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## **A Cup of Imperial Taste: The Formation of Ceramic Aesthetics under Emperor Huizong (r. 1100-1126)**

Kexin Ma  
*College of William and Mary*

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# **A Cup of Imperial Taste**

**The Formation of Ceramic Aesthetics under Emperor Huizong (r.1100-1126)**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Department of Art and Art History from  
The College of William and Mary

by

Kexin Ma 马可昕

Accepted for \_\_\_\_\_  
(Non-Honors, Honors)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Xin Wu, Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Catherine Levesque

\_\_\_\_\_  
Kevin Vose

\_\_\_\_\_  
Cristina Stancioiu

Williamsburg, VA

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## Abstract

Ancient Chinese ceramics are objects of appreciation around the world and have been defined as works of art by the art world. My thesis, however, points out that the taken-for-granted idea that ceramics are born to be works of art in ancient China, is, in fact, a constructed interpretation. In the thesis, I ask the question: when and how were ceramics transformed from functional objects into works of art in ancient China? The thesis investigates the change of roles and imperial tastes of ceramics during the Tang-Song transition, and examines the formation of a new aesthetics of ceramics, combining two aesthetic concepts: *unadorned naturalness* and *antiquarianism*, under Emperor Huizong of the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127). *Ru* ware, the imperial ceramics cherished by Huizong, was produced after the new ceramic aesthetics. Through examining the life of *Ru* ware in relation to Song dynasty literati culture and court rituals, the thesis proposes that Emperor Huizong developed the new ceramic aesthetics through appropriating contemporary literati aesthetics of nature and synthesizing it with his political interest in reviving antiquity. The ceramics aesthetics was established as a powerful cultural discourse rejecting the extravagant lifestyle of the Tang court and emphasizing a return to morality, which also elevated functional ceramics into the realm of art.

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## **Introduction**

The central questions concerning this thesis are how ceramics metamorphosed into an independent form of high art in medieval China, and what were the key aesthetics that contributed to the formation of its connoisseurship during the first half of the Song dynasty (960-1279). Following China's active role in international trade throughout the pre-modern period, Chinese ceramics arrived in Europe as early as the sixteenth century and in America with the settlers. To this day, Chinese ceramics are frequent exhibits in art museums worldwide and the subject of numerous publications, many of which take it for granted that ancient Chinese ceramics were born to be works of art. Early European and Chinese scholarship on Chinese ceramics history has focused on the development of techniques, the succession of formal styles, and the criteria of connoisseurship. However, they have not paid as much attention to the changing attitudes towards and ritual uses of ceramics which are linked to deeper cultural transformations.

European scholarship on ancient Chinese ceramics started in the nineteenth century following the arrival of huge collections of ancient Chinese ceramics in Europe. These

literatures are composed as comprehensive surveys of Chinese ceramics in chronological order rather than monographs on specific types of ceramics, and they are usually dedicated to general readers, art collectors, and connoisseurs. Robert Lockhart Hobson (1872-1941), the former president of the Oriental Ceramic Society wrote *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain: An Account of the Potter's Art in China from Primitive Times to the Present Day* in 1915. He analyzes ceramics from a formalist perspective based on the collections of ancient Chinese ceramics in various museums located in Europe and the U.S.<sup>1</sup> The structure of the book shows that the author has paid special attention to Song dynasty ceramics. He devoted one chapter to the ceramic ware of each pre-Song and post-Song period, while dividing the chapter on Song dynasty ceramics into eight sub-chapters, each of which discussed one or several types of Song ceramics from different kilns. According to the author, the refined form of Chinese ceramics reflects the visual capability of Chinese potters to capture colors from nature spontaneously and apply them into their artistic creation of ceramics. On the

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<sup>1</sup> The major museums that generously provided visual sources for Hobson are: The Victoria and Albert Museum, London; art galleries and museums in Birmingham and Edinburgh; the Grandidier Collection in the Louvre, Paris; the Kunstgewerbe Museum, the Hohenzollern Museum, Palace of Charlottenburg, Berlin; Collection of Augustus the Strong, Johanneum, Dresden; the Herzogliches Museum, Gotha; Collection of Dr. Adolf Fischer and his wife in Kunstgewerbe Museum, Cologne; Pierpont Morgan Collection and Avery Collection in the Metropolitan Museum, Collection of Han pottery in the Natural History Museum, New York; Collection of Han pottery and Tang figurines, the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

other hand, the author did not probe into the original social and cultural circumstances, in which ceramics were produced and popularized, or investigated the specific functions of ceramics as either ritual vessels or everyday utensils.

Rose Kerr, an English art historian specializing in Chinese ceramics, wrote *Song Dynasty Ceramics* published in London in 2004. The book offers a survey of Song dynasty ceramics based on the collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The author analyzed the development of various Song dynasty ceramics, including the monochrome-glazed wares appreciated by elites of the Song dynasty and the decorative polychromic wares favored by commoners in the society and people from the outside world. Starting with a formalist analysis of the ceramics, Kerr addresses latest archaeological findings in China and discusses the social, economic and cultural background of Song China, which exerted great influence on the production and popularization of different ceramics.

Stacey Pierson, a ceramic historian working at School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, also wrote a book *Song Ceramics: Objects of Admiration*, published in London in 2003. Having closely observed the ceramics in Sir Percival David collection, the

author addresses the aesthetic of elegant simplicity manifested by monochrome-glazed Song ceramics and discusses the condition of modern connoisseurship of Song ceramics. She suggests that connoisseurs of our time have appropriated the classification system of Song ceramics proposed in ancient texts, which emphasizes the superiority of ceramics from the five great kilns, consisting of *Ru*, *Jun*, *Guan*, *Ding* and *Ge* kilns respectively. Pierson argues that the classification system was a constructed discourse, which emerged during the Song dynasty and had an impact on the appreciation of Song ceramics in post-Song periods. She calls for people's attention to the cultural and social contexts that would lead to the development of the classification system, but has not conducted further investigation in her book. My research takes Dr. Pierson's argument further and examine how an aesthetic standard for ceramics, which was fundamental to the development of the classification system, was constructed during the Song dynasty and elevated the status of ceramics from functional objects to a new form of art.

While western scholarship focuses on formalist analysis of Chinese ceramics based on museums, private collections, and ancient texts, Chinese scholars, who began researching

ceramics in the twentieth century, devoted themselves to technical and archeological studies following a series of archeological excavations of ancient ceramic kilns that took place after 1949. Feng Xianming, one of the leading archaeologists and specialists in Chinese ceramics, wrote a number of archaeological reports and books on the social and economic history of Chinese ceramics based on archaeological outcomes. In his “Report on Thirty-Year Archaeological Excavations of Ceramics in China,” he presents the archaeological outcomes of fifteen major regions, from the South to the North of China.<sup>2</sup> The author specifies the number of kilns located in each region, the location of each kiln, the time period during which the kiln was established and eventually ceased to produce ceramics. He further describes the major types of wares that had been fired in each kiln, according to ceramic shards and complete wares unearthed in the site of the kiln, and comments on chemical contents of different wares’ clay bodies and glazes.

In his influential book *History of Chinese Ceramics*, Feng conducted a technical study of *Ru* ware and did research on the social circumstance that influenced the production of *Ru*

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<sup>2</sup> Feng Xianming 冯先铭, “Sanshinianlai woguo taoci kaogu de shouhuo”三十年来我国陶瓷考古的收获 [Report on Thirty-Year Archaeological Excavations of Ceramics in China], *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宫博物院院刊 [*Palace Museum Journal*], No.1 (1980).

ware as vessels used by the court and by commoners. His research depended largely on ancient texts and heirloom pieces of *Ru* ware, since the excavation of the site of *Ru* kiln in Qingliangsi, Baofeng County, Henan had not taken place until October, 1987.<sup>3</sup> In his report of the excavation of *Ru* kiln, Zhao Qingyun states that *Ru* kiln was originally an unofficial kiln producing a great number of ceramic vessels for commoners, as more than 300 pieces of intact ceramics were unearthed, including only a small amount of imperial-used wares with ash-grey clay body and crazed celadon glaze.<sup>4</sup>

Traditional Chinese scholarship on ceramics first emerged in late Tang period (923-937), and gradually increased in amount during the Song dynasty. The *Classic of Tea* (Cha Jing 茶经) by Lu Yu 陆羽 (733-804) is the first literature that contains comments on the aesthetic value of ceramic wares when they were used in tea rituals, and it set the foundation for later scholarship on connoisseurship of ceramics. During the Song dynasty, literati, who were actively involved in various cultural events, devoted themselves to the study of ceramics. Cai

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<sup>3</sup> Zhao Qingyun 赵青云, "Baofeng qingliangsi ruyaozhi de diaocha yu shijue" 宝丰清凉寺汝窑址的调查与试掘 [Investigation and Testing Excavation of Ru Kiln Archaeological Site at Qingliang Temple, Baofeng County], *Wenwu* (Cultural Relics), (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989, No.11).

<sup>4</sup> Zhao, "Baofeng qingliangsi ruyaozhi de diaocha yu shijue," 3.

Xiang 蔡襄 (1012-1067), a scholarly official and a renowned calligrapher of the Northern Song dynasty, wrote *The Record of Tea* (*Cha Lu* 茶录) during 1049 and 1053, and elaborated his taste for *Jian* ware as the most appropriate tea bowl. At the same time, the cultivated rulers of the Song court were also engaged in voicing their opinions on the aesthetics of ceramics. Emperor Huizong of the Northern Song dynasty (1082-1135) wrote *Treatise on Tea of Daguang Era* (*Daguang Chalun* 大观茶论) in 1107. The *Treatise on Tea* uncovers not only standards for tea rituals promoted by Huizong, but also the emperor's aesthetic criteria for ceramic wares used for tea rituals.

Modern literatures on ceramics, like those I have mentioned above, focus mostly on formalist analysis, technical and archaeological studies of ceramics, and has not paid attention to changes of tastes in ceramics and the shift of people's perception of ceramics from functional objects to works of art corresponding to social and cultural transformation. In fact, imperial taste in ceramics underwent great changes during the Tang-Song transition, from highly decorative, polychrome-glazed ware (*sancai* 三彩) (Plate 1) to the unadorned monochromic *Ru* ware (Plate 4). The Song period taste of ceramics was different, and yet,

the production of the monochromic ceramic ware in the Song dynasty demonstrated a continuation of the Tang dynasty ceramic manufacturing tradition. Most of the glazes, which resulted in a variety of colors, including celadon green, white and greyish-blue, that were significant for engendering the specific ceramic aesthetic of simplicity were invented during the Tang dynasty. However, the appreciation of monochromic ceramic wares reached its peak under the reign of Huizong rather than during the Tang period. To understand these very deep changes, we have to broaden our horizon of investigation beyond technical studies and practices of connoisseurship.

This thesis will mainly examine the role and appreciation of ceramics from the Tang to the late Northern Song period, following the shift of power from military aristocrats to meritocratic elites during the Tang-Song transition. It will particularly focus on the reign of Emperor Huizong (1100-1126) and propose an interpretation of the emergence of an aesthetic appreciation of ceramics at Huizong's court and its impact upon style and technique of ceramics. The major type of ceramic object that will be discussed is functional ceramics, which refers to ceramic wares primarily made for functional purpose, including food



containers, tea bowls and ritual vessels. The thesis argues that practices of the emperor and his court helped to lift ceramics from its pre-Song status of functional objects to works of art. Moreover, a new aesthetics of imperial ceramics came into shape out of two popular tastes of the time: *unadorned naturalness* (*suzhi tianran* 素质天然) and *antiquarianism* (*shanggu* 尚古).<sup>5</sup>

The thesis will put an emphasis on how contemporary socio-cultural circumstance exerted an influence on Huizong's establishment of the ceramic aesthetics. Huizong, the last emperor of the Northern Song dynasty, has been considered the most cultivated ruler of the Song dynasty. He identified himself with the literati class and participated in practices of art and various prevailing cultural events in Song literati circle. Huizong especially shared the literati's appreciation of tea and adopted the act of tea drinking as a significant element in court rituals. Furthermore, he not only created distinguished works of art by himself, but also actively involved in collecting works of art, launching a program of cataloguing his imperial collection of painting, calligraphy and antiquities.

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<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all the translations are by the author.

This ambitious program has been discussed from a compelling perspective by Patricia Buckley Ebrey in her book *Accumulating Culture: The Collections of Emperor Huizong* published in 2008. In traditional historiography, Huizong is an “artist-emperor” who was solely immersed in art-related events and “responsible for everything that went wrong during his reign [which eventually led to the fall of the Empire].”<sup>6</sup> Ebrey, however, provides us an alternative way to look at Emperor Huizong as an ambitious ruler, who strove to maintain the power of the court over every realm of the society. Given the premise that the core of the general governing principle of the Northern Song court was developing culture, a literati class had increasingly gained power over the political and cultural realm of the country. The rise of this new class threatened the authority of the court, and the tension between the court and literati reached its peak under the reign of Huizong. Ebrey argues that the cataloguing program was a political initiative that could appease the tension between the court and literati, but at the same time, construct a new cultural discourse and reestablish the court as “the cultural center of the realm.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey. “Introduction,” *Accumulating Culture: The Collections of Emperor Huizong*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Ebrey. “Introduction,” *Accumulating Culture*, 11.

Under the inspiration of Ebrey's argument, I will propose that Huizong's identity as a cultivated ruler facilitated the establishment of an imperial ceramic aesthetics that promotes ceramic as a form of art. The ceramic aesthetics was a new cultural discourse constructed by Huizong, that reflects both a vision of nature shared by the literati class and the emperor's dedication to antiquarianism corresponding to his political initiative of "reviving antiquities."

Chapter 1 will present the imperial taste of ceramic wares during the Tang dynasty, highlighting their instrumental value and the role of their decoration in the display of riches. This chapter will conduct a comparative study between *Ru* ware and *sancai* ware, and demonstrate the change of the way people behold ceramics from sets of functional vessels for court and state rituals to individual objects bearing aesthetic quality during the Tang-Song transition.

Chapter 2 will explore the influence of literati culture on the establishment of Huizong's ceramic aesthetics of *unadorned naturalness*. It will discuss *Classic of Tea* and Lu Yu's comment on *Yue* ware, a glossy green celadon ware, which serve as a model for Huizong's establishment of his ceramic aesthetics. The thesis will address the close relationship

between Lu's aesthetic taste for ceramics and the *Three Teachings*. The *Three Teachings* refer to the harmonious combination of Confucianism, Daoism and Chan Buddhism for the sake of self-cultivation that happened during the Song dynasty and had exerted profound influence in the cultural development of the Northern Song dynasty. This chapter will also present an analysis of literati aesthetics of nature, particularly the aesthetic theory proposed by the literati group that surrounded Su Shi, and discuss its relationship with the production of *Ru* ware as a spontaneous representation of nature that echoes with the animating spirit of nature.

Chapter 3 is devoted to Emperor Huizong's *Treatise on Tea of Daguang Era*, presenting the development of tea ceremony rituals and the shift from *Yue* to *Jian* ware, that is from glossy celadon to dark rustic looking ceramic. The chapter will focus on how Huizong was motivated by his spirit of a literatus, incorporated elements from the literati culture and constructed his aesthetic of *unadorned naturalness*.

Chapter 4 will examine the establishment of the aesthetic of *antiquarianism* as the court engaged in cultural politics in the face of political strife. It will analyze the structure and the

classification system adopted in Huizong's catalogue of antiquities, and conduct a comparative study between a *Ru Beaker with Three Sacrificial Animals* (*Ru san xi zun* 汝三牺尊), the illustrations on the catalogue of antiquities, and an heirloom piece of bronze *san xi zun*. The chapter will examine how Huizong's ambitious cultural enterprise of reviving proper ritual tradition and returning to the glorious past facilitated the development of the ceramic aesthetic of *antiquarianism*.

## Chapter One

### Ceramics for the Era of Extravagance

The Tang Empire (618-907) was known for its cultural prosperity and accomplishment in economic diplomacy, facilitated by its active involvement in international trades along the Silk Road. Ceramic production during this period reached a peak following the high demand of ceramics both domestically and internationally and the development of innovative technologies and techniques. At this moment, ceramics had already become commonly used by rulers of the Tang dynasty in their court and state rituals, and the rulers particularly developed an interest in the “tri-colored” (*sancai* 三彩) ware.

*Sancai* ware is a unique type of Tang dynasty ceramic first produced under the reign of Emperor Gaozong (628-683), the third emperor of Tang China. The ware is typically known for its decorative surface applied with a diversity of saturated glaze colors. The decorativeness of the *sancai* ware is in great contrast against Song Huizong’s ceramic aesthetics that emphasize unadorned simplicity and courtly elegance. The dramatic change of the imperial taste for ceramics during the Tang-Song transition corresponds to the shift of the core of the court’s governing principle from strengthening military power to developing

culture.

### ***Sancai* Ware: Court Ritual and Exotic Taste**

The Tang dynasty witnessed a growing enthusiasm for the exotic at the court and among the aristocracy, following the active interaction with the outside world through trade and military conquest.<sup>8</sup> During this period, *sancai* ware became favored by the Tang noble and was considered a symbol of the flourishing Tang China. A typical *sancai* ware is usually fired at a low temperature, around 800 Celsius degrees, and is decorated in organic patterns with a natural combination of a variety of glaze colors, including yellow, green, blue, and brown.

The creation of the decorative polychromic glaze of *sancai* wares was facilitated by the discovery of various coloring agents, such as copper, iron, manganese and cobalt compounds. Cobalt, for example, creates a bright, translucent blue glaze and was introduced from Persia through trades along the Silk Road and diplomatic exchanges following the tributary system.<sup>9</sup>

Domestically, *sancai* ware was often adopted as funerary vessels for imperial members

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<sup>8</sup> Edward H. Schafer, "The Glory of T'ang," *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of T'ang Exotics*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), 30.

<sup>9</sup> Schafer, "The Glory of T'ang," *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, 26-27.

and aristocrats, according to a number of archaeological excavations of Tang dynasty tombs since 1949. During the two-year excavation of the tomb of Princess Yongtai, the granddaughter of Emperor Gaozong of Tang (628-683) and Empress Wu Zetian (624-705), 101 pieces of functional *sancai* wares have been discovered, including eating utensils, such as dishes (*die* 碟), bowls (*wan* 碗), and jars (*guan* 罐), and utensils for daily use, like lamp (*deng* 灯), brazier (*lu* 炉) and dressing case (*lian* 奩).<sup>10</sup>

The inclusion of *sancai* wares as burial objects for imperial tombs is associated with the funerary ritual of the Tang dynasty, which promoted luxurious burials (*houzang* 厚葬) based on the official rank of the deceased.<sup>11</sup> Specific record on the funerary furnishings for Emperor Taizong of Tang (598-649) suggests:

When the day comes, carve on a stele at the side of the mausoleum, clarify the size and height of the tumulus. All the necessary *brilliant objects* [my italics] should be made of clay and wood, instead of gold, silver, bronze or iron, following ritual texts.

事竟之日，刻石于陵侧，明丘封大小高下之式。明器所须，皆以瓦木，合于礼

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<sup>10</sup> Shaanxi sheng wenwu guanli weiyuanhui 陕西省文物管理委员会 [Shaanxi Provincial Administration Committee of Cultural Heritage], “Tang yongtaigongzhumu fajue jianbao” 唐永泰公主墓发掘简报 [Brief Report on Excavation of the Tomb of Princess Yongtai of Tang Dynasty], *Wenwu* [Cultural Relics], (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1964, No.1), 14-5. The excavation took place from August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1960 to April 16<sup>th</sup>, 1962. The unearthed *sancai* wares include: 9 dishes, 10 bowls, 4 cups, 5 braziers (burners), 6 boxes, 1 bottle, 1 jar, 1 bo, 1 spoon, 1 cosmetic box, 3 lids for boxes, 1 plate, 2 lamps, 31 lids for jars.

<sup>11</sup> The Chinese Ceramic Society, “Ceramics of the Song, Liao, and Jin,” *History of Chinese Ceramics*, 214-5.



文，一不得用金银铜铁。<sup>12</sup>

The record provides an insight into the standard for imperial funerary furnishings during the Tang dynasty, and uncovers that ceramics were adopted as *brilliant objects* (*mingqi* 明器) in accordance with the court ritual. *Brilliant object* refers to a common type of burial objects starting to be used from the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.) following the Confucian canon. *Brilliant object* was typically produced as nonfunctional miniature of objects the deceased owned when they were alive. These objects reflected Chinese people’s perception of one’s afterlife as a continuation of his or her earthly life, and often represented the social status of the deceased.<sup>13</sup> The record does not mention specific types and formal characteristics of the appropriate ceramic object for the funerary furnishing. Instead, the ceramic object was mentioned only as a symbol suggesting the ruler was virtuous in that he always acted upon ancient rituals and kept himself from extravagant lifestyle by abandoning luxurious objects made of precious metals as his funerary objects. On the other hand, according to the archaeological findings, *sancai* wares were incorporated as one of the

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<sup>12</sup> Liu Xu 刘昫, “Volume seventy-six,” *Jiu tang shu* 旧唐书 [*Old Book of Tang*], 945.

<sup>13</sup> Heather Colburn Clydesdale, “The Vibrant Role of Mingqi in Early Chinese Burials,” Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mgqi/hd\\_mgqi.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mgqi/hd_mgqi.htm) (April 2009).

*brilliant objects* for Tang nobles. In addition to its glamorous exotic glaze colors, the form of *sancai* wares that resembles silver objects betrays Tang court's attempt to display their power and wealth under the camouflage of pious ritual practice.

One of such example is a *sancai* six-lobed tripod dish (Plate 1) unearthed in Henan, China and currently held in the Avery Brundage Collection in the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco. The piece functioned as an offering plate used by Tang dynasty elites for worshipping heaven, earth and ancestors. It is raised on three barely glazed legs that curve upwards and results in a tripod form inspired by Shang dynasty tripod *cauldrons* (*ding* 鼎) (Plate 2). The glaze applied on the piece is thick and glossy, offering a wide range of highly saturated colors from bright yellow and amber to olive green and dark blue. In addition to its decorative glaze colors, the interior of the plate is embellished with incised floral patterns in a symmetrical composition, while the rim of the plate is foliated and molded into six curling lobes.

The design of the rim modelled after the foliate form of luxurious Tang metalwork, especially silver wares, which were produced after the introduction of Iranian silverwork to

China along the Silk Road.<sup>14</sup> Silver was a precious metal highly appreciated by Tang nobility, and silver utensils were often used as banqueting vessels, which not only represented the wealth of the owner but also demonstrated the owner's interest in exotic vessels.<sup>15</sup> Scholars have suggested that silverwork served as a model for foliate ceramic vessels during the Tang dynasty, because it is more natural to create the foliate form in precious metals like, gold and silver, than in clay, for "the indented sides [and the complicated curves]...are liable to fracture [when craftsmen worked with the highly flexible clay]."<sup>16</sup>

One such silverwork that presumably inspired the *sancai* dish is a gilt hexagonal silver plate with a feilian beast pattern (Plate 3) excavated in Hejiacun hoard in Xi'an, China, the capital of the Tang Empire. This refined silver dish is decorated with a gilt repoussé pattern of feilian, the god of wind in Chinese mythology. The rim of the plate is divided into six floral lobes, each of which slightly curves in the middle, resulting in an elegant and flowing

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<sup>14</sup> Jessica Rawson, "Sets or Singletons? Uses of Chinese Ceramics: 10<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Centuries," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, No.23 (1993), *Jstor*, Accessed October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015, 85. Schafer, "Secular Objects," *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, 258.

<sup>15</sup> Rawson, "Sets or Singletons," 85.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 78-79.

movement. the basic foliate form and the elegant gesture of the curve on the silver plate must have inspired the potters of the day, who actively responded to a potential “market for the fine ceramics in metal shapes” promoted by the court.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, the rim of the *sancai* dish appears to be more complicated than that of the silver plate, with each of its lobe curling up dramatically and forming a triangular shape. With its highly-embellished shapes and dazzling polychromatic glaze colors, *sancai* ware was also produced as diplomatic gifts to neighboring rulers, imperial endowment to tributary states, and popular export products along the Silk Road.<sup>18</sup> It manifests that the Tang court was confident in contacting with the world, taking great pleasure in the exotic and celebrating their power that had extended outside the country, facilitated by their military prowess.

### **Decorativeness vs Unadornedness: *Sancai* Ware of Tang and *Ru* Ware of Song**

With its decorative form and exquisite shapes that emulated that of precious metalwork,

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<sup>17</sup> Rawson, “Sets or Singletons,” 80.

<sup>18</sup> Zhongguo guisuanyan xuehui 中国硅酸盐学会 [The Chinese Ceramic Society], “Song, Liao, Jin de taoci” 宋、辽、金的陶瓷 [Ceramics of the Song, Liao, and Jin], *Zhongguo taocishi* 中国陶瓷史 [History of Chinese Ceramics]. (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1982), 180-181.

*sancai* ware serves as a symbol of the high social status and the luxurious lifestyle of the Tang court. It reflects the court's taste of *extravagance* (*huamei* 华美) for ceramics in opposition to Huizong's ceramic aesthetics of *unadorned elegance*, manifested by *Ru* ware, the ceramic ware cherished by the emperor produced in his imperial kiln located in Ruzhou of Henan, China. A comparison between the *sancai* six-lobed tripod dish and a *Ru* celadon plate (Plate 4) manifests the dramatic change of the imperial taste for ceramics during the Tang-Song transition. Both the glaze color and the shape of the *Ru* plate is much less flamboyant compared to the *sancai* dish. The *Ru* plate is covered with a thick layer of monochrome crazed glaze in the color of greyish blue, which engenders a sense of tranquility and moderation, in contrast to the bright and bold polychromic glaze of the *sancai* dish. The crazing on the piece is a glaze defect that happens during the cooling process, when the glaze contracts faster than the body, and it was appreciated as a subtle decorative pattern created by nature in harmony with the elegant glaze colors.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, *Ru* ware appears in a simple rounded shape with a smooth and plain rim, which is very different from dynamic hexagonal

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<sup>19</sup> The Chinese Ceramic Society, "Ceramics of the Song, Liao, and Jin," *History of Chinese Ceramics*, 180-181.

shape and the undulating rim of the *sancai* dish.

The production of monochromic ceramic wares like *Ru* ware, in fact, had already started in the Tang period. Most of the glazes, which resulted in a variety of colors, including celadon green, white, and greyish-blue, that were significant elements for the aesthetic of unadorned simplicity embedded in the Song ware, were invented during the Tang dynasty.<sup>20</sup> However, the monochromic ware was not commonly appreciated in Tang China, as it demonstrated the taste of unadornedness in contrast to the Tang dynasty taste for extravagant decorativeness.

The change of the imperial taste for ceramics during the Tang-Song transition is closely associated with the shift of power from Tang dynasty military aristocracy to cultivated intellectuals of the Song dynasty. With its territory increasingly expanding, the Tang court focused on solidifying their military prowess and assigned military governors to maintain each protectorate outside of the Empire under control. Nevertheless, those military governors gradually established their own armies and became equivalent to kings of the protectorates,

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<sup>20</sup> The Chinese Ceramic Society, "Ceramics of the Song, Liao, and Jin," *History of Chinese Ceramics*, 284-286.

threatening the authoritative position of the court and eventually causing the decline of the Tang Empire. The Song rulers were well aware of the danger of a military-based governing principle, and considered the Tang court as immoderate and lacking virtue. They overthrew the Tang political system dominated by aristocracy, and established a government based on civil administration, appreciating the virtue of temperance under the influence of the *Three Teachings*. A new imperial taste for simply adorned monochrome ceramic wares, therefore, emerged in the Song Empire led by cultivated rulers and intellectuals.

### **A Set or A Single Piece**

Although Tang rulers did have particular tastes for ceramic wares they would use at court, it was Huizong who theorized his taste into a systematic aesthetic standard for Song dynasty imperial ceramics that potentially influenced aesthetic judgments of ceramic wares made by his contemporaries and people of post-Song periods. The establishment of an aesthetics for Song dynasty imperial ceramics corresponds to the change of people's vision of ceramic wares from the Tang dynasty to the Song dynasty associated with changes of how ceramic

wares were used and the specific environment in which the wares were used.

During the Tang dynasty, ceramic wares were usually considered as functional objects used in a set during court and state rituals and symbolizing appropriate ritual behaviors. On the other hand, Song rulers, especially Huizong, promoted a variety of cultural events, such as the tea ceremony and literary gathering, in which ceramic wares often functioned as significant elements that enhanced the aesthetic atmosphere of the events. The development of this new way of perceiving ceramic wares, focusing on their individual characteristics, set the foundation for Huizong to establish his aesthetic for imperial ceramics later in time.

Ceramics were often adopted as ritual vessels during the Tang dynasty. Although an official kiln system had not been established, particular types of ceramic objects were commissioned by courts and noble families, and were actively involved in ritual events, such as the ceremony of worshipping Heaven and Earth (*fengchan* 封禪), imperial banquets, and the celebration of traditional festivals held by the courts.<sup>21</sup> The choice of ceramic wares as ritual vessels is closely associated with the canon of rituals established in the Three dynasties

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<sup>21</sup> Liu, "Volume twenty-seven," *Old Book of Tang*.



(*sandai* 三代), suggesting that authentic ritual vessels used for worshipping Heaven and Earth were made of unadorned clay.<sup>22</sup> Records of ceremonies of worshipping Heaven and Earth held by the Tang court provide specific evidence supporting that ceramics were used as ritual vessels during the Tang dynasty.

At the beginning of *Wude* era, [the emperor] issued the decree:

On the day of the winter solstice every year, worship of the heaven will take place at the circular mound altar...During each worshipping ceremony, the Heavenly Upper emperor and his subordinates should be seated on pedestals, withered grain stalks should be used, [and] potteries should be adopted as ritual vessels.<sup>23</sup>

武德初，定令：

每岁冬至，祀昊天上帝于圆丘.....每祀则天上帝及配帝设位于平座，藉用槁秸，器用陶匏。

Another record describing the ceremony of worshipping Heaven and Earth under the reign of Emperor Taizong suggests that “[since] heaven appreciates frugality, withered grain stalks were used, [and] potteries were used as ritual wine vessels 天道贵质，故藉用槁秸，樽以瓦甗.”<sup>24</sup> These records of the ritual ceremonies offer an insight into how ceramics were used in the Tang court; however, the records did not specify the formal characteristics of the wares

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<sup>22</sup> Zhou Li 周礼 [Rites of Zhou] in *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三经注疏. Reprint of 1815 ed. Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1981.

<sup>23</sup> Liu, “Record of Rituals I,” *Old Book of Tang*.

<sup>24</sup> Liu, “Record of Rituals I,” *Old Book of Tang*.

adopted for the rituals. Instead of being individual vessels differentiated from each other, these ceramic vessels were viewed collectively as a set of symbolic elements, indicating the Tang ruler as a legitimate mediator of the heaven and the earth, whose power was granted by heaven.

It seemed reasonable to omit descriptions of ceramic vessels in the textual records of the ritual ceremonies, as the records were aimed at demonstrating the events instead of trivial details of the ritual vessels. I would highlight paintings of court events of the Tang dynasty that provide further evidence showing the tendency of viewing ceramic wares in sets without paying much attention to individual features of the wares. For instance, a Tang dynasty mural painting (Plate 5) discovered in Shaanxi province depicts a scene of an aristocratic banquet with a detailed demonstration of the setting and utensils in use during the banquet. Nine aristocrats are sitting around a rectangular table, enjoying the banquet in a relaxed atmosphere. A set of utensils is placed in an orderly way on the table. These utensils have been recognized as ceramic vessels, including plates, wine vessels and tea bowls by contemporary scholars, who suggest that hosts of banquets involving with wine drinking

would always provide tea for his guests before they started to drink wine.<sup>25</sup>

The Tang artist put efforts into capturing the dynamism in the distinctive physical features of the intellectuals. Each figure was rendered in different postures, drinking and talking in a relaxed manner. The draperies of the figures were depicted with soft and curved lines and bright green and orange colors, which create a sense of volume for each figure and enhancing the dynamism of the entire composition. Compared to the expressive and naturalistic demonstration of the figures, the ceramic wares on the table are simplified into geometric shapes in loose strokes, with no elaboration of their formal details, such as decorative patterns or colors of glazes.

A comparison between this painting and a painting of *Eighteen Scholars of the Tang* (Plate 6) attributed to Emperor Huizong further shows that the individuality of ceramics had been underscored during the Song dynasty and became explicitly appreciated by the cultivated Song court. The work is a large-scale handscroll painting, rendered in meticulous ink-lines and light tones on silk, inscribed with a poem written by Huizong in his “Slender

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<sup>25</sup> Qiu Jiping 裘纪平, “Chinese Painting on Tea during Tang and Five Dynasties,” *Zhongguo chahua* 中国茶画 [Chinese Painting on Tea], (Hangzhou: Zhejiang sheying chubanshe, 2014), 5.

Gold” (瘦金) calligraphic style. The poem uncovers the subject matter of the painting, a literary gathering of eighteen prominent scholars of the Tang dynasty. In the painting, the eighteen scholars are engaged in a variety of events, including banquet, poetry club and tea drinking. This type of work depicting literary gatherings was often painted and appreciated by Northern Song literati, as it supposedly served as a “self-portrait” of the artist as a self-cultivated scholar dedicated to intellectual pursuits. Like the literati, Huizong also created *Eighteen Scholars of the Tang* as a reflection of his identity as a cultivated artist and intellectual. At the same time, by depicting the Tang scholars in the setting of the Song dynasty, Huizong proclaimed that China under his reign was comparable to, or even surpassed, the Tang empire, characterized by cultural prosperity and economic accomplishment.

The *Eighteen Scholars of the Tang* offers a detailed demonstration of the preparation process of tea drinking. The attendants preparing tea for their masters by whisking tea (*diancha* 点茶), a prevailing method for tea preparation highly appreciated by Emperor Huizong himself. This method will be further explored in Chapter three, as the popularization of the method had contributed to the establishment of Huizong’s ceramic aesthetic of

*unadorned naturalness*. On the table that the attendants are using to place tea utensils, four black-glazed tea bowls with stands are rendered with a detailed depiction of their brownish striped patterns, which are very different from the simplified ceramic vessels in geometric shapes depicted in the Tang dynasty mural painting. In the painting, Huizong puts almost the same amount of emphasis on the tea ware as the figures, depicting the visual details of the tea bowls in such a realistic manner that they could even be identified. The patterns point to a specific type of *Jian* wares (Plate 7), of which “Hare’s fur” markings resemble the striped patterns of the tea bowls depicted in the painting. Huizong’s painting suggests that the Northern Song dynasty witnessed people’s realization of ceramic wares not just as functional utensils but also as objects possessing certain aesthetic qualities, whose formal details were worth examining.

## **Summary**

Both the textual records and paintings demonstrating ritual affairs uncover that ceramic wares commissioned by the courts and aristocratic families of the Tang dynasty often served as ritual vessels arranged in sets, following the ritual canons developed by sage kings. In the

ritual context, ceramic wares remained as *qi*, functional *vessels*, but were also considered as “vessels which conceal ritual codes” and serve as symbols of power and privilege.<sup>26</sup> Certain standards, such as those elaborated in ritual canons, which determined the appropriate forms of ceramic wares, had indeed emerged during the Tang dynasty and had been promoted by contemporary patrons. Nevertheless, by utilizing and viewing ceramic wares in a set, patrons of the Tang dynasty visualized ceramics as sets of functional objects and collective symbols of power and wealth more than works possessing aesthetic values. It was not until the Song dynasty when the elite class, including the court and the literati, first started to appreciate the individuality of ceramic wares. Widely adopted in a variety of cultural events held by Song elites, Song ceramic wares gradually transformed from functional objects to works of art closely associated with contemporary literati culture. It served as a part of the visual representation of the prevailing literati aesthetics emphasizing the unadorned beauty of nature, which had been adopted by Huizong and incorporated into his aesthetics for ceramics.

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<sup>26</sup>Wu Hung, “Gudai meishu yange: ‘Dashi’ – zhongguo gudai yuqi yu liqi yishu zhi qi yuan” “古代美术沿革：大始”——中国古代玉器与礼器艺术之起源 [A Great Beginning: Ancient Chinese Jades and The Origin of Ritual Art], in Vol. 2 of *Liyi zhong de meishu 礼仪中的美术 [Art in its Ritual Context: Essays on Ancient Chinese Art by Wu Hung]*, ed. Zheng Yan and Wang Rui (Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi Sanlian shudian, 2005), 535-536.

## Chapter Two

### Tea, Ceramics and the Beauty of Nature

As a cultivated ruler, Huizong established his ceramics aesthetics of *unadorned naturalness* (*suzhi tianran* 素质天然) by adopting the aesthetics of nature proposed by the literati class through close learning of the *Three Teachings* and engagement in cultural events, such as the practice of mountain-and-water painting and the tea ceremony. Huizong particularly drew inspiration from the literati's emphasis on *yi* 意 (*thoughts, intents*) over *xing* 形 (*form*) in their paintings of mountain and water, and promoted the unadorned ceramics as a true representation of nature resembling the mountain-and-water paintings.<sup>27</sup>

The ceramic aesthetics of *unadorned naturalness* was also closely related to the tea drinking, which had been popularized as a meditating practice between self and nature, when Lu Yu 陆羽 (733-804), a late-Tang literatus often known as the Sage of Tea, composed *The Classic of Tea* (*Cha jing* 茶经), the first known Chinese monograph on tea. In the monograph, Lu provided the first elaborate critical evaluation of ceramic tea bowls in terms

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<sup>27</sup> Ronald C. Egan, "Calligraphy and Painting," *Word, Image and Deed in the Life of Su Shi*, Cambridge, (MA and London: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1994), 284.

of their forms and functionality, calling for attention to the individuality and the aesthetic of nature manifested in the form of ceramic wares.

### **The Literati Aesthetic Concepts of *Yi* and *Xing***

The Northern Song dynasty witnessed the establishment of literati aesthetics by a group of literati around Su Shi 苏轼 (1037-1101), a prominent poet, practitioner of calligraphy and painting, and theoretician who coined the term “scholar’s painting (*wenren hua* 文人画).”<sup>28</sup>

Su and his friends proposed that scholar’s painting demonstrates “a higher order of representation” that succeeded in capturing the animating vitality of the subject matter, whereas artisans’ paintings merely focused on achieving formal likeness.<sup>29</sup>

Su specifically proposed the concepts of *yi* and *xing* as the fundamental rules for painting, and put an emphasis on *yi* over *xing*. *Xing* refers to the form of the painted subject and a painting approach concentrating on achieving formal likeness. Su commented on this approach and suggested capturing the verisimilitude of the subject matter through closely

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<sup>28</sup> Egan, “Calligraphy and Painting,” *Word, Image and Deed*, 284.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*



observing nature was not sufficient as the painted subject lacked vitality (*qi*). *Yi* literally means thoughts or meanings, but what it refers to cannot be described accurately through restricted language.<sup>30</sup> Typically, *yi* refers to the “artistic intent or aesthetic mood” generated within the heart of the painter before he starts his work.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, *yi* is an “emotively neutral” term, as it does not connote that painters demonstrate their subjective emotion through painting. By promoting sketching *yi* in painting, Su proposed an alternative way to achieve lifelikeness, which emphasized the significance of painters’ artistic intent to investigate and demonstrate the “enduring [true] principles of nature” through capturing the animating vitality of nature.<sup>32</sup> Su’s aesthetic theories had become influential within the literati circle as it gave his fellow literati a unique and rather lofty identity of a self-cultivated gentleman, who was not restricted by social conventions and was able to capture the fundamental essence of nature.

Although Huizong and Su Shi’s literati group were at odds over political issues, Huizong incorporated the idea on exploring the truth of nature by fusing the self with nature rather

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<sup>30</sup> Egan, “Calligraphy and Painting,” *Word, Image and Deed*, 272.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 272-293.

than observing the form of nature through limited human perspective into his ceramic aesthetics of *unadorned naturalness*. The Chinese term of *unadorned naturalness* consists of two interrelated terms, *suzhi* and *tianran*. *Suzhi* refers to the beauty of unadornedness and simplicity, and *tianran* could be translated into spontaneity. The connotation of the term *tianran* is, in fact, far beyond the discursive language could describe. The concept of *tianran* is closely associated with the prevailing Daoist and Chan Buddhist philosophy on nature, which were highly appreciated by literati, including Su and his literati group at the time. Specifically, the concept is associated with the idea of “follow the natural course (*shunqiziran* 顺其自然)” originated in Daoism, which is also the core of the concept of *yi* in Su’s aesthetics. *Tianran* is also associated with Chan Buddhist philosophy of *wu*, which literally means “nothingness,” and refers to the illusion of “self” and “human efforts” that supposedly violates the enduring natural principle of the universe.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The concept of “Wu” appears in *The Gateless Gate*, one of the Chan Buddhist Classics with a collection of 48 Chan kōans that typically refer to records of random dialogues, statements, and experiences of ancient Chan masters. Kōans are usually adopted by the school of sudden enlightenment as effective tools for monks to generate intuitive responses from their original Buddha-nature and achieve enlightenment during Chan Buddhist practice. The emphasis on intuitiveness during the practice centered on kōans reflects the core of Chan Buddhism, which is the elimination of subjective interpretation and human efforts and full entrusting to the Buddha-nature, equivalent to the enduring natural principle of the universe in Daoism.

The two terms are related to each other in that a representation, either a visual one or a linguistic one, of the quality of unadornedness could generate a sense of natural spontaneity, as decoration or euphuism was considered extravagant and lacking natural purity. In his discussion on the influence of Su Shi and men surrounding him on the field of arts, Ronald C. Egan suggested that the *guwen* movement promoted by a group of Northern Song literati, including Ouyang Xiu and Su Shi, reflects contemporary literati's call for the revival of an ancient writing style in replacement of "euphonic prosody" and "ornate diction."<sup>34</sup> The literati's preference to an unadorned "ancient-style prose" echoes with their engagement in promoting aesthetics based on their appreciation to unadornedness and their vision of nature. Su once had praised Song Fugu's mountain-and-water painting "of the Xiaoxiang region, suggesting "How grand is this man's breast:/ Hills and rivers coil themselves inside."<sup>35</sup> This quote indicates a trend of maintaining "a lasting affinity" with nature, pursuing "a selfless immersion in activity [of painting] and the replication of natural images," promoted by Northern Song literati.<sup>36</sup> In this case, "natural images" were rendered through spontaneous

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<sup>34</sup> Egan, "Calligraphy and Painting," *Word, Image and Deed*, 262-3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

brushstrokes in response to the animating spirit of the subject matter without further interpretation or alternation from human perspective.

*Ru* ware, as a product created after Huizong's aesthetic of *unadorned naturalness*, resembles the mountain-and-water painting appreciated by literati as the true representation of nature's essence. If we recall the comparison between the *sancai* six-lobed dish of the Tang dynasty (Plate 1) and the Song *Ru* plate (Plate 4) in the previous chapter, *Ru* ware's monochromic celadon glaze differentiates from the extravagant polychromic glaze of the *sancai* ware, and engenders a sense of non-artificiality, echoing with the literati's aesthetic of nature, which emphasized the significance of following the enduring principle of nature. The clay body of *Ru* ware is analogous to the paper or the silk, on which painters transform the three-dimensional landscape into a two-dimensional image that reflect the inner quality of nature. The glazed surface that abandons artificial decoration and appears in naturally-formed glaze colors resembles the freely-executed brushstroke that captures the animating spirit of nature spontaneously. The unadorned glazed surface of *Ru* ware could be understood as an impressionistic demonstration of nature, as *Ru* ware's glaze colors had been recognized as

representations of various natural elements and phenomena, and coined with names such as eggshell-blue (*danqing* 蛋青), sky-blue after rain (*yuguo tianqing* 雨过天青) and moon-white (*yuebai* 月白).

Under the inspiration of the aesthetics of nature proposed by contemporary literati, Huizong gradually appreciated the unadorned form of ceramic wares as a disinterested representation of the spirit of nature. At the same time, the relationship between ceramic wares and tea gatherings that allowed literati to keep themselves away from worldly affairs and enjoy the tranquility of nature, contributed to the establishment of the ceramic aesthetics of *unadorned naturalness*.

### **Lu Yu and His *Classic of Tea* - The Prelude of A New Ceramic Aesthetics**

Lu Yu is a prominent poet and tea master of the Tang dynasty, whose *Classic of Tea* elevated the cultural status of tea and facilitated the development of connoisseurship of tea in China.

He was the first person who elaborated on the contribution of ceramic wares to the enhancement of aesthetic atmosphere of the tea ceremony in his *Classic of Tea*. The *Classic*

*of Tea* is the first monograph on tea in Chinese history. It consists of ten chapters, and could be divided into five major sections: the origin of tea, the manufacturing process of tea, tea utensils, the brewing process and rituals of tea drinking, and the history of tea.<sup>37</sup> The monograph could be considered as the model for Huizong in his theorization of his ceramic aesthetics of *unadorned naturalness*. In *the Classic of Tea*, Lu Yu interpreted the Way of Tea (Cha Dao 茶道) as an approach to probe into natural principles, cultivate inner virtue and attain enlightenment, associated with *the Three Teachings*.

Lu Yu's passion for tea is associated with his close interaction with contemporary Chan Buddhist monks and literati, who were major consumers of tea at this time. According to Lu's autobiography, he became an orphan at the age of three and was adopted by Zhiji, a Chan Buddhist master of Longgai Monastery.<sup>38</sup> Although he was raised to be a monk and studied Buddhist treatises under the guide of Master Zhiji, Lu developed a greater interest in Confucian studies than in Buddhist philosophy, and eventually left the monastery in 743 at

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<sup>37</sup> Ten Chapters of *the Classic of Tea* are: "The Beginnings of Tea," "The Tools of Tea," "The Manufacturing of Tea," "The Equipage," "The Brewing of Tea," "The Drinking of Tea," "Notations," "Tea-Producing areas," "Generalities," "Plan of the Book." The translation of the chapters' titles is based on Francis Ross Carpenter's version.

<sup>38</sup> Lu Yu 陆羽, *Lu Wenxue zizhuan* 陆文学自传 [Autobiography of Lu Wenxue], 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century.

the age of eleven.<sup>39</sup>

Despite his disinterest in becoming a monk, Lu Yu familiarized himself with Chan Buddhist philosophy and consistently interacted with Chan Buddhist monks in his life.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, Lu Yu had his early contact with tea in the monastery, following the spread of tea among Chan Buddhist monasteries in the Tang dynasty. Feng Yan, a Tang dynasty scholar-official, specifically recorded the custom of drinking tea in a Chan Buddhist monastery:

...When practicing meditation [Master Xiangmo of the Lingyan Monastery at Mount Tai] emphasized the importance of staving off sleep...For this reason, the Master allowed all [of his followers] to drink tea. Everyone then adopted [the habit], and tea was boiled everywhere.<sup>41</sup>

……太山灵岩寺有降魔师大兴禅教，学禅务于不寐……皆恃其饮茶。人自怀挟，到处煮饮。

According to this account, tea developed in the monastery community as a drink to aid meditation. The description provides an insight into the popularity of tea as a drink for

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<sup>39</sup> Lu, *Autobiography of Lu Wenxue*; Jin Zhenshu 金珍淑, “Guanyu Lu Yu 《Chajing》 zhong yincha guandian de yanjiu” 关于陆羽《茶经》中饮茶观点的研究 [*A Study on the Point of View to Drinking Tea Showed in Lu Yu's Tea Classic*], (Zhejiang University, 2005), 6.

<sup>40</sup> John Kieschnick, “Accidents and Incidentals: Tea,” *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), 266.

<sup>41</sup> Feng Yan 封演, “Yin cha,” *Fengshi wenjian ji* “饮茶,” 封氏闻见记 [*Master Feng's records of hearsay and personal experience*], Volume 6, 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century.

meditation in Chan Buddhist monasteries during the Tang dynasty. Chan Buddhism claims that every sentient being possesses an original Buddha-nature, and could realize the Buddha-nature through meditation, which could purify the heart that has been veiled by illusion. In order to keep the mind from being distracted by worldly affairs and stay concentrated during meditation, Buddhist monks drank tea habitually and promoted tea drinking as a meditative practice that could purify one's heart and enable one to achieve enlightenment.<sup>42</sup>

A number of Tang dynasty paintings on tea demonstrates the tea gathering of Buddhist elites. One of such paintings is *Xiao Yi Trying to Swipe the Lanting Scroll* (Plate 11) by Yan Liben. A Song dynasty copy of the painting is housed in the National Palace Museum in Taipei. The painting demonstrates a story of Xiao Yi, a scholar-official serving Emperor Taizong (627-649), acquiring the precious Lanting Scroll by Wang Xizhi from the Chan Buddhist monk Bian Cai by trickery. In the painting, Bian Cai, Xiao Yi and another Buddhist monk occupy a large space of the picture plane, leaving the rest of the space for a detailed depiction of two attendants brewing tea (Plate 12). The depiction visualizes the tea utensils

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<sup>42</sup> Kieschnick, "Accidents and Incidentals: Tea," 267.



and the brewing process written in *the Classic of Tea*. For instance, the attendants adopt the brewing method of putting tea powder into the cauldron (fu 鍑) recommended in the monograph. The elderly attendant is holding a bamboo pincer (jia 夹) to stir the tea powder. The young attendant is holding two ceramic tea bowls with stands and waiting for the tea. The individual characteristics of the tea bowls were not clearly demonstrated yet, as the painter still focused more on the meticulous rendering the major figures in rhythmic inklines.

Staying in the monastery for seven years, Lu Yu was well aware of the Buddhist connotation behind tea drinking, and incorporated his knowledge on Chan Buddhism into *the Classic of Tea*. In his first chapter on the origin of tea, Lu Yu draws an analogy between tea and the elixir of immortality in Buddhist context.<sup>43</sup> After Lu Yu left the monastery, he became acquainted with the governor of Jingling prefecture, and pursued Confucian studies under the support of the governor, while having opportunities to develop close relationships with scholar-officials.<sup>44</sup> Familiar with Confucian philosophy, Lu Yu emphasized the significance of *jian* (moderation 俭) in the ritual of tea in *the Classic of Tea*. In the section

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<sup>43</sup> Xiao Lihua 萧丽华, “Chajing daodu” 茶经导读 [Reading Guidance for the Classic of Tea], *T&D Fashion*, 国家文官学院[National Academy of Civil Service], No.131 (2011), 12.

<sup>44</sup> Lu, *Autobiography of Lu Wenxue*. Jin, “A Study on the Point of View to Drinking Tea Shown in Lu Yu’s Tea Classic,” 6.

on the brewing process of tea, Lu Yu points out that “moderation is the very essence of tea.

Tea does not lend itself to extravagance.”<sup>45</sup> He further states that tea is the most suitable

drink for one that “[is mindful of decorum and] generally moderate” (*Jingxing jiande zhi ren*

精行俭德之人), especially when he or she is suffering from physical and spiritual pains.<sup>46</sup>

By connecting tea with Confucian virtues, Lu Yu intended to promote the act of tea drinking

as a virtuous practice and transform tea from a common drink to an effective tool for people

to achieve self-cultivation.

Following the establishment of Daoism as the state religion by the Tang court, Daoist

philosophy that encourages people to take “effortless action” and live in harmony with nature

became widespread in the society.<sup>47</sup> Lu Yu, as a cultivated scholar, also engaged in Daoist

studies and was fully aware of prevailing Daoist concepts. In the section on the brewing and

rituals of drinking tea, Lu Yu proposed criteria for water used to brew tea, for the boiling

water as well as for forms of the tea foam. His criteria explicitly reflect his Daoist approach

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<sup>45</sup> Lu Yu 陆羽, Francis Ross Carpenter (translator), *The Classic of Tea: Origins and Rituals* (New York: Ecco Press, 1995), 111.

<sup>46</sup> Lu and Carpenter, *The Classic of Tea*, 60. Physical and spiritual pains refer to “melancholia, aching of brain, smarting of eyes, trouble in the four limbs and hundred joints.”

<sup>47</sup> Laozi 老子. Chapter 3, *Daodejing*.

to tea and tea practice. For instance, Lu Yu suggests that mountain streams are the best sources of water for brewing tea, because “the streams that flow through mountain and valley... are those that are clear and pure.”<sup>48</sup> He pointed out that if one has to use water from rivers, he or she should “take only that which man has not been near.”<sup>49</sup> The specific criteria and terminology provided in the monograph establish the standard for tea appreciation.

### **Lu’s Appreciation for *Yue* Ware**

Lu dedicated a whole chapter to evaluate the quality of ceramic tea bowls and praised *Yue* ware (Plate 8) as the most exquisite ceramic ware for tea drinking. Contemporary scholars of Chinese ceramics often consider *Yue* ware as “the ancestor of the Song celadon.”<sup>50</sup> It is characterized by its glossy blue-and-green glaze and translucent surface which is either completely free of adornment, or moderately decorated with shallow incised geometric or floral patterns.<sup>51</sup> Huizong’s *Ru* ware (Plate 4), in fact, bears a lot of similarities to *Yue* ware,

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<sup>48</sup> Lu and Carpenter, *The Classic of Tea*, 105-106.

<sup>49</sup> Lu and Carpenter, *The Classic of Tea*, 106.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Sullivan, “The Qin and Han Dynasties,” *The Arts of China* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999), 90.

<sup>51</sup> The Chinese Ceramic Society, “Ceramics of the Song, Liao, and Jin,” *History of Chinese Ceramics*, 191-194. Rose Kerr, photography by Ian Thomas, “Southern Celadon Wares: Guan, Yue and Longquan,” *Song Dynasty Ceramics*, (London: V & A Publications, 2004), 89.

as both of them are applied with thick celadon glaze and free from extravagant decorative patterns.

*Yue* ware is among the earliest Chinese celadon-glazed ceramics from Yuezhou of Zhejiang, China first produced in Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220AD). Its production reached a peak during the Tang and Five dynasties, when it served as the “tribute ware” for the Tang court, and was largely consumed as “exquisite utensils for daily use” by contemporary scholar-officials and Buddhist elites.<sup>52</sup>

Lu Yu was among those who recognized the aesthetic quality of *Yue* ware, but he was the first person who pushed his taste further to a theorized aesthetic standard, by articulating the reasoning behind people’s appreciation for *Yue* ware in words. In his evaluation of ceramic tea bowls, Lu Yu proposes:

Yue Zhou ware is the best. Ding Zhou ware is the next best. After that come the bowls of Wu Zhou, Yue Zhou, Shou Zhou, and Hong Zhou. There are those who argue that the bowls of Xing Zhou are superior to Yue ware. That is not at all the case. It is proper to say that if Xing ware is silver, then Yue ware is jade. Or if the bowls of Xing Zhou are snow, then those of Yue are ice. Xing ware, being white, gives a cinnabar cast to the

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<sup>52</sup> Regina Krahl, John Guy, j. Keith Wilson, and Julian Raby, “Green Wares of Southern China,” *Shipwrecked: Tang Treasures and Monsoon Winds* (Washington D.C.: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2010), 185-186. Yuezhou refers to the area around Shaoxing, Zhejiang.

tea. Yue ware, having a greenish hue, enhances the true color of the tea. That is yet a third way to describe Yue Zhou's superiority to Xing Zhou in the way of tea bowls...The lip [of Yue ware] does not curl over, but the base is round and shallow and will hold fewer than eight ounces. Stoneware from both the Yue Zhous is of blue-green shade. Being so it intensifies...the color of the tea, and the tea appears in a light red color. The tea color will appear as red in the white bowls of Xing Zhou; it will appear to be rusty brown in Shou Zhou bowls that are applied with a yellow glaze; bowls of Hong Zhou is brown, and the tea will appear to be black. [Thus,] these are unworthy of tea.<sup>53</sup>

碗，越州上，鼎州次，婺州次，岳州次，寿州、洪州次。或者以邢州处越州上，殊为不然。若邢瓷类银，越瓷类玉，邢不如越一也；若邢瓷类雪，则越瓷类冰，邢不如越二也；邢瓷白而茶色丹，越瓷青而茶色绿，邢不如越三也……瓯，越州上口唇不卷，底卷而浅，受半升已下。越州瓷、岳瓷皆青，青则益茶，茶作白红之色。邢州瓷白，茶色红；寿州瓷黄，茶色紫；洪州瓷褐，茶色黑：悉不宜茶。

In this paragraph, Lu Yu analyzes the quality of ceramic wares from six regions in terms of colors of their glazes and colors of tea when tea is poured into the bowls. He claims that the blue-green glazed *Yue* ware had the best quality as a tea bowl, and supports his opinion by comparing the glaze color of *Yue* ware to that of *Xing* ware, a type of white-glazed ceramics produced in Northern China and appreciated by the Tang court.<sup>54</sup> The approach Lu Yu used to compare the two wares manifests that he made his aesthetic judgement for ceramics based

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<sup>53</sup> Lu and Carpenter, *The Classic of Tea*, 90-93.

<sup>54</sup> The Chinese Ceramic Society, "Ceramics of the Song, Liao, and Jin," *History of Chinese Ceramics*, 203.

on his knowledge of Chan Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism. In his comparison, Lu Yu draws two pairs of analogies between the wares and elements from nature, suggesting that *Yue* ware is superior to *Xing* ware because the light celadon glaze of *Yue* ware resembles jade and ice, while that of *Xing* ware is analogous to silver and snow. Silver, as a precious metal, commonly used in the court, became a symbol of worldly pleasure and extravagant lifestyle in the Tang dynasty. On the other hand, jade had been praised as the symbol of five Confucian virtues from the Han dynasty, as its warm color, translucent quality and remarkable toughness echo with virtues of moderation and perseverance.<sup>55</sup>

The second analogy demonstrates that the glaze color of *Xing* ware resembles snow, while that of *Yue* ware is equivalent to ice. Lu Yu captures the characteristics of the two wares, suggesting the glaze of *Xing* ware appears to be milky and opaque like snow, and that of *Yue* ware possesses a lustrous and translucent quality resembling ice. At the same time, Lu Yu applies his knowledge of Chan Buddhist concept on uncontaminated Buddha-nature into his evaluation of the two wares. Since snow often appears to be mixed with a variety of

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<sup>55</sup> Xu Shen 许慎, “Yu” 玉 [Jade], *Shuowen Jiezi* 说文解字 [Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters], 2<sup>nd</sup> century. The five virtues of jade are charity, rectitude, wisdom, courage, and equity.

substances, while ice is always pure and stainless, the ice-like *Yue* ware symbolizes the enlightened heart, in which the Buddha-nature is not polluted by worldly attachments.

Claiming that *Yue* ware resembles jade and ice, while *Xing* ware is analogous to the luxurious silver and impure snow, Lu Yu proposes that the celadon-glazed ceramic ware like *Yue* ware represented Confucian virtues and spiritual purity. He further implies that the celadon ware could serve as a “self-portrait” for elites, who used the ware for tea, reflecting their identities as virtuous intellectuals devoting themselves to self-cultivation and spiritual purification.

At the end of his evaluation, Lu Yu comments on the functionality of the ceramic wares, suggesting that the green-glazed wares like *Yue* ware could “intensify ... the color of the tea,” because their grayish-green glaze would change the “light red color of tea” to green.<sup>56</sup> The preference for tea in green is presumably related to the Daoist idea of living in harmony with the natural universe through “non-action” (*wuwei* 无为).<sup>57</sup> The green color of tea echoes with the original color of the natural tea leave and was considered “the true color of tea”

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<sup>56</sup> Lu and Carpenter, *The Classic of Tea*, 92. Li Xiangwu 李相武, Qiu Hui 邱慧, “Qianxi Lu Yu tuichong Yueyao de yuanyin,” 浅析陆羽推崇越窑的原因 [A Brief Analysis of the Reason for Lu Yu’s Appreciation of *Yue* ware], *Agriculture Archaeology*, Jiangxi Academy of Social Science 江西省社会科学院, No.2 (2011), 100. Jin, “A Study on the Point of View to Drinking Tea Showed in Lu Yu’s Tea Classic,” 24.

<sup>57</sup> Laozi 老子. Chapter 3, *Daodejing* 道德经, 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

according to Lu Yu.<sup>58</sup> The Green-glazed ware, therefore, preserves the natural characteristic of tea, and was praised as superior to the other ceramic wares, in which the color of tea would result in the impure brown or black.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, the unadorned surface and naturally-formed glaze patterns of *Yue* ware reflect the unconstrained spirit of nature. By touching the ware and drinking tea from the ware in mountains and near water, practitioners were able to fuse themselves with the landscape and approach the *Dao*, the transcendent principle of nature.

## Summary

It is true that Lu Yu's evaluation of tea bowls is rather subjective, because it largely depends on his personal preference for *Yue* ware and his intellectual background. Nevertheless, he made the connection between forms of ceramic wares and prevailing concepts on nature derived from the *Three Teachings*, and provided the first explanation of why people viewed *Yue* ware as visually appealing, completing the first connoisseur review for Chinese

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<sup>58</sup> Lu and Carpenter, *The Classic of Tea*, 90.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*



ceramics. His evaluation of ceramics in terms of their glaze colors and functional effectiveness set the standard for the later development of connoisseurship of ceramics in China. His appreciation for the glossy green glaze and the unadorned beauty of *Yue* ware exerted a profound influence on the Song elites' taste for ceramic wares. It further laid the foundation for Huizong's ceramic aesthetics of *unadorned naturalness*, which is visually manifested as an unadorned monochrome surface applied with translucent glaze.

## Chapter Three

### The Aesthetic of Unadorned Naturalness: Huizong's *Treatise on Tea*

Inspired by the literati aesthetics of nature and Lu Yu's comments on tea bowls regarding their functionalities and aesthetic qualities in his *Classic of Tea* (*Cha jing* 茶经), Emperor Huizong theorized his ceramic aesthetics of *Unadorned Naturalness* in his *Treatise on Tea of the Dagan Era* (*Dagan chulun* 大观茶论).<sup>60</sup> The book was composed in 1077 and has been considered as a major tea literature in Chinese history. In *Treatise on Tea*, Huizong stated that “the most exquisite tea bowls are a dark bluish-black with delicate white highlights, called ‘hare’s fur’ or ‘marbled jade’ 盏色贵青黑，玉毫条达者为上.”<sup>61</sup> The tea bowl he referred to is *Jian* ware, which was also depicted in his painting of *Eighteen Scholars of the Tang* (Plate 6).

#### *Treatise on Tea*

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<sup>60</sup> The thesis will refer *Treatise on Tea of the Dagan Era* as *Treatise on Tea*.

<sup>61</sup> Zhao Ji 赵佶, “zhan” 盏 [Tea Bowls], *Dagan chulun* 大观茶论 [*Treatise on Tea of the Dagan Era*], 1077.

*The Treatise on Tea* was the first tea literature compiled by an emperor in Chinese history. It was composed after Lu Yu's *Classic of Tea* and tea literature by literati in Huizong's time, especially *the Record of Tea* (*Cha lu* 茶录) written by Cai Xiang 蔡襄 (1012-1067), a Northern Song scholar-official mastering calligraphy and interested in tea connoisseurship.

The book consists of twenty-one chapters which could be divided into nine parts, including the origin of tea, place and climate for planting tea, manufacturing process, assessment of tea leaves, preparation for tea, tea utensils, rituals of tea drinking, assessment of tea liquor, and an introduction of tea products in good quality. Compared to the ten chapters of *The Classic of Tea*, the *Treatise on Tea* added new contents according to the prevailing trend of tea connoisseurship, such as the instruction on whisking tea, the method which had not been popularized in Lu Yu's time. The introduction of specific tea products was another new content absent in *The Classic of Tea*; the book even devoted one chapter on white tea, a type of tea favored by Huizong. The *Treatise on Tea* records Huizong's subjective comments on tea and the practice of tea rituals, uncovering his favorite method of preparing tea, his choice

of water and his idea on the superiority of *Jian* ware as the tea bowl for tea rituals over other wares.

Huizong's preference for *Jian* ware is different from Lu Yu's appreciation of *Yue* ware as the best choice for the practice of tea. This difference in the choice of tea wares is associated with Huizong's engagement in contemporary literati culture. During the Northern Song dynasty, connoisseurship of tea started to emerge after Lu Yu had elevated tea drinking as a virtuous practice that facilitated self-cultivation and attainment of enlightenment.

Whisking tea, a new method for preparing tea, had been promoted by literati in their literature on tea. *Jian* ware was especially presented as the appropriate tea bowl for whisking tea, as it functioned effectively and represented the unadorned rustic beauty of nature appreciated by the literati.

Huizong was especially interested in this prevailing practice of whisking tea, and in the *Treatise on Tea*, he picked up on literati's preference for *Jian* ware and articulated his aesthetic judgment on the *rusticity* of *Jian* ware, discussing its unadorned spontaneous form that pays respect to the truth of nature. He further incorporated the rustic aesthetic manifested

by *Jian* ware into his aesthetic standards for ceramic wares and eventually established the aesthetic of *unadorned naturalness* as a crucial part of his ceramic aesthetics for imperial ceramics.

### ***Jian Ware and Whisking Tea***

*Jian* wares were first produced in Fujian province during the Tang dynasty, and are commonly referred as *Tenmoku* wares usually adopted in the tea ceremony in Japan. *Jian* wares have been identified as black-glazed ceramic wares with stripped and dappled patterns, which were formed naturally during the firing process in kilns.<sup>62</sup> As the *Treatise on Tea* has suggested, the appreciation of *Jian* ware had reached its peak under the reign of Huizong. Several Northern Song *Jian* wares, inscribed with the characters *Jinzhān* (Plate 9) and *Gongyu* (Plate 10), have been excavated in archaeological sites of the *Jian* kiln.<sup>63</sup> The

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<sup>62</sup> He Li and Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. "The Liao-Song-Jin-Yuan Periods (10<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries)," *Chinese Ceramics: A New Comprehensive Survey from the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco* (New York: Rizzoli, 1996), 207-210.

<sup>63</sup> Feng Xianming 冯先铭, "Sanshinianlai woguo taoci kaogu de shouhuo"三十年来我国陶瓷考古的收获[Report on Thirty-Year Archaeological Excavations of Ceramics in China], *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宫博物院院刊 [*Palace Museum Journal*], No.1 (1980), 8.

inscriptions indicate that *Jian* wares were often produced during the Northern Song dynasty as imperial tributes or utensils only for the court.

Under the reign of Huizong, *Jian* wares were promoted as one of the most appropriate tea wares not only for tea drinking during literary gatherings, but also in imperial banquets:

In the summer, around April of the second year of *Zhenghe* era, Cai Jing was called to the inner garden to join the banquet ... [Cai Jing was then] awarded with a cup of new tribute tea boiled with spring water from Mountain Hui and held in Jianxi ware with irregular fur-like patterns.<sup>64</sup>

政和二年...夏，四月，召蔡京入内苑赐宴.....又以惠山泉、建溪异毫盏，烹新贡太平喜瑞茶，赐蔡京饮之。

This record demonstrates a scene of Emperor Huizong calling Cai Jing 蔡京 (1047-1126), the minister of the court who had earned great trust of Huizong, into the inner garden. The inner garden of the court was a place in which the emperor would meet with his favored officials and organize cultural events, such as elegant gatherings. The painting of *Listening to the Qin* (Plate 13) attributed to Emperor Huizong offers an insight into specific cultural events the emperor and his officials would enjoy in the inner garden. The painting depicts a

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<sup>64</sup>Anonymous, “Yuan ji”元集. *Dasong xuanhe yishi* 大宋宣和遗事[*Anecdotes about the Song Dynasty During the Year of Proclaiming Harmony*], 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century CE. The “Jianxi ware” mentioned in the quoted passage refers to the favored “Hare’s fur” *Jian* ware.

scene of elegant gathering, in which Emperor Huizong is playing *qin*, a traditional Chinese string instrument, and two officials are immersed themselves in the music. The poem inscribed on the painting was written by Cai Jing, who was very likely to be one of the officials who participated in the depicted elegant gathering. Playing the *qin* is not the only event, as the emperor and the officials would also enjoy a series of other literati events, including drinking tea, making poems and appreciating works of art during elegant gatherings. The textual record specifically shows how Huizong awarded a bowl of tea for Cai Jing during the gathering, and reveals the tea ritual practiced at Huizong's court, including the choice of *Jian* wares as the tea bowl and water from Mountain Hui, which had also been recorded in his *Treatise on Tea*.<sup>65</sup>

The popularity of the method of whisking tea reached its peak under the reign of Huizong, as the method is associated with “tea contest” (*doucha* 斗茶), a cultural activity, involving competitions in appraising the quality of tea and in skills of whisking tea, that Huizong was particularly passionate about (Plate 14). This activity was primarily invented by

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<sup>65</sup> While promoting *Jian* wares as the most appropriate tea bowls, Huizong pointed out that “the water of Zhongling and Hui Mountain are the best [for boiling tea]” in his *Treatise on Tea*.

tea farmers in Fujian province, where *Jian* ware was produced, to test the quality of their new tea.<sup>66</sup> Later, literati had become interested in the activity, as they realized the aesthetic value of patterns formed by foams of the tea during the process of “tea contest,” and believed that playing “tea contest” could allow them to interact with nature closely and help them discern the essence of the mysterious nature through observing dynamic patterns of the tea in ceramic tea bowls.<sup>67</sup>

Huizong, as an enthusiast of the “tea contest,” shared the belief of the literati that the act of whisking tea during “tea contests” was a meditative practice enabling people to unite with nature. In his *Treatise on Tea*, Huizong elaborated on the proper manner of whisking tea to achieve the most beautiful water pattern and win the game. His description on the pattern of the tea foam explicitly manifests the aesthetic aspect of this activity:

The master whisks the tea to completion, not unlike the proper kneading of dough. Before you realize it has happened, foam arises like *bright and twinkling stars shining in glory around the moon* [my italics] ...After more powerful whisking, a greater foam will start to arise and pile up like *a treasure of pearls* [my italics] ...the whisking also continues to slow down. More froth with colorful reflections, like *cloud and mist* [my

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<sup>66</sup> Cai Xiang 蔡襄. “Jian zhan” 建盞. *Cha lu* 茶录 [The Record of Tea]. 11<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>67</sup> Qiu, “Chinese Paintings on Tea during Song Dynasty,” *Chinese Painting on Tea*, 38.



italics], will rise up... When the surface looks like *a crisp frost or freshly fallen snow* [my italics], then the tea has reached its peak.<sup>68</sup>

...如醇蘖之起面，疏星皎月，灿然而生...急注急上，茶面不动，击拂既力，色泽渐开，珠玑磊落...筵欲转稍宽而勿速，其清真华彩，既已焕发，云雾渐生...发立已过，则拂以敛之，结浚霭，结凝雪，茶色尽矣。

In this description on the process of whisking tea, Huizong has proposed an analogy between the constantly changing patterns of water bubbles and elements in nature, such as stars, clouds, mist and snow. This analogy connects the activity with nature, demonstrating that a variety of patterns of the foam, created by the act of whisking tea, echoes with changes in the natural world and results in a miniature of nature. As a pious Daoist practitioner, Huizong considered whisking tea as an approach to merge with the Way (*Dao* 道), the fundamental principles of the world that is formless and resides in nature. Through focusing on whisking tea and observing changes of patterns of the foam, the emperor was hoping to feel the change in the natural world and eventually achieve unification with nature.

To intensify the spiritual experience and the aesthetic quality during tea practice, the *Jian* tea bowl had been promoted as the most appropriate ware for whisking tea. Huizong's

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<sup>68</sup> Zhao, "Dian" 点 [Whisking Tea]. *Treatise on Tea*.

*Treatise on Tea* has a comprehensive description on the reason why *Jian* wares should be used, most likely influenced by the concise appraisal of *Jian* ware in Cai Xiang's *Record of Tea*.<sup>69</sup> Cai Xiang believed that because the color of the tea is white, the black-glazed *Jian* ware with "hare's-fur" markings is the most appropriate tea bowl.<sup>70</sup> Elaborating on Cai Xiang's comment on *Jian* ware, the *Treatise on Tea* suggests the *Jian* ware was both functionally appropriate and aesthetically superb for the activity. Firstly, the *Jian* ware was often produced with a thick clay body and glaze, which could preserve the temperature of the tea at a high level for a long time compared to other ceramic wares.<sup>71</sup> The reduced upper rim of the *Jian* ware could keep the tea from spilling out from the bowl during the process of whisking tea. Moreover, the dark glaze of the ware allowed practitioners to observe the patterns formed by the white foam of the tea more easily than other lighter-colored glazes.<sup>72</sup>

In addition to its functional effectiveness, Huizong valued the rusticity of the *Jian* ware, characterized by its dark-glazed color and patterns resembling natural elements, such as

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<sup>69</sup> Cai. "Jian zhan," *The Record of Tea*.

<sup>70</sup> Cai. "Jian zhan," *The Record of Tea*.

<sup>71</sup> Zhao, "Zhan" 盞 [Tea Bowls]. *Treatise on Tea*.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

hare's fur, partridge's feather and oil spots. This rustic aesthetic of the *Jian* ware corresponds to Daoist concept of “employing with calmness and tranquility (*tiandan weishang* 恬淡为上).”<sup>73</sup> *Tiandan* mainly refers to the aesthetic quality of authenticity and unadornedness.<sup>74</sup> “Authenticity” indicates the degree to which objects are true to their natural characteristics, which is associated with Daoist philosophy suggesting sentient beings should act upon natural principles, in which the authentic Dao reside. “Unadornedness,” which rejects external efforts in creating superficial decoration, corresponds to “authenticity” in that it emphasizes the loftiness of following natural rules and the true beauty of nature's design.

The *Jian* ware demonstrates the rustic aesthetic of “authenticity” and “unadornedness,” in its less-refined dark glaze and a diversity of patterns formed during the natural firing process. Having realized the rusticity of *Jian* ware was associated with aesthetic values derived from Daoist philosophy, Huizong perceived the ware as a mediator between the *Way* and himself and adopted it to engender a lofty atmosphere during the practice of tea drinking.

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<sup>73</sup> Laozi 老子. Chapter 31, *Daodejing* 道德经, 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

<sup>74</sup> Chen Wangheng 陈望衡. “Di wu jiang: Daojia meixue: Laozi” 第五讲：道家美学：老子 [Lecture Five: Daoist Aesthetics: Laozi], *Zhongguo gudian meixue ershiyi jiang* 中国古典美学二十一讲 [Twenty-one Lectures on Chinese Classical Aesthetics]. (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007), 84.

### *Comparison Between Jian Ware and Ru ware*

Huizong's appreciation of the rustic aesthetic manifested by *Jian* ware corresponded to the later establishment of his aesthetics of *unadorned naturalness* for imperial ceramics, which resulted in the production of *Ru* ware. As mentioned in previous chapters, *Ru* ware refers to Huizong's most cherished ceramic ware produced in the *Ru* kiln, an unofficial kiln later adopted by the emperor as his imperial kiln, and representing Huizong's ceramic aesthetics. It seems that the crazed celadon glaze of *Ru* ware demonstrates the aesthetic of elegance that contrasts with the rustic beauty of *Jian* ware. In fact, Emperor Huizong appropriated the aesthetic of nature embedded in the dark and rather crude glaze of *Jian* ware, which emphasized the beauty of rustic naturalness and opposed artificiality, and further developed his own ceramic aesthetic of *unadorned naturalness* that was manifested by *Ru* ware.

For example, the *Jian* tea bowl inscribed with *Jinzhan* (Plate 9) excavated in archaeological sites of the *Jian* kiln is covered by a thick layer of black glaze dripping down, with the bottom part and the foot rim left unglazed.<sup>75</sup> The light brown spots on the glaze

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<sup>75</sup> Feng, "Report on Thirty-Year Archaeological Excavations of Ceramics in China," *Palace Museum Journal*, 8.

have been identified as the “hare’s-fur” marking. The spots on the exterior surface of the bowl concentrate at the area close to the rim and spread out as they move downwards to the bottom of the bowl. The interior of the bowl is also decorated with “hare’s-fur” markings radiating outward. In comparison, a *Ru* incense-burner with “raised ‘bow-string’ lines” (Plate 15) currently housed in the British Museum is applied with a thick layer of monochrome greyish-blue glaze throughout its body.<sup>76</sup> The subtle crackles that result from the crazing during the firing process evenly spread throughout the surface of the ware and serve as naturally-formed decoration similar to the “hare’s-fur” marking on the *Jian* ware. The two wares were both applied with monochromic glaze colors, and were free of any artificial decoration except the glaze defects, which were considered as traces of nature and appreciated as visual representations of the aesthetic of naturalness.

The *Jian* tea bowl is created with a wide mouth and a narrow circular foot rim, resulting in a V-shaped silhouette, while the *Ru* incense-burner appears to be cylindrical body and three “cabriole legs” are attached to the body of the ware.<sup>77</sup> The shapes of the two wares are

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<sup>76</sup> “Incense Burner,” *The British Museum Collection*, accessed March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017, [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=3180529&partId=1](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3180529&partId=1)

<sup>77</sup> “Incense Burner,” *The British Museum Collection*.

simple and moderate, and are free of complicated decorative forms like the foliated rim that often appears on Tang dynasty *sancai* wares (Plate 1).

## Summary

Huizong's *Treatise on Tea* was a record of the emperor's subjective comments on tea practice and his taste for ceramics under the inspiration of contemporary literati culture. As the emperor, Huizong publicized his comments through *Treatise on Tea* and exerted profound influence on how contemporary Song people would perceive ceramic wares, forming an aesthetic standard for ceramics as another cultural discourse.

The comparison of glazes and shapes of the two wares reveals that both *Jian* ware and *Ru* ware were produced in simple shapes and applied with monochrome glaze bearing subtle patterns resembling element from nature, which were formed during the firing process following the principle of nature. *Ru* ware, thus, was produced after the aesthetic of rustic plainness and unadorned simplicity represented by *Jian* ware, and became a visual representation of Huizong's ceramic aesthetics of *unadorned naturalness*.

On the other hand, one feature that differentiates the *Ru* incense-burner from the *Jian* tea bowl is that the shape of the *Ru* ware resembles that of the bronze *Lian*, a ritual tripod wine container, of the Han dynasty (Plate 16). *Ru* wares, like this incense-burner, that were produced after archaic ritual vessels represents the other aspect of Huizong's ceramic aesthetics related to the emperor's interest in reviving the glory of Antiquity, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter Four

### Antiquarianism into Ceramics: *Antiquities Illustrated* and the Invention of a New Art Form

Huizong's literati spirit motivated him to share literati aesthetics of nature derived from prevailing philosophical concepts of the *Three Teachings*, and facilitated the establishment of his ceramic aesthetic of *unadorned naturalness*. If Huizong's aesthetic just ends here, it would merely be an appropriation of the literati aesthetics, which presumably indicates the court had submitted to the cultural discourse promoted by literati. Far from ending his ceramic aesthetics with the incorporation of the literati aesthetics, Huizong, as the ruler of the country, proposed *antiquarianism* (*shanggu* 尚古) as the other essential aspect of his ceramic aesthetics. The ceramic aesthetic of *antiquarianism* was established under the influence of Huizong's campaign of "reviving antiquity," involved with cultural programs of collecting and cataloguing Antiquities, and replicating the ancient ritual vessels in the imperial collection for court and state rituals.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey. "Collecting and Cataloguing Antiquities," *Accumulating Culture: The Collections of Emperor Huizong*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 151.



While demonstrating the aesthetic of *unadorned naturalness*, *Ru* ware was also produced after this aesthetic of *antiquarianism*, taking various shapes of ancient ritual vessels and functioning as ritual vessels under the guidance of *Rites of Zhou*. The catalogue of antiquities is a crucial source for the production of *Ru* ware in shapes of antiquities, and it also manifests Huizong's attempt to show the ability of the court in collecting ancient vessels, which were also highly appreciated and collected by literati. The production of *Ru* wares that emulated antiquities and the formulation of this ceramic aesthetic echoes with Huizong's ambition to trace back to the glorious ancient root and regain a strong voice in the cultural realm of the society, which had been increasingly dominated by the literati class.

### **Campaign of “Reviving Antiquity”**

Huizong's ambitious cultural program of “reviving antiquity” corresponded to the rapid expansion of literati influence in the society. Upon the accession of Huizong, the court was facing a decline in its control over the realm of culture and an increasing tension between the

literati class and the court regarding political decisions.<sup>79</sup> Literati, like Su Shi and his friends, had devoted themselves to a variety of art-related activities, such as painting, calligraphy, art collection, and connoisseurship. They also proposed theories on arts, philosophy and religions, and dominated the narrative of culture at the time. At the same time, literati had actively engaged in influencing political affairs of the country, questioning decisions made by the emperor and presumably threatening the authoritative status of the court.<sup>80</sup>

To maintain his absolute power and appease the conflict between the literati and the court, Huizong launched the famous program of cataloguing imperial collections of paintings, calligraphy, and antiquities. The selection and classification of works of art that could be catalogued were conducted meticulously according to Huizong's preference and theories on art. Specifically, the emperor had introduced a number of "lesser-known painters" in the catalogue of painting, and most of the painters had close relationship with the court.<sup>81</sup> By promoting artists who were close to the court in the catalogue, Huizong emphasized "the

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<sup>79</sup> Ebrey. "Strains in Emperor-Literati Relations during the Reform Era," *Accumulating Culture*, 42-75.

<sup>80</sup> Ebrey, "Collecting As a Scholarly Passion during the Northern Song Period," *Accumulating Culture*, 76-101.

<sup>81</sup> Ebrey. "Collecting and Cataloguing Painting," *Accumulating Culture*, 307.

cultural prowess and centrality of the court.”<sup>82</sup> The cataloguing program, thus, was initiated in an attempt to rebuild the court as the cultural center of the country and regain control over the cultural discourse.

The catalogue of antiquities was particularly associated with Huizong’s attempt to reform court and state rituals. It was a crucial source for the production of *Ru* wares in shapes of antiquities, and contributed to the establishment of the ceramic aesthetic of *antiquarianism*.<sup>83</sup> The catalogue of antiquities was entitled *Antiquities Illustrated of Xuanhe [Hall or Period], Revised (Chongxiu Xuanhe Bogu tu[lu] 重修宣和博古[录])*.<sup>84</sup> It is divided into 30 chapters with a classification of 59 types of objects dated by dynasty.<sup>85</sup> The catalogue is a huge book but a very selective one, as it puts an emphasis on ritual bronze vessels and documents the most superior pieces of the imperial collection. The objects in the catalogue are listed in an order from the most important ritual vessels recorded in *Rites of Zhou*, such as the cauldrons (*ding* 鼎), the six libation cups (*yi* 彝) and six beakers (*zun* 尊),

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<sup>82</sup> Ebrey. “Collecting and Cataloguing Painting,” *Accumulating Culture*, 307.

<sup>83</sup> Ebrey. “Collecting and Cataloguing Antiquities,” *Accumulating Culture*, 155.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 154. The paper will refer the catalogue as *Antiquities Illustrated (bogu tu 博古图)*.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 154. The paper will refer the catalogue as *Antiquities Illustrated (bogu tu 博古图)*.

to less ritually significant items like steelyards (*tiliang* 提梁) and dove carts (*jiuche* 鳩車).<sup>86</sup>

Moreover, the catalogue demonstrates Huizong's huge collection of vessels that are related to court rituals, such as cauldrons and bells, with the documentation of 126 cauldrons and 118 bells dated from the Shang dynasty to post-Han periods.<sup>87</sup> The classification system of the catalogue demonstrates that Huizong's standard for the connoisseurship of antiquities, which claimed the superiority of ritual bronze vessels over other types of antiquities. The emperor especially appreciated objects that were closely associated with ancient rituals recorded in *Rites of Zhou* in an attempt to express his respect to sage kings, who established the ancient rituals.<sup>88</sup>

After commissioning *Antiquities Illustrated*, Huizong initiated a reform of state rituals by reproducing ancient ritual bronze vessels following the illustrations in the catalogue. The illustrations were considered the most accurate pictorial representation of the ancient bronze vessels used by sage kings during their practices of rituals.<sup>89</sup> By commissioning the

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<sup>86</sup>“*Zhongqi* 重器” literally means “heavy objects;” however, “heavy objects” like ritual bronzes and jades are heavy, or, in other word, monumental for their political and philosophical significance, but not necessarily for their physical weight. Ebery, Contents of Huizong's Antiquities Illustrated, “Collecting and Cataloguing Antiquities,” 156-157.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 156-157.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>89</sup> Ebery. “Collecting and Cataloguing Antiquities,” *Accumulating Culture*, 166-167.

production of bronze vessels following the illustrations, Huizong intended to practice rituals in the most appropriate manner and “strengthen the ancient root of the monarchy.”<sup>90</sup>

### ***Ru* ware as Ritual Vessels**

*Ru* wares in shapes of antiquities were produced under the regulation of the Agency for Deliberating On Ritual (*yi li ju* 议礼局), which was responsible for the revision of ritual vessels according to *Antiquities Illustrated* and for regulating the imperial kilns. Although *Ru* ware was produced as imperial-used ceramics, the *Ru* kiln was not an imperial kiln originally, but was later adopted by Emperor Huizong to produce his cherished celadon-glazed *Ru* ware. Under the reign of Emperor Huizong, an imperial kiln system was established. Unofficial kilns like the *Ru* kiln received commissions from the court and produced ceramic ware following the aesthetic standards of the court. At the same time, an imperial kiln was also established by Huizong. According to *Brush Judgments From the Level Studio* (*Tanzhai biheng* 坦斋笔衡) by Ye Zhi 叶真 (the author's dates are unknown),

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<sup>90</sup> Ebrey, “Introduction,” *Accumulating Culture*, 11.

an imperial kiln, named as *Guan*, was said to be established in the capital during *Zhenghe* era (1111-1118).<sup>91</sup>

Although archaeologists have not discovered the exact site of the Northern Song *Guan* kiln yet, The Northern Song *Guan* kiln had claimed a close connection with the *Xiuneisi* Southern Song *Guan* kiln, which has been discovered in Hangzhou in 1996 and has been recognized as one of the five renowned Chinese ceramics kilns. After moving the capital to Nanjing to escape from the invasion of the Jurchen people, the new emperor of Song established the Southern Song empire and built an imperial kiln in the new capital to continue producing green-glazed ceramic vessels, following the system of the original imperial kiln of the Northern Song court.<sup>92</sup> The green-glazed ceramic vessels refer to what is now known as *Guan* wares, characterized by the greyish-green glaze and their shapes modelling after ritual vessels (Plate 17). The Southern Song *Guan* kiln was established based on the system and the function of the Northern Song *Guan* kiln, and the forms of the Southern Song *Guan* wares demonstrate a continuation of Huizong's ceramic aesthetic of

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<sup>91</sup> “Guan” literally means “official.” This *Guan* kiln refers to the official kiln established by Huizong's court in the Northern Song dynasty. Ye Zhi 叶真, *Tanzhai biheng* 坦斋笔衡 [*Brush Judgments From the Level Studio*], 12th-13th century.

<sup>92</sup> Ye, *Brush Judgments From the Level Studio*.

*antiquarianism*. The major difference between *Ru* kiln and *Guan* kiln is that *Guan* kiln was established only for the production of imperial-used ceramics, whereas *Ru* kiln experienced the transformation from an unofficial kiln to Huizong's imperial kiln, which was responsible for producing ceramic wares following the aesthetic standard set by the emperor.

The adoption of ceramic vessels as ritual vessels was not an invention of the Song court, but a tradition inherited from the sage kings. During the prehistoric periods, sage kings appreciated the unadorned beauty and the noble simplicity of pottery, which could be considered as the predecessor of ceramics. *The Rite of Zhou* has specifically pointed out that, “Shun valued frugality and unadorned beauty, so he appreciated potteries 舜至质，贵陶器，” and adopted potteries as the appropriate ritual vessels especially for the ceremonies of worshipping heaven and earth.<sup>93</sup> Specific textual record of a ceremony of worshipping heaven and earth under the reign of Huizong demonstrates that the emperor recollected the tradition of using potteries as ritual vessels established by the sage kings:

(On April 28<sup>th</sup> of the fourth year of *Daguan* era (1110), the Agency for Deliberating On Ritual) suggested...past dynasties venerated the great ceremony of worshipping heaven

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<sup>93</sup> *Zhou Li* 周礼[Rites of Zhou] in *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三经注疏. Reprint of 1815 ed. Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1981.

and earth, so... *potteries* (my italics) should be adopted as ritual vessels, [and] the manner should be equivalent to that of the heavenly and earthly sovereign.

(大观四年(1110) 四月二十八日, 议礼局)又言... 历代崇奉以为天地大祠, 故...器以陶匏, 其仪必与昊天上帝、皇地抵等。

The adoption of *Ru* ware as the ritual vessel, thus, corresponds to the fact that the translucent monochromic glaze color and the absence of decoration of the ware demonstrated the aesthetics of elegant simplicity similar to that of the potteries, which also echoed with Huizong's aesthetic of *unadorned naturalness*.

One of the examples showing *Ru* ware as a ritual vessel is a *Ru Beaker with Three Sacrificial Animals* (*Ru san xi zun* 汝三牺尊) (Plate 18) appearing at an auction held in Hongkong in 2014.<sup>94</sup> The *san xi zun* was a ritual vessel derived from the sacrificial animal beaker (*Xi zun* 牺尊), a ritual wine vessel in shapes of sacrificial animals widely adopted in the Shang, Zhou and the Warring States periods. The sacrificial animal beaker had also been incorporated in the *Rites of Zhou* as one of the six standard vessels for ritual ceremonies.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> The *Ru san xi zun* was from Zhanggongxiang kiln (张公巷窑) located in Ruzhou, Henan. The piece appeared in 2014 autumn auction held by Sincerity International Auctioneer Limited (香港中信国际艺术品拍卖有限公司) in Hong Kong. The thesis will refer the *Ru Beaker with Three Sacrificial Animals* as *san xi zun*.

<sup>95</sup> Zheng Xuan 郑玄, Jia Gongyan 贾公彦 and Zhao Boxiong 赵伯雄. *Zhouli zhushu: Chun guan zong bo* 周礼注疏: 春官宗伯, (Taipei: Taiwan guji chuban youxian gongsi, 2001), 578.

“Zheng sinong said: the six standard vessels for ritual ceremonies include sacrificial animal beaker, elephant beaker, urn-shaped beaker, beaker with no foot rim or lid, grand beaker, mountain-shaped beaker 郑司农云: 六尊, 献尊、象尊、壶尊、著尊、大尊、山尊。” *Xian Zun* (献尊) refers to the sacrificial animal beaker (*xi zun* 牺尊), “献” should be read as “xi.”



*Antiquities Illustrated* has documented two sacrificial animal beakers from the Zhou dynasty

(Plate 19). Both beakers were produced in forms of ox with covers attached to their body.

While beaker I (right) bears no decoration on its body, beaker II (left) is embellished with linear patterns formed by cursive lines and geometric patterns. It is very likely that these two

beakers offered inspiration for the creation of the sculptural decoration of the sacrificial

animals on the *san xi zun*. the body of *san xi zun* was attached with three heads of a

sacrificial animal, which resemble those of the two sacrificial animal beakers depicted in

*Antiquities Illustrated*.

On the other hand, the essential form of the *san xi zun* was not produced after those of the sacrificial animal beakers, which were made into realistic forms of the animals. The vase-like body of *san xi zun* resembles the conventional form of typical bronze beaker, such as the *shi yu* beaker of the Zhou dynasty (Plate 20) with an open, extended upper rim and a fully rounded belly. The piece particularly resembles the bronze *san xi zun* (Plate 21) housed in the Palace Museum in Taipei. This bronze *san xi zun* was produced in a moderate manner different from the extravagant bronze vessels of the Shang dynasty. It is decorated with the

*taotie* motif, which appears as a low-relief pattern attaching to the body of the vessel rather than protruding outwards as a sculptural decoration. Three heads of sacrificial ox emerge out from the repetitive pattern on the upper edge of the vessel's belly. The heads are decorated with linear patterns, which enable a smooth transition from the decorative patterns on the body of the vessel to the sculptural form of the ox's heads.

The *Ru san xi zun* is similar to the bronze *san xi zun* because both vessels achieve a combination of their vase-like bodies and the decorative sculptural sacrificial animals. While the rhythmic patterns and motifs on the Bronze *san xi zun* serve as links connecting the sculptural animal decoration and the body of the vessel, the bluish-green glaze applied throughout the surface of the vessel enable the animal decoration to merge with the vase-like part of the vessel. Furthermore, the color of the glaze engenders a sense of tranquility and elegance for the *Ru san xi zun*, and the light reflection on the smooth surface of the vessel create a dynamic visual effect. Thus, with its delicate form and elegant glaze color, the *Ru san xi zun* preserves the dynamism of bronze vessels, without applying complicated intertwining patterns, and demonstrates the beauty of unadorned elegance.

The elegant shape of the *Ru san xi zun* demonstrates that the aesthetic of *antiquarianism* connotes civilian elegance derived from the Confucian value, which suggest “elegance” is born from virtuous behaviors and proper etiquettes 由礼而雅.”<sup>96</sup> According to Xun Zi 荀子 (ca. 310-235 BCE), one of the early Confucian masters, *elegance* (*ya* 雅) is associated with civility, loftiness and orthodox, bearing the connotation of “uprightness” and “impartiality.”<sup>97</sup> Modelling after ritual bronze vessels and involving in state rituals, *Ru* wares became symbols of proper ritual practices, which qualified the court as a civilian government and the emperor as equally virtuous as the sage kings.

*Ru* wares were also associated with ritual jade because its celadon glaze color and the smooth texture of its glaze resembles jade. During the era of the sage kings, jade had been considered as a symbol of power and adopted as ritual objects for worshipping heaven and earth.<sup>98</sup> In Confucian value system, jade was appreciated as the representation of a

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<sup>96</sup> Chen, “Di si jiang: Rujia meixue: junzi zhi mei” 第四讲：儒家美学：君子之美 [Lecture Four: Confucian Aesthetics: beauty of virtuous men], *Twenty-one Lectures on Chinese Classical Aesthetics*, 69.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., The term “正” has both meanings of “uprightness” and “impartiality,” which is related to Confucian idea on the significance of behaving virtuously.

<sup>98</sup> Wu Hung, “Gudai meishu yange: ‘Dashi’ – zhongguo gudai yuqi yu liqi yishu zhi qi yuan” “古代美术沿革：大始”——中国古代玉器与礼器艺术之起源 [A Great Beginning: Ancient Chinese Jades and The Origin of Ritual Art], in Vol. 2 of *Liyi zhong de meishu* 礼仪中的美术 [Art in its Ritual Context: Essays on Ancient Chinese Art by Wu Hung], ed. Zheng Yan and Wang Rui (Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi Sanlian shudian, 2005), 525-548.

gentleman who possessed the five virtue, because of its smooth surface and translucent color, which engender a sense of moderation and noble simplicity.<sup>99</sup> Bearing similar formal qualities as jade, *Ru* ware refrained from irrational extravagance and became a representation of the aesthetics of unadorned purity and elegant *antiquarianism*.

## Summary

Emperor Huizong was a unique emperor in Chinese history. As a cultivated ruler, he had a powerful voice both in the cultural and the political realm. Cultural development and political enterprises intertwined with each other under the reign of Huizong, following Huizong's ambitious campaign of reviving the glorious antiquity and reclaiming the court as the cultural center of the society. The ceramic aesthetic of *antiquarianism* was established under the influence of this campaign, corresponding to Huizong's interest in replicating antiquities to reform rituals based on those practiced by sage kings. As the imperial ceramics adopted by Huizong, *Ru* ware represents the ceramic aesthetic of *antiquarianism* through its

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<sup>99</sup> Xu Shen 许慎, "Yu" 玉 [Jade], *Shuowen Jiezi* 说文解字 [Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters], 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

shapes that emulate antique ritual vessels, and reflects Huizong's intention to declare his emperorship, ensure his connection with the ancient sage kings, and strengthening the power of the court in every realm of the society. The unadorned celadon glaze produced after the aesthetic of *unadorned naturalness* also speaks to Huizong's political agenda of establishing a cultivated court that surpassed the extravagant Tang court and strengthening the societal morality through launching cultural enterprises and constructing new cultural discourses.

## **Conclusion**

The late Northern Song period (960-1127) was the Renaissance of China. During this period, a growing influential literati class and a cultivated imperial court were both actively involved with a redefinition of culture, inspired by a desire to restore the empire back to the harmony of the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE) and the Great Sage Kings of Antiquity. The emergence of an aesthetic appreciation of ceramics, and the transformation of crafts into works of art are direct consequences of this Chinese Renaissance spirit.

Certain standards, such as those elaborated in ritual canons, which determined the appropriate forms of ceramic wares, had indeed emerged during the Tang dynasty (618-907) and had been promoted by contemporary patrons. Nevertheless, by utilizing and viewing ceramic wares in a set, patrons of the Tang dynasty visualized ceramics as functional objects more than art works possessing aesthetic values. They interpreted a set of ceramic wares as a collective symbol of power and wealth, and paid little attention to individual characteristics of each piece, such as glaze colors, shapes and decorative designs on the surface. It was not until the Song dynasty when the elite class, including the court and the literati, first started to

appreciate the individuality of ceramic wares, which eventually helped to elevate ceramics into the realm of art.

We have identified two strands of development of the ceramic aesthetics under the reign of Emperor Huizong (1100-1126), which unfurled themselves at different rhythms. Cultural changes at the initiative of literati, Daoist and Buddhist monks contributed to the formation of an elite tea culture in China during the early tenth century. It introduced an appreciation for the spiritual value of some ceramics, especially the *Jian* ware for its contribution to the aesthetic of unadorned naturalness. Emperor Huizong appropriated this cultural development to his own ends, thus replacing a rising taste for the dark rusticity of *Jian* ware stressing its materiality, with a taste for the unadorned and refined elegance of *Ru* ware highlighting its own dematerialization.

The elevation of the tea ceremony to a court ritual does not explain the new ceramic aesthetics, because it craves an explanation of its own. The change of the imperial taste for ceramics during the Tang-Song transition (907-960) is closely associated with the replacement of a Tang court dominated by aristocracy with military power, by a Song court

controlled by scholar officials recruited based on meritocracy from the whole (literate) population and engaged in constructing new cultural discourse. Song rulers were well aware that the Tang court eventually collapsed due to the chaos caused by provincial military governors, who became powerful warlords and initiated revolts against the court. Therefore, the Song rulers opposed the luxurious lifestyle and the military-based governing principle of the Tang court, which resulted in the loss of virtue and lack of inner cultivation. At the same time, they appreciated the virtue of moderation and spiritual tranquility under the influence of the *Three Teachings* and intended to strengthen societal morality through a variety of cultural enterprises. A new imperial taste for simply adorned monochrome ceramic wares, thus, emerged during the Song dynasty.

The production of *Ru* ware did not call for a technical revolution though, since the production of monochromic ceramic wares in the Song dynasty demonstrated a continuation of the Tang dynasty ceramic manufacturing tradition. The specific aesthetic of simplicity embedded in the unadorned Song ware was facilitated by the technical innovation, especially the development of diverse types of glazes, during the Tang dynasty. Widely adopted in a



variety of cultural events held by Song elites, Song ceramic wares gradually transformed from functional objects to works imbued with spirituality. They were closely associated with contemporary elite culture and served as parts of the visual representation of the prevailing elite aesthetics emphasizing the unadorned beauty of nature.

Song rulers promoted a variety of cultural events, such as the tea ceremony and literary gathering, in which ceramic wares were often engaged and functioned as significant elements that enhanced the aesthetic atmosphere of the events. Yet, the radical changes were introduced by Emperor Huizong, who came to power at a time of economic and political stress in the empire and factionalism at court. He engaged in a large program of cultural revival, stressing a return to the ethics and the practices of the most revered ancient sage kings. In his effort to disseminate a new culture, leading to social harmony, he produced a creative synthesis of the imperial interests for antiquarianism and the literati aesthetics of unadorned naturalness. This move initiated in his *Treatise on Tea*, and took shape in his encouragement for the production of ritual vessels made of ceramics following the forms of antique ritual vessels, while reinterpreting their decoration and materiality to fit the aesthetics

of unadorned naturalness. This transformation of a craft of daily use into an art form demonstrates the interlacing of spiritual interests and aesthetic practices, and of interactions between the initiatives of elite groups (Buddhist monks and Confucian scholar officials in particular) and those of the Song court.

Last, we should note that the evolution of aesthetics for ceramics did not follow a simple line of change. From the multicolor and sophisticated forms of *sancai* ware, we have observed first the rise of *Yue* ware, a glossy celadon-glazed unadorned ware with a form dictated by the needs of tea drinking. The *Yue* ware was soon superseded at the Huizong court by *Jian* ware, a dark rustic ware evocative of wild life responding in form and color to the demands of a new way of preparing tea. Yet, at the same court, this ware was superseded in court rituals by *Ru* ware, even lighter and more evanescent than *Yue* ware, but of sophisticated shapes borrowed from antique vessels, though its decoration was more evocative than imitative of ancient precedents. It speaks for a complex web of interactions, rather than the course of influence and technical change, to account for the rise of ceramics into a form of art in China during the transition of Tang and Song dynasties.

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# Plates



Plate 1 *Sancai* six-lobed tripod dish, Tang dynasty (618-906), upper: view from above, below: view from the side, Glazed low-fired ceramic, H. 5.4cm, Diam. 27.7cm, The Avery Brundage Collection, Asian Art Museum, CA.





Plate 2 *Tripod cauldron (Ding)*, 11<sup>th</sup> century B.C., bronze inlaid with black pigment, H. 15.2cm, W. at handles 13.3cm, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Plate 3. *Gilt hexagonal silver plate with a feilian beast pattern*, Tang dynasty (618-906), gilt silver metalwork, H. 1.4cm, W. 15.3cm, Hejiacun hoard, Xi'an, China.



Plate 4 *Celadon Plate (Ru ware)*, Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), stoneware with celadon glaze, H. 3.7cm, Diam. 15.7cm. National Palace Museum in Taipei.



Plate 5 Anonymous, *Banquet (detail)*, excavated in 1987, mural painting, 180×235 cm. East wall of a Tang-dynasty tomb excavated in Nanliwang cun of Chang'an county, Shaanxi province.



Plate 6 Attributed to Huizong, *Eighteen Scholars of the Tang* (detail), Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), Handscroll, ink and color on silk, 28.2×550.2 cm. National Palace Museum in Taipei.



Plate 7 Tea Bowl with Hare's-Fur Decoration (*Jian ware*), 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century, stoneware with copper-oxide glaze, H. 6.4cm, Diam. 11.7cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Plate 8 *Lobed Bowl (Yue ware)*, 10th century, pale-grey stoneware with celadon glaze, Diam. 12.2cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Plate 9 *Jian Tea Bowl in Hare's-Fur Decoration with Inscription of "jin zhan,"* Song dynasty, stoneware with copper-oxide glaze.



Plate 10 *Jian Tea Bowl in Partridge's-Feather Decoration with Inscription of "gongyu,"* Song dynasty, stoneware with copper-oxide glaze.



Plate 11 Yan Liben (601-673), *Xiao Yi Trying to Swipe the Lanting Scroll* (Song copy), Song dynasty (960-1279), handscroll, ink and color on silk, 27.4×64.7cm. National Palace Museum in Taipei.



Plate 12 Yan Liben, *Xiao Yi Trying to Swipe the Lanting Scroll* (Song copy) (detail), Song dynasty (960-1279), handscroll, ink and color on silk, 27.4×64.7cm. National Palace Museum in Taipei.



Plate 13 Attributed to Huizong, *Listening to the Qin*, Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 147.2 x 51.3 cm, The Palace Museum, Beijing.



Plate 14 Liu Songnian (1174-1224), *Doucha tu (Tea Contest)*, Song dynasty, Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 61.8×56.4 cm. National Palace Museum in Taipei.



Plate 15 *'Bow-string' Incense-burner (Ru ware)*, 11<sup>th</sup> century (late)-12<sup>th</sup> century (early), stoneware with celadon glaze, H. 15.3cm, Diam. 24.8cm. The British Museum, London.



Plate 16 *Gilt-Bronze Bear-feet Beaker*, Han dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.), gilt-bronze metalwork, H. 19.5cm, Diam. 20cm. Nanyang Museum, Henan.





Plate 17 *Zun* vessel with light bluish-glaze, Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279), stoneware with celadon glaze, H. 25.9cm, Diam. 16.5cm, Diam of foot rim. 13.0cm, National Palace Museum in Taipei



Plate 18 *Ru Beaker with Three Sacrificial Animals (Ru san xi zun)*, Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), stoneware with iron-oxide glaze, H. 21.2cm, Diam. 12.8cm, 2014 autumn auction held by Sincerity International Auctioneer Limited, Hong Kong.



Plate 19 *Sacrificial Animal Beaker of the Zhou Dynasty (Zhou Xi zun)*, in *Antiquities Illustrated*, 1123.



Plate 20 *Shi Yu beaker of the Zhou Dynasty (Shi Yu zun)*, in *Antiquities Illustrated*, 1123.



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Plate 21 *Ritual Beaker with Three Sacrificial Animals (San xi zun)*, bronze, H. 25.3 cm, National Palace Museum in Taipei.