquities mattered because they exposed such boundaries as nothing more than human constructs. They gestured to the possibility of realizing the natural order that preceded the obfuscating languages of human beings.

Intellectual and literary historians have documented the degree to which leading thinkers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, especially Zhu Xi (1130–1200) and his followers, rejected the notion that *wen* inherently mediated reality.⁴¹ The process by which Zhu Xi's theories became state-sponsored Neo-Confucian educational orthodoxy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is well documented, as is the persistence of this orthodoxy into the early twentieth century.⁴² What is less well understood is the degree to which the visualization of antiquities reinforced and sustained this turn against *wen*. Given the ideological consistencies between the earliest antiquities cataloguers at the turn of the twelfth century and the Neo-Confucians who came to dominate the intellectual life of China, it appears likely that the kinds of thinking that antiquities inspired had wide-reaching repercussions. Although the permutations of their impact await further exploration, these repercussions remind us that in addition to documenting the early study of antiquities in China, *Illustrated Investigations of Antiquities* and *Manifold Antiquities Illustrated* also evince the agency of material things in the shaping of cognitive processes.

This special issue of the *Journal of Art Historiography* participates in the now well-established trend toward historicizing inventories and catalogues as things 'in their own right', instead of simply mining them for the documentation that they contain. The essays that make up this volume collectively explore the many interpretations that become possible when these lists are situated in the time and place of their listing. If the foregoing discussion of antiquities cataloguing in China at the turn of the twelfth century has something to contribute to this larger endeavor, it is to expose both the limitations and the security of this turn to context. When a text is explained through reference to its time, the most it can do is reinforce what we already know about that time. But if we grant it the agency to shape what we know, we surrender our power over it. Just as ancient bronzes forced medieval Chinese scholars to accept the limitations of their language, the inventories and

⁴¹ Michael Fuller, 'Aesthetics and meaning in experience: A theoretical perspective on Zhu Xi's revision of Song dynasty views of poetry', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 65: 2, 2005, 311–55.

⁴² Peter Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.

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catalogues of other times expose the artifice of our categories. This is a perilous opportunity. If we allow these lists and rankings and pictures to remake us as the bronzes remade them, our consensual art of history may start painting pictures that our scholarly community does not recognize and cannot judge.

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