

Chen Fangmei 陳芳妹, (2016) *Qingtong qi yu Songdai wenhua shi* 青銅器與宋代文化史 [*Bronze Vessels and Song Dynasty Cultural History*]. Taipei: National Taiwan University. 325 pages.

This volume is a collection of articles published by Professor Chen Fangmei 陳芳妹 over the past fifteen years. The volume represents the results of Chen's studies on Song [960-1279] dynasty research into ancient bronze vessels. Chen is a leading scholar in Taiwan in the field of bronze vessels, with a background in early Chinese archaeology.

The five lengthy papers in this volume were originally published between 2001 and 2015. Although the topical focus and publication dates of the five papers vary, they revolve around common themes and concerns, which Chen characterizes in her introduction with the question: "Why is it that such material objects already extant at the time of Confucius, such as the *jue* 爵, *ding* 鼎, and *fu* 簋, with their characteristic shape and ornamentation, enjoyed a longevity of two thousand years after the end of the Bronze Age, during which millennia they widely circulated?" (p. iii). The five papers all have their starting point in this question, implicitly or explicitly. Each paper explains why these vessels from the three ancient dynasties had a new life in the Song and what meaning their rebirth had in Song cultural history.

Interest in bronze vessels during the Song dynasty had a very complicated sociological background. Consequently, in addition to examining archaeological materials and Song writings concerning them, Chen reconstructs the historical setting of bronze vessel revivalism during the Song, as it existed in different social classes, and how it changed over time.

In chapter 1, the author argues that *Diagrams of the Three Rites Classics* [*Sanli tu* 三禮圖], by Nie Chongyi 聶崇義 [fl. 962], was the beginning of the Song period investigations into these ancient vessels. This work relied completely on earlier classical commentaries for its understanding of the vessels, adhering to the doctrine of "explicating the vessel according to textual accounts of it" [尊文譯器, 依經繪圖]. But, starting with the middle period of the Northern Song [960-1127], scholars such as Liu Chang 劉敞 [1019-1068] and Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 [1007-1072] represented a new breed of researchers who broke free of the shackles of Han [202 BCE-220] through Tang [618-907] classical commentaries. By examining pre-Qin vessels, these scholars founded their own understanding of ritual vessels, thus opening a new path in this field of inquiry. *Kaogu tu* 考古圖, by Lü Dalin 呂大臨 [1040-1092], advanced this approach, making it more academic and systematic. Then, in the reign of emperor Huizong 宋徽宗 [r. 1101-1125], at the end of the Northern Song, with

his reforms of court music and ritual, even more attention was paid to trying to recapture and replicate the ancient vessels.

In chapter 2, Chen turns her attention to the progression from Song scholarly studies of ancient vessels to the more popular, nonscholarly interest in them. As she says, “the change from investigating antiquities to amusing oneself with antiquities” (p. 124). In this part, she looks at the practice of making replicas of ancient forms and the role that practice played in the new popularity that ancient vessels came to enjoy.

Further developing upon the first two chapters, the third chapter focuses on the merging and mutual influence of studies of metal objects, stone inscriptions, and calligraphy models in Song culture. Here, she pays particular attention to Xue Shangong's 薛尚功 study of rubbings of colophons on ancient bronze vessels [*Lidai zhong ding yi qi kuanshi fatie* 歷代鐘鼎彝器款識法帖]. She evaluates the date and authenticity of these colophons through attention to taboo characters that they contain. This chapter ends with special attention to the important role that the confluence of interests and fields in antiquities, epigraphy, the collection of ancient rubbings, and calligraphy models [*fatie* 法帖] played in the early Southern Song [1127-1729] recovery and reconstruction of cultural treasures that had been damaged or lost during the warfare that ended the Northern Song dynasty.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the revival of bronze vessels in provincial Confucian rituals. Chapter 4 concentrates on Zhu Xi's 朱熹 [1130-1200] *shidian* 釋奠 ritual of honoring ancient worthies and teachers. The author uses archaeological findings, rubbings of inscriptions, and transmitted texts to investigate the influence that Zhu Xi's promotion of this ritual, and its use of ritual bronzes, had on Southern Song Confucian academies and society in general. In this ritual, Zhu Xi “sought to use the forms of ancient vessels from the Three Dynasties to merge a Confucian system of belief with ritual sacrifices to honor Confucius. By spreading this ritual throughout prefectural lands in the Southern Song, he hoped to bring about a Confucian transformation of customs on a par with the rituals he imagined had taken place in the Three Dynasties” (p. 191).

Chapter 5 looks at two thirteenth-century stele engravings of a *shidian* ritual in Guilin prefecture. The author uses these engravings to highlight how Zhu Xi's promotion of this ritual, complete with real or pseudo ancient bronze vessels, had spread as far as the distant borderlands of the Southern Song empire and had a profound impact on the Confucian (or neo-Confucian) revival throughout the empire.

The author was one of the first scholars in Taiwan to study the field of Song dynasty research on ancient vessels and their inscriptions. Having spent time

working at the Palace Museum in Taipei, she had an opportunity to gain experience examining ancient bronzes in the museum's large collection. In light of this, her book has two features that are particularly noteworthy and valuable.

The first is the attention throughout to aspects of the material culture of her object of study. Chen did her graduate work in art and archaeology at the University of London. This kind of academic background enables her to integrate excavated material objects with written materials. For example, in her examination of the rubbings of the two Guilin engravings in chapter 5, she was not content to look at reproductions of the illustrations in libraries in Taipei. Instead, she went to Guilin, where she could examine the actual steles from which the rubbings were made and thus gain insight into the physical attributes of the illustrations that would not be possible from reproductions. Likewise, in her investigation in chapter 1 of Huizong's ritual music reforms, in addition to studying written accounts, she analyzed surviving bronze bells and other musical instruments used in those eleventh-century rituals. This gives new insight into the nature of the "antiquity" of Huizong's music. Similarly, in chapter 2 Chen examines Song-period bronzes recently excavated in Sichuan to advance her understanding of the ways in which the court and elite fascination with such antiquities or their replicas spread geographically and took root in lower levels of Chinese society.

The second is that, from beginning to end, the volume concentrates on the visual appearance of the objects under discussion, linking their visuality with any understanding of the vessels and their inscriptions. In this way, Chen breaks free of the tradition of relying on classical texts to describe the objects. For example, she finds great significance in the drawings provided in Lü Dalin's *Kaogu tu*, recognizing in that work the significance of his new approach to analyzing the bronzes. She notes that this approach is compatible with the methods of twentieth-century art historical methods introduced from Western academia.

Chen's chapters give attention not only to the visuality of their subject but to the visual qualities of the textual reproductions of them in Song-period sources. Chen devotes a considerable amount of space in chapter 3 to analyzing the relationship between the fragmentary surviving pages of Xue Shangong's study of colophons on ancient bronzes and woodblock printings of the colophons in the Ming [1368-1644]–Qing [1644-1911] period. She concludes that the fragmentary surviving pages were indeed rubbed from the stone inscriptions in the Song dynasty.

A key feature of Chen's work is its focus on the human element behind the Song interest in these antiquities. As the author states in her introduction, one of her main goals is "to reconstruct the relationship between the [Song] people

and these material objects; this relationship includes persons and their society as well as the network of mutual interactions between persons' political status and the use to which the objects were put" (p. vii). One of her key findings in this regard is that for the members of the Song literati and official classes, ancient bronze vessels became symbols of their idealized vision of ancient China (p. viii). One major reason the literati devoted themselves to collecting and studying these vessels was their belief that the vessels embodied the values and mores of ancient times that they longed to revive in their own world. This is a crucial element in understanding the unprecedented Song dynasty enthusiasm for ancient vessels and related epigraphical studies. Analyzing it in this way, from the standpoint of what needs and goals the bronzes fulfilled for an entire segment of Song society, humanizes the field of Song scholarship and activity and puts it squarely in the arena of humanistic studies and cultural history.

Nevertheless, some aspects of Chen's study require further reflection and refinement. One of them is the fundamental issue of terminology. What should this field be called? The traditional name for it in Chinese is *jinshi xue* 金石學, literally, "the study of metal and stone," which is conventionally understood to designate the study of ancient bronze vessels, stone steles, and the inscriptions found on these types of objects. But Chen uses three different designations more or less interchangeably: *jinshi xue*, *jinxue* 金學, and *gu qiwu xue* 古器物學 [the study of ancient objects]. The second of these two terms seem to be Chen's own neologism, and it is far from clear why it is needed or how, in Chen's understanding, *jinxue* differs from *jinshi xue*. She never gives a satisfactory explanation of her use of *jinxue*, dealing with it only in a cursory fashion in single footnote (chapter 1, footnote 4). Her reasoning for coining this term remains unclear. Chapter 1, when it was originally published in 2001 as a journal article, used the term *gu qiwu xue* but replaced it with *jinxue* when the article was adapted for inclusion in this volume. Again, the assumptions underlying these different terms and her preferences, as well as why they have changed over time, are of interest.

Beyond the issue of terminology, some of the arguments advanced are less than persuasive. For example, chapter 1 says that the *zhenghe ding* 政和鼎 (a replica of ancient *ding* vessels produced during the *Zhenghe* reign [1111-1118] of emperor Huizong), part of a series of such vessels produced in connection with Huizong's revisions of court ritual, should be viewed as the result of Huizong's veneration of Daoism and Daoist implements. This seems like an overstatement. Certainly, it is known that many aspects of Huizong's reign and policies reflected his enthusiasm for Daoism. Still, it is difficult to find support

for this claim made about the *zhenghe ding* and related vessels in texts and other materials that we have from Huizong's reign.

Another issue concerns recent scholarship in the field published in China, which is inadequately referenced and used. The author has paid great attention to mainland publications concerning archaeological finds and reports discussing them. But other types of Mainland Chinese scholarship (e.g., analytical studies) in the field are rarely cited in Chen's work and seem to have been insufficiently consulted. Song dynasty replicas of ancient bronze vessels are an important subject of the work, and this subfield has been dealt with at length in several mainland publications in recent years, but Chen's work does not use them.¹ Similarly, chapters 1 and 2 repeatedly refer to Huizong's Dasheng 大晟 bells as being related to the emperor's reforms in ritual music. Actually, Huizong's Dasheng music has been a special focus of the research of Li Youping 李幼平 since the 1990s, when he wrote his PhD dissertation on the subject. He has subsequently published numerous studies on the subject.² If Chen had used these studies, they would have enhanced her understanding of what Huizong had done. Less importantly, the text and the footnotes have some typos and other minor errors.³

We often hear that academic disciplines in the field of Chinese studies, as practiced within East Asia and outside it (in North America, in Europe), are drawing ever closer. Although this is no doubt true in many respects, significant differences remain. The publication of a volume such as the one under review reminds us more of the remaining differences than the growing similarities. First, there is the matter of academic publisher's standards and criteria. This is, after all, a collection of papers published separately in various academic journals in Taiwan. A collection of previously published papers certainly has its value. Although essentially nothing new is contained here, what

- 1 Several of these works are PhD dissertations or M.A. theses—for example, Ma Xiaofeng 馬曉鳳, *Songdai jinwen xue yanjiu* 宋代金文學研究 (PhD diss., Shanxi shifan daxue, 2008); Li Xiaoxuan 李小旋, *Lü Dalin Kaogu tu yanjiu* 呂大臨《考古圖》研究 (M.A. thesis, Zhongyang meishu xueyuan, 2009); Guo Yueqiong 郭月瓊, *Songdai fanggu qingtongqi yanjiu* 宋代仿古青銅器研究 (M.A. thesis, Zhongguo yishu yanjiuyuan, 2011); Shi Zhenghao 史正浩, *Songdai jinshi tupu de xingqi, yanjin yu yishu yingxiang* 宋代金石圖譜的興起、演進與藝術影響 (M.A. thesis, Nanjing yishu xueyuan, 2013).
- 2 Li Youping 李幼平, *Dasheng zhong yu songdai huangzhong biao zhun yingao yanjiu* 大晟鐘與宋代黃鐘標準音高研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue xueyuan chubanshe, 2004).
- 3 For example, in note 11 to the preface, "Li Congli" should be "Li Gonglin"; in note 15 "Artiquarian" should be "Antiquarian"; notes 18 and 19 are redundant; on page 212, line 15, *sishui hou* 泗水候 should be 泗水侯; and on page 241, footnote 2, Zhu Renji 朱人傑 should be Zhu Jieren 朱傑人.

it offers is the convenience of having papers by the same author on common subjects and themes brought together in one handy volume. There is value in this convenience. It should be said, nevertheless, that at least in North America the publication of such a volume would be a rare event. Most major university presses would not consider publishing something like this simply because this material has been published before and is readily available online. So it is not the case that this volume collects papers that would be hard to locate otherwise. Scholars outside East Asia might be envious of the existence of such a volume, as it represents a kind of rebirth of scholarly work. It originally appeared separately and in a kind of fragmented way that those of us outside East Asia have little chance of having for our own separately published scholarly articles. However, if a finite number of publications in a relatively narrow field (i.e., that of Song dynasty research on ancient bronze vessels) are available, is there not a trade-off involved? Does not the publication of this collection mean that some other work, perhaps a wholly original study in the same field, will have a more difficult time getting published (from the same or competing academic publishers)? If that is true, then this thought might temper our enthusiasm for the appearance of such a publication.

A related thought concerns the difference between collected papers, even by a single author, and a scholarly work undertaken as an original and integral project. The work under review might look like a book at first glance: it has chapters that revolve around consistent themes, but important differences remain between a collection of separate articles published over many years and a scholarly book written as a single undertaking. The fact that the Chen's volume has no conclusion and only a perfunctory six-page introduction is revealing in this regard. This work does not represent a book-length project, with all that that entails regarding the conception, plan, design, momentum of argumentation between chapters, and intellectual integrity of the undertaking. In saying this, we do not intend to diminish the value, importance, or especially the convenience of Chen's new publication. Still, we should think clearly about what this publication is and not equate it with an integral book-length study in the same field.

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