



A Glimpse of I Ching Through the Classic on Tea - Chapter Four Vessels

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Abstract. Chinese civilization began from the pre-Qin period, and the “Axial Age” was a time when the cultural essence was laid down in a vast array of texts, of which *I Ching (the Book of Changes)* is the first. As the first tea monograph in the world, *the Classic on Tea* has regulated the order of tea for thousands of years, with far-reaching significance, and has shone a light on the wisdom and aesthetics of modern life with *I Ching*. With the fourth chapter of *the Classic on Tea-Vessels*” as the object, the cultural representation of the “symbol” of tea ware is examined to construct a thinking framework about “Tao” of tea with the “symbol” of tea ware for further exploration.

Keywords: Watch symbols to make vessels · Tea wares · Symbol · Rituals · Edification · Cultural representation

1 Introduction: Cultural “Symbol” of Tea Ware

The *Classic on Tea - Chapter Four Vessels* describes in detail the twenty-eight kinds of vessels for frying tea in the Tang Dynasty (twenty-four groups), describing their forms and utility [1]. The vessels carry Tao, which can not be discussed without vessels, but how to view Tao and how to penetrate it in making vessels? Here we must focus on “symbol”.

It has real and imaginary symbols. The former refers to “an elephant with a long nose and two long teeth, which is a large beast of South Vietnam, born every three years and the word Xiang (an elephant in Chinese) is very similar to the shape of the ears, teeth and four feet” [2]. All the words with it as the radical are understood to be related to elephant. Also the following presentation in *the Interpretation of Lao Tzu* says “it is rare to see real elephants but the bones of dead ones or imagine the elephants alive according to their images, so what they think is called imagination” [3]. Among them, that is abstracted as the inner projection of the “picture”, namely, the imaginary image. Since then it has been further deduced, such as in ancient times to ask the fortune of the “divination symbols” and “pictograph” to describe objects. Lao Tzu said in chapter 35 of *Tao Te Ching*, “To him who holds in his hands the Great Image (of the invisible Tao), the whole world repairs” [4], namely, to grasp the “symbol” is equal to familiar with the truth of the world.

In “symbol”, there is reality and objectivity, but also abstraction and projection without distortion. In the Book of Changes-Xi Ci Zhuàn, it is said, “The study of the invisible Tao is based on a discursive approach from the abstract to the concrete, while the study of the surface phase of all is based on an empirical analysis from the concrete to the abstract” [5]. The “symbol” bridges the vessels to Tao. The process of materializing the “Way of Heaven and Earth”, i.e., from “making vessels” to “symbols” and then to “revealing the Way”, namely to “watch symbols to make vessels”, or “make vessels by imitating symbols”.

The law of “watching symbols to make vessels” needs to be followed urgently. The first Chinese handicraft monograph, *Kaogong ji* (which also translated as *the Artificers’ Record*), in which the vessels are of different colors, but are processed strictly with fine-chosen materials, fully embodying the system of “advantages of heaven and earth, great materials and skills” [6]. The best materials and exquisite craftsmanship complement each other in dialectical unity, becoming the key to the production and the principles abide by craftsmen.

“Where the sage makes the weapon to benefit the people, all are in line with the yin and yang odd-even intricate reasoning,..... if it matches, then it can be eternal..... Otherwise it will gradually disappear” [7].

Tao is not visible, so the sage after enlightenment to simulate the great Tao with symbols, that’s what “watching symbols to make vessels” comes from. This can be seen in the invention of tea wares and the changes of each dynasty, and is particularly prominent in the fourth chapter of the Classic on Tea. For this reason, it is hoped that by examining the “symbol” of the tea vessels in the *Fourth Chapter Vessels* to discover and explore the underlying cultural representations.

2 Power Representation of “Symbol” of Tea Wares

The first vessel in the opening chapter is introduced as a wind oven: “The wind oven is cast in copper and iron, like a tripod in ancient times”. The Tuan says: “The tripod is a symbol”. In ancient times, the tripod was regarded as an important tool for the establishment of the state and a symbol of power. The Symbol says: “The trigram of the Ding is the fire on wood. The gentleman is inspired by the trigram, corrects his position, and pays attention to the mission entrusted to him by heaven.”

The earliest tripod was born in the Yangshao period (initially as a common cooking utensil) and was made of earthenware. During the Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties, the bronze tripod gradually evolved into a heavy vessel symbolizing power, and the “symbol” of the tripod in the shape of a wind oven was changed, dating back to “the Yellow Emperor made three tripods, symbolizing heaven, earth and man” [8]. Yu and Qi believed that “When the nine dings have been completed, they shall be given over to three empires [9]” and cast “Nine Tripods” to “harmonize the upper and lower levels and to bear the rest of heaven” [12]. As the myth developed, the tripod was transformed into a vessel of “divine power” from heaven, and gradually became associated with “kingship” and evolved into a “symbol” of power.

In the later period, tripods were used for more diverse purposes, such as incense burning and alchemy, while Lu Yu first used them to cook tea in the Classic on Tea (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Tripod used to cook tea, Source:Cha Jing: el clásico del té. (2011).



Fig. 2. “Gui” and “Lei” Source:Cha Jing: el clásico del té. (2011).

3 Tea Wares “Symbol” Ritual Representation

In the Tang Dynasty, the formal tea banquet could not be held without twenty-four ware, Lu Yu even stressed in the Classic on Tea - Chapter Nine: The Easy and Simple Tea Ceremony that “In the bustling city, the dukes and aristocrats gathered to drink tea, but if one of twenty-four vessels of tea set is missing, it will lose elegance. Human artifacts system rituals, starting from a variety of ‘symbols’”, which of the tea ware rituals is characterized first in its integrity.

“Prestige keeps the wares and ritual is hidden in the vessels.” From the type of tea ware can also be a small glimpse of the civilization of ritual “symbol”, among the twenty-four ware there are many for rituals, such as:

“Cuo and Gui, made of porcelain, four inches in diameter, are like a box, bottle, or Gui used to put salt. Jie, made of bamboo, is 4.1 inches long and 0.9 inch wide and used to take salt” (Fig. 2).

Among them, “Gui” and “Lei” were important ceremonial vessels in the Bronze Age. In the Shang and Zhou ritual system, the bronze Gui was usually used in an even number combination with the odd number combination of columns of tripods during rituals and feasts, such as “the emperor used nine tripods and eight Gui, the vassals seven tripods and six Gui, the senior officials five tripods and four Gui, and the lower officials three tripods and two Gui” [12]. The old ceremonial vessels were used to hold the salt for seasoning the tea broth during the Tang Dynasty.

4 The Educational Representation of Tea Ware “Symbol”

In the “sage created trigram symbol to try to express the thoughts”, the symbol is divided into three layers: firstly, view symbol to understand the objective world with perception; secondly, take symbol to classify the thinking the objective world abstractly with logic;



Fig. 3. The Khan, Sun and Li Hexagram, Source: I Ching (the Book of Changes).

thirdly, watch symbol to create newborn artifacts based on practical experience and the common Qi of heaven and earth.

The twenty-four wares, through “symbols” of the shape, decoration and the method of use, contains a certain connotation of education.

When describing the wind stove, “The Classic on Tea - Chapter Four Vessels says”..... a one-legged tripod is ‘Khan is on top while Sun at the bottom and Li in the middle’.....”.

The ancient tripod-shaped wind oven has two ears and three feet, each one engraved with three pure trigrams such as Khan, Sun and Li (Fig. 3).

Kan represents water, and both Kan represents hardships. The hexagram reads “Khan, refers to be honest with open heart and progressive action.” By washing the heart with water, one can resist the danger. The Tuan Zhuan explains the trigrams: Khan is yin outside and yang inside, with the yang Yao in the middle representing the unwavering heart; The Xing Zhuan says, “A gentleman learns endlessly by maintaining constant virtue.” In the “constant virtue” lies the eternal morality. Water virtues are mainly reflected in the following two points: “Kan is not full”, namely the top class of virtue is like water, which benefits ten thousand objects without any demands for return, and then the goal of running to the sea remains unchanged, it is dangerous but never loses faith to run to the sea.

Sun represents the wind, which moves the grass and trees, so it also represents the trees. The wind is the command of the heavens, circumstantial and obedient. The wind blows and things follow, and the gentleman acts with the order. The trigram reads “Sun, slightly prosperous. It is good for traveling and for meeting with princes and nobles.” The interpretation of Tuan Zhuan is that the two Sun trigram overlap to issue orders, and the masculine gentleman also has the virtue of neutrality (in line with the way of heaven), so his will is carried out (the people comply). When the feminine is submissive to the masculine, it is prosperous and conducive to issuing orders. Sun actually speaks of the wisdom of being human, namely “obedience”.

The Ion represents fire, opposite to Khan Gua, with the outer Yang and inner Yin. Li has two meanings: one is dependent, and in nature it is fire, moving dependent on the wind; thee other is the charm of light, representing sun, the source of energy in the universe. It is solid on the outside and empty on the inside, like the sun (“the sun sees foam in the middle”, with a black hole in the middle, but radiating light around it). Tuan Zhuan explained the trigram in two ways: to attach to the right way, like the sun and

the moon to the sky and grass and trees to the earth; to have great soft and empty love, practice finance properly and spread light.

Then look at the Ting (Fig. 4): the last NINE is Yin, like the foot of the vessel; the second, third and fourth NINE are Yang, the real, hollow and allow things, like the belly of the vessel; the fifth NINE is Yin, like the ear of the vessel; the sixth is Yang, like items for lifting the tripod.

The trigram says: “Ting is symbol, with Mu Xun makes fire to cook.” According to the allegorical meaning of the Ting Gua, Sun symbolizes wind and Li fire. Sun is below the Li, which means the wind is below to make fire. As an ancient food and ritual vessel, it must meet with water. As “Kan Top” in seven characters inscribed in a foot, Kan symbolizes water, meaning the kettle pot (water boiler) placed on the tripod-shaped wind oven, and the wind from the bottom to make fire in the middle, describing the basic principle of frying tea.

Secondly, the combination of “Kan” and “Li” forms the “Chi Chi”, the penultimate of the I Ching.

“Chi Chi” means to have crossed the river, the former word means already while the latter means to cross the water. It is “Kan” above “Li”, namely water on fire, and the both is connecting. If the water and fire are completely deviated, it is “Wei Chi” (separation of Khan and Li), water and fire is not connected for nothing. If fire put out the fire or the both connect, it is “Chi Chi”.

The terms “Chi Chi” and “Wei Chi” (Fig. 5) are very useful in other ways. For example, Chinese medicine says that water and fire connect, it indicates that the heart and kidneys are in harmony and healthy condition, or it means that the body is suffering



Fig. 4. The Ting Hexagram Source: *I Ching*.

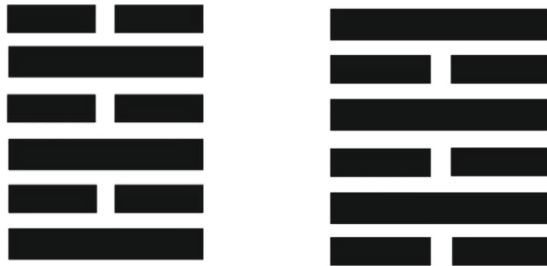


Fig. 5. The Chi Chi and Wei Chi Hexagram Source: *I Ching*.



Fig. 6. The pattern on the stand of the furnace in Lu Yu's "the Classic on Tea" Source:Cha Jing: el clásico del té. (2011).

from diseases. In management, the former means good communication and working results while the latter means blocked information and bad results.

Looking back on "Chi Chi", Xiang Zhuan explained that: "Chi Chi means the water is on fire." Water on the fire, this is the trigram; water on fire can put out the fire and also be boiled, meaning successful throughout. Water and fire are mutually exclusive, but the tea let it "help each other", so that the original incompatible opposites coexist, which depends on the kettle, and wind, which accelerates its co-integration and coexistence. "Sun" represents wind while the kettle boosts integration of water and fire and wind ignites it, reflecting the education in the "symbol".

Based on three trigrams in I Ching, Lu Yu explained that frying tea contains the "symbol" of natural harmony, and the three trigrams characterized by Fish (water insects), Biao (wind beasts) and Zhai (fire birds) characterizing the three trigrams, are painted on the bracket of the wind oven. The earth is put inside the stove in three frames: one is for Zhai, the fire bird, with a trigram said Li. The second is for Biao, the wind beast, with a trigram said Sun. The third is for fish, the water insects, with a trigram said Khan." (Fig. 6).

By this Lu Yu explained how wind helps to make fire, which boils water, which fries tea. The three is mutually supportive and the "symbol" of balance is self-explanatory.

When describing the wind stove, "The Classic on Tea-Chapter Four Vessels also says, "..... a one-legged tripod is 'A well-proportioned body can be beneficial to eliminate diseases.'....." (Fig. 7).

This is based on the "symbol" of harmony conveyed from the previous "Khan is on the top, Sun in the bottom and Li in the middle". The "body" refers to the wind stove, "five elements" onclude "wood, fire, earth, gold, water", and Lu Yu created another "symbol" to coordinate five elements with tea. As the ancient Chinese thought model for the world and the five most basic substances that make up the world, the five elements nourish and constrain each other to make up the material world. The ancient philosophers grouped the nature of all in nature into these five major categories to illustrate the origin of all.

The ancient Greeks and Indians also explored the origin of the world, to summarize the four elements.

The ancient Greek philosopher Empedocles proposed "fire, water, earth and air" as the four unchanging elements of the universe, and Hippocrates, the father of ancient Greek medicine, proposed the four body fluids, blood (fire), mucus (water), yellow bile



Fig. 7. Tripod used to cook tea Source:Cha Jing: el clásico del té. (2011).

(earth) and black bile (air); In the 19th century, the Soviet biologist Pavlov proposed four types of higher neurological activity: Sanguine (fire), Phlegmatic (water), Choleric (earth), and Melancholic (air) personality types.

In ancient India, “be void of vanities” refer to “earth, water, fire and wind”.

The ancient Chinese summarized the five elements, which first referred to the five materials (material entities) and then evolved into five functions, which today echo everything (Fig. 8).

“A well-proportioned body helps to eliminate diseases.” can be understood as cooking water with a wind stove to fry tea, with complete wood, fire, earth, gold and water, it can get rid of diseases and strengthen the body if the tea is tasted in line with the five elements.

The ancestor of the Japanese tea ceremony, Zen Master Eisai (1141–1215), in his seminal book named as *Kissa Yojoki* (which literally means “Notes on Tea and Health Care”, one of the oldest masterpieces of Japanese tea written in 1215) based on the Classic on Tea-based, applied Lu Yu’s idea corresponding to the five elements of the body and systematically explained the theory of moistening the body and mind with tea. He began by saying, “Tea is a magic medicine for health, the wonderful art of prolonging the age; it grows on the great land in the mountains and valleys and the people picking it will enjoy longevity” [12]. He said that the heart is the main human organs, corresponding to fire while the tea is cold. Drinking tea is conducive to protecting the heart, health of

Five Elements	Season	Direction	Color	Taste	Viscera
Wood	Spring	East	Green	Sour	Liver
Fire	Summer	South	Red	Bitter	Heart
Earth	Long Summer	Middle	Yellow	Sweet	Spleen
Gold	Autumn	West	White	Pungent	Lung
Water	Winter	North	Black	Salty	Kidney

Fig. 8. Diagram of the five elements Source:Cha Jing: el clásico del té. (2011).

which is conducive to coordinating the operation of the five organs, so tea can prevent disease and maintain health.

When describing the wind stove, *The Classic on Tea-Chapter Four Vessels* also says, “..... a one-legged tripod is ‘to cast tripod after Tang Dynasty destroy Hu Nationality’”.....

It refers to “An Shi Rebellion”, and the wind stove was cast in 764 AD (the next year after the end of the An Shi Rebellion). This line reflects Lu Yu’s concern for the rise and fall of his country and his desire for a peaceful and enlightened political world. Throughout Lu Yu’s life, he gave up being an official, but had a strong feeling of entering the world, so the inscriptions of the vessels show the way of his heart, showing the symbols of education.

The “symbol” of edification was also embodied in the inscription “Yi’s Soup, Lu’s Tea” on top of the gray bear.

Yi Gong, or Yi Yin, named Zhi, was the first famous and wise minister of China, who assisted five emperors, which is unique in history, and whose powerful ability and unparalleled merits are hard to surpass in later generations. The ancients put Yi Yin on a par with Confucius, one called the Yuan sage and the other the supreme sage, but Yi Yin predated Confucius by more than 1,360 years. It says in the *Analects of Confucius* that “The only great sage is Yi Yin” [13].

Yi Yin “came to Cheng Tang with a rice pot and anvil on his back and took the opportunity to talk about the taste of cooking to persuade him to practice the Way of the King”, known as the “prime minister of tastes” to rule the country by “a pot and a spoon” (meaning that ruling the world was just mixing soup in a pot) [14]. He believed that the duty of the prime minister was to regulate the yin and yang, so that the pot of soup would have all the flavors. Therefore, “Yi’s Soup” is the reputation of Yi Yin’s rule of the country, and also the origin of “ruling a big country is like cooking soup”.

Here Lu Yu used “Lu’s Tea” and “Yi’s Soup” to compare frying tea with Yi Yin’s soup to illustrate the great “symbol” to better oneself, improve familial harmony, rule country wisely, and bring peace to the world, hoping that Lu’s teachings of tea can be spread through the ware, tea and other media.

5 Conclusion: “Way” of Tea Through “Symbol” of Tea Wares

The Chinese people’s “Symbol” is rooted in special culture, first seen in divination, where people usually understand the way of heaven and determine good and bad fortune based on the different meanings expressed in the changes of the trigrams. “Watching symbols to make vessels” is found in the “four ways of sage” in the “Xici First Half”, and also in “knowing vessels through symbols” in the “Xici Second Half”. In ancient times, it was believed that small utensils, buildings, villages, urban planning are all subordinate to the unified dimension of “knowing vessels through symbols”.

Through the form, decoration, use of scenes, matching and other multi-dimensional applications, the “symbol” of tea wares played a weight, education, ritual and other representational functions and built the aesthetic and cultural system for generations through the tea affairs. “Watch symbol” helps us to understand the ideology, rituals, politics, etc. from the Tang Dynasty to later generations, but in the inheritance and

development of culture, it is more necessary to take the civilization of the heart as the main road to subtly understand the great “Way” of tea.

And aside from “vessel making”, as the axial age is getting farther and farther away, it seems to be more difficult to “watch symbol” and “reveal the Way”. After over two thousand years of human evolution, as predicted by Zhuangzi, “the scholars of later generations will unfortunately not be able to see the pure beauty of heaven and earth, the full picture of the ancient Taoist art, and the ‘Tao’ will cut off the world” [15]. The essence of “watcher” and “maker” - human beings - are forced to operate in the social machine as one-sided, single-sided “technician” or “instrumental persons”, whose sensory system is fragmented and the left and right brains are divided. The more identities one has, the thinner one becomes and harder to reach “full virtuous” and “full divine”. Undoubtedly, his perception and sense will also continue to be dulled, and the spiritual world bubbled or even virtualized. Miguel de Cervantes once said, “History is sacred because it is real; where the real is, God is. The real is part of the divine” [16].

Perhaps, rereading the classics is another practice to recover one’s “making vessels by imitating symbols” of physical and mental refinement in order to “reveal the Way”.

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