

Ancient Or Up-To-Date? Nie Chongyi's Design Of Five Drinking Cups For The Court In The 950's

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One well-known type of bronze ritual vessel from ancient China is *jue*. In many museums, art history publications, and public monuments, *jue* has been identified as a bronze cup with three legs and a mouth stretching out like two spouts. However, this popular form of *jue* was rediscovered and reintroduced in the eleventh century by antiquarians of the Song Dynasty (960–1279).¹ Before this antique form of *jue* was rediscovered, *jue* cups were designed and crafted differently. For instance, in an illustrated ritual manual from the beginning of the Song Dynasty — *Illustrations of the Three Classics of Rites* (henceforth the *Illustrations*) — the *jue* was described and illustrated as a goblet with a bird-shaped stem (Figure 1). For the justification of the design numerous ritual manuals were cited, seemingly indicating that this design was the standard norm before the Song.² Thus, even though the three-legged *jue* gained tremendous popularity after the eleventh century, the *jue* with a bird-shaped stem was representative of the earlier designs and their strategic synergy of the mid-tenth century.

In recent years, discoveries of the non-three-legged *jue* and growing interest in the *Illustrations* have raised scholarly attention to the *jue* with bird décor. Pre-imperial-era cups with inscriptions stating their identity as “*jue*” have been unearthed. Art historians, historians, and museum curators, like Li Ling, Yan Buke, and Wu Hsiao-yun, are advocates for the *jue* changing designs in the pre-imperial era, and the three-legged *jue* being one of them.³ Yan Buke, a historian, published two articles illuminating how the *jue* had undergone a dramatic change in appearance from the pre-imperial era to the *Illustrations*. He suspected that ritualists from the late pre-imperial era had reused five pre-existing names of cups, including the “*jue*,” for a new set of ritual cups referred to as the “Five *jue*.” The

capacities and implementations of these cups were crucial for the invention of the “Five *jue*,” but the appearances of the “Five *jue*” were neglected until ritualists around the beginning of the Common Era developed cups with corn-shaped bodies and ring feet for all the “Five *jue*,” making this basic design the most prominent and dominant since then.⁴ As such, Yan seems to label the *Illustrations*, or rather its compiler Nie Chongyi (fl. 948–964), as a sincere follower of a long tradition rather than a practical reformer who revised and adjusted traditions tactfully. Meanwhile, Yan’s focus is the pre-imperial era and early imperial era, glancing over many later developments of the design of the *jue*.

Art historians Jeffrey Moser and François Louis have examined the *Illustrations* in their studies, mentioning the design of the *jue*. Moser takes note of the *jue* when arguing that Nie was inconsistent in interpreting and evaluating ancient ritual manuals and previous designs.⁵ Moser’s primary focus is on the inscriptions that explain the design in the *Illustrations*. Louis compares the illustration with archaeological discoveries in *Design by the Book*, an object-oriented study that serves as a catalogue of an exhibition. With the application of a different methodology, Louis sees the *jue* as one of many examples of Nie adjusting, instead of abandoning, earlier designs from the Tang Dynasty (618–907), the principal dynasty in China before the establishment of the Song Dynasty.⁶ Moser and Louis associate the design of the *jue* in the *Illustrations* with different origins: the former as the hermeneutic practice of ancient ritual texts, and the latter as the up-to-date design developed from the recent past. The illustrations of the ritual objects in the *Illustrations* might have been done by illustrators other than Nie himself, displaying some intriguing contradictions with Nie’s description. However, these differences were most likely accepted by Nie and other ritualists, or they would not have survived in printed copies circulated across the Song Dynasty. The design of the “Five *jue*” cups in the *Illustrations* should be looked at as a product of negotiation between different sources of designs and various intentions. To fully understand the design of the cups, I decide to scrutinise both the illustration and the accompanying text.

Developing from these recent studies, I investigate the numerous earlier designs of the “*jue*” cups reused in the *Illustrations*, together with the implications and reasons used to justify the adaptation of these earlier designs in the

1 Wu Hsiao-yun, “Yu jue tusu baili qia: jue de lishi yu jue yinjiu de yuanyuan [Harmonizing hundreds of rituals with jade *jue* and *tusu* wine: history of *jue* and origin of drinking with *jue*],” *The National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art* 382 (2015): 28–39. For reference of a public monument in the shape of *jue*, see Jessica Rawson, “Reviving Ancient Ornament and the Presence of the Past: Examples from Shang and Zhou Bronze Vessels,” in *Reinventing the Past: Archaism and Antiquarianism in Chinese art and Visual Culture*, ed. Wu Hung (Chicago: Center for the Art of East Asia, University of Chicago Art Media Resources, 2010), 71.

2 Nie Chongyi, *Xinding Sanli tu* [Newly established illustrations of the three *Classics of Rites*] (henceforth *Illustrations*), 2 vols. (961; Zhengjiang fuxue, 1175; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), Vol. 2, 12.4b. Citations refers to the Zhonghua shuju edition.

3 Li Ling, *Shuo gu zhu jin—kaogu faxian he fugu yishu* [Re-Casting Antiquity—Archaeological Discoveries and Archaism in Chinese Art], 2nd ed. (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhi sanlian chubanshe, 2007), 70–76; Yan Buke, “You Sanli tu zhong de quebei jue tuilun ‘jue ming sanqian, jue you sixing’ [The three changes of the name of *jue* with its four different shapes: Deduced from the bird-like *jue* in *Sanli Pictures* by Nie Chongyi]” *Journal of Peking University (Philosophy and Social Science)* 56, no. 6 (2019): 132–46, <http://journal.pku.edu.cn/CN/abstract/abstract733.shtml>; Wu Hsiao-Yun, “Jue yu que: Cong benyuan xinrucang Xizhou wanqi douxing jue tanqi [Jue and bird: A discussion on the ladle shaped jue],” *The National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art* 450 (2020): 74–84.

4 Yan Buke, “Lishu ‘wu jue’ de chengwei yuanli: ronglianghua qiming [The principle of naming five wine vessels by volume in the ritual books]” *Journal of Historical Science* 7 (2019): 12–28, [https://r.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?filename=SXYK201907003&dbcode=WVBJ&dbname=WVBJLAST2019&v=](https://r.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?filename=SXYK201907003&dbcode=WVBJ&dbname=WVBJLAST2019&v=;); Yan, “You Sanli tu zhong de quebei jue tuilun,” 140–44.

5 Jeffrey Moser, “Recasting Antiquity: Ancient Bronzes and Ritual Hermeneutics in the Song Dynasty,” PhD diss. (Harvard University, 2010), 61–74.

6 François Louis, *Design by the Book: Chinese Ritual Objects and the Sanli tu* (New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2017).

mid-tenth century. In the article's first section, I focus on the text that explains the creation of the *jue* and then proceed to analyse the illustrations. After that, I connect the design with related objects and examine the historical background of the compilation project, which encouraged Nie to criticise the dominating ritual manuals and design of the *jue* of his time and to investigate ancient ritual manuals for his design.

In the second section, I focus on the other four cups in the "Five *jue*" category. As Yan Burke's research demonstrates, the "Five *jue*" refers to a group of five ritual cups used for diverse rituals.⁷ The *Illustrations* provides us with a sequential introduction of the five cups. In some writings, these cups were generalised as the "*jue*" cups.⁸ Nevertheless, while the *jue* is designed as a goblet with a bird-shaped stem in the *Illustrations*, the other four cups of the category appear as corn-shaped mugs with a handle and a ring foot (Figure 2). Confusingly, Nie abandons his criticism of the latest design, which is obvious in the *jue* entry, abruptly modelling his creation of the four cups on these sources. After closely examining the four cup's design in the *Illustrations*, I connect Nie's design to some surviving objects, ritual practices, and particular concerns Nie faced in the mid-tenth century to contextualise Nie's different approaches in designing the "Five *jue*."

By comparing the designs, my aim is to construct a more holistic understanding of the design of the "*jue*" cups in the *Illustrations* and connect these cups with the discourse on state rituals around the mid-tenth century. By examining the design of the "Five *jue*" cups in the *Illustrations* and preceding examples of the cups, I argue that the design of ritual cups in the *Illustrations* not only came from the ancient and orthodox models responding to the court's pursuit of a new design of ritual objects, but also served as a compromise to the practical need to sustain the up-to-date and widely approved design of imperial utensils.

Before unfolding my study on the *jue* and the remaining ritual cups, I shall clarify two issues regarding the dating of the *Illustrations*. Firstly, the book's origin should be traced back to the period before the foundation of the Song Dynasty. It was indeed completed at the beginning of the Song dynasty and practised as one central ritual manual.⁹ Nevertheless, the *Illustrations* was essentially a response to the chaotic interregnum between the collapse of the once mighty Tang Dynasty and the prosperous Song Dynasty. The Tang ended after a long period of decline at the beginning of the tenth century, and many regional powers waxed and waned. In 951, the Later Zhou emerged around the former political centre of the Tang. However, this state turned out

7 The "Five *jue*" could be found in many rituals and formal state ceremonies, including ancestral worships, sacrifices to nature spirits, ritualized archery activities, important court feasts and many other activities mentioned in early ritual texts. Yan, "Lishu 'wu jue' de chengwei yuanli," 15–24.

8 For examples of these ritual manuals, see Zheng Xuan (ca. 127–220 C.E.), and Kong Yingda (574–648), *Li ji zheng yi* [Correct meaning of the *Book of Rite*], ed. Li Xueqin (Beijing: Beijing Daxue chubanshe, 1999), 729. For examples of generalizing the cups as "*jue*", see Yue Ke (1183–1243), *Ying shi* [History on a column] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 88.

9 Louis, *Design by the Book*, 39–47.

to be equally as short-lived as its numerous predecessors. In 960, a coup ended the Later Zhou and established the Song Dynasty. The end of the Tang created a vacuum of political superiority and an absence of authority over state rituals.¹⁰ Many regional powers chose to adopt Tang ritual manuals, but the Later Zhou decided to revise them by appointing officials to revisit ritual regulations and re-examine the Tang design of ritual objects.¹¹ Nie Chongyi, a scholar and a court ritualist, began to participate in the revision project in 956, from which he gained himself the assignment to compile the *Illustrations*. Thus, Nie's work was closely associated with the Later Zhou's ambitious revision project of Tang rituals.

Secondly, the oldest surviving printed edition of the *Illustrations* came from 1175, yet it remains possible to grasp some Later Zhou designs from the prints. This is partly because the official recognition and support in the early Song had paved the way for the wide circulation of the *Illustrations*. Its texts were quoted throughout various other publications, and the illustrations were either reprinted in other books or copied in paintings. For example, at the beginning of the twelfth century, a *jue* in the shape of a goblet with a bird stem was depicted in paintings conducted by a court artist.¹² In the mid-twelfth century, a scholar named Yang Jia (ca. 1110–1184) had written a book to facilitate the study of ancient classics and texts. Yang has quoted texts from the *Illustrations* to help visualise the ritual vessels, and local officials made sure to add illustrations before publishing the book.¹³ The illustrations of the *zhi* cup, one of the "Five *jue*" cups, are almost identical to that in the *Illustrations*, loyally replicating the three cloud patterns on the body and the seemingly malfunctioning handle (Figure 3). These sources aid in the identification of the unchanged features and reconstructing the mid-tenth century design. A contemporary photocopied reprint of the 1175 edition is an essential source for my research. While I chose to rely on information from this copy, I am aware that it could be dangerous to assume that the present document remains the same as the original manuscript. However, the *Illustrations* still provide us with a rare chance to peep into the design of the *jue* and some other ritual vessels before the revolutionary reintroduction of antiquarian designs.

10 Naomi Standen, "The Five Dynasties," in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 5, Part One: The Sung Dynasty and Its Precursors, 907–1279*, ed. Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 38–132; Hugh R. Clark, "The Southern Kingdoms between the T'ang and the Sung, 907–979," in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 5, Part One*, ed. by Twitchett, 133–204; Peter Lorge, *Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Chinese University Press, 2011).

11 There are many examples of Tang influences on tenth-century rituals and I will discuss one later in this article.

12 Wan Xiaoshi, "Liyi, tuxiang yu shijian: Songdai *Mao shi* tu hui 'que bei fu zhan' shi jue ji qi xiangguan wenti [Ritual, image, and time: The bird-carrying-a-cup style *jue* in Song depictions of the *Mao Commentary of the Classic of Poetry* and relevant issues]," *Art Research* 1 (2020): 41–48, <https://www.cnki.com.cn/Article/CJFDTotal-MUSE202001011.htm>.

13 Pan Shending, preface to Yang Jia, *Liu jing tu kao* [Illustrated studies of the six classics] (1155; Ligeng Tang, 1722), 1a–2a, accessed Jun. 1, 2022, <https://id.lib.harvard.edu/curiosity/chinese-rare-books/49-990079180350203941>. Citations refer to the Ligeng Tang edition.

1: The Design of the *Jue*

The entry of the *jue* in the *Illustrations* stands out from the other entries of the four cups in the “Five *jue*” category. First, the elaborated explanation of the *jue* has been singled out from the section introducing most ritual cups. This section is on ritual vessels for sacrifices to nature spirits. While the *jue* has been included in this section, its entry is so short that it requires readers to look for the entry of “*yu* (jade) *jue*” for further details. “*Yu jue*” is almost identical to the *jue* but made of jade. Moreover, its entry appears much later when Nie introduces vessels used to worship imperial ancestors.¹⁴

Second, Nie redesigned the *jue* and the jade *jue* together with the other forty-one ritual vessels used at court sacrifices between 956 and 957, a stand-alone project took place before the official start of the compilation project of the *Illustrations*.¹⁵ At this preliminary stage, Nie was most likely still trying to convince other court ritualists about his fundamental design principle regarding the revival of ancient traditional designs. Hence, the text that explains his design of the *jue* and the jade *jue* is carefully articulated yet assertive.

Nie's design of the *jue* and the jade *jue* synthesises multiple layers of design from the past—especially the remote past. Nie begins the entry on the jade *jue* with quotes from the *Classics of Rites*, an orthodox text meant for rituals that could be dated back at least to the early imperial era. Nie then cites Zheng Xuan (ca. 127–220), an authoritative ritualist from that time, for his description of the function and size of the jade *jue*.¹⁶ Thereafter, two illustrated ritual manuals from later periods, roughly between the second and fifth century, are cited, indicating that the *jue* should have a tail, two wings, a square foot, red lacquer on the interior surface, and red cloud patterns on the exterior.¹⁷ After that, these fragmented instructions are bundled up by a description of an example: “Now [I can] see a bird carved out of wood among the sacrificial vessels. Under [the bird's] belly, iron is used to make the attached claws. It stands on a square board.”¹⁸ The *jue* cups observed by Nie were likely to be those used at court. After introducing the examples in use, Nie comments on how they “have also missed it [the correct form of *jue*],” considering the piece's imperfect manifestations of the orthodox ritual manuals from the remote past and revealing his disapproval

of the contemporary design and the latest ritual manuals. To correct mistakes from the medieval era, Nie quotes another early-imperial source, arguing that the *jue* should have a rounded mouth and a rounded foot. Additionally, Nie returns to the sources he first quoted in the entry to justify his decision to add surface patterns to the body of the *jue*.¹⁹ Unfortunately, the sources Nie relied on are too laconic and fragmented to generate a revolutionary change to the design of the *jue*.

The illustrations attached to the *jue* entries suggest Nie's change, which was based on the ancient references, are moderate (Figure 1). The illustrations display cups with bird-shaped décor and clear traces of claws, like the examples Nie supposedly condemned. Cloud patterns on the exterior create no direct conflict with the early ritual manuals and they remain clear in the illustrations. The most significant and apparent change Nie applied is replacing a square board at the bottom with a rounded ring foot. However minor Nie's changes are, Nie used these changes to advocate a return to the ancient form of the *jue* described in ritual manuals from the remote past.

Aside from the illustrations, a ceramic vessel excavated from the tomb of Empress Ai (d. 675) of the Tang Dynasty (618–907) also confirms the inheritance of some features of Tang *jue* cups, though Nie neglects the Tang sources in his writing. Hsieh Ming-liang, an art historian, was the first to notice that this excavated vessel has striking similarities with Nie's design in the *Illustrations*, including red pigment on the interior wall of the cup and a bird-shaped stand with its beak and eyes vividly incised (Figure 4).²⁰ Nevertheless, the foot of the vessel, as an unclear image from the brief archaeological report displays, looks nothing like a ring, but more-so two independent poles.²¹ Hence, Tang design of the *jue* could be similar to the one used in the 950s.

Nie's criticism toward the extant design of ritual vessels, which may follow the Tang design, matched with a court project to rebuild court ritual sites and reproduce ritual paraphernalia in the 950s. Prior to the 950s, imperial ritual sites in Luoyang, whose last recorded large-scale maintenance was conducted by the court of the Tang Dynasty in 846, were reused by the rulers of the post-Tang era.²² The reuse of Tang ritual sites might have generated a sense of lineal succession from the once powerful Tang Dynasty to the following states

14 Nie, *Illustrations*, Vol. 2, 12.1a, 4b–5b, and 14.5b.

15 Nie, *Illustrations*, Vol. 2, 11.1a.

16 For the dates of Zheng Xuan, see Qiao Hui, *Lidai sanli tu wenxian kaosuo* [Literature survey on illustrations to the three rites classics from different dynasties] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2020), 23–25.

17 For the dates of these ritual manuals, see Qiao Hui, “Ruan Chen shengping luekao [A preliminary study of the life of Ruan Chen],” *Lantai shijie* 16 (2011): 53, <https://www.cnki.com.cn/Article/CJFDTotal-SHIJ201116036.htm>; Qiao, *Lidai sanli tu wenxian kaosuo*, 62–65.

18 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

19 Nie, *Illustrations*, Vol. 2, 14.5b.

20 Hsieh Ming-liang, “Ji Tang Gongling Ai Huanghou mu chutu de taoqi [On unearthed potteries from Tomb Gongling of Empress Ai of Tang],” in *Zhongguo taoci shi lun ji* [Collected essays on the history of Chinese Ceramics], 2nd ed. (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhishi sanlian chubanshe, 2019), 188–90. (first publ. in *National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art* 279, No. 9 (2006): 68–83.)

21 Guo Hongtao, “Tang Gongling Ai Huanghou mu bufen chutu wenwu [Some artifacts unearthed from Empress Ai's tomb of Tang Dynasty],” *Archaeology and Cultural Relics* 4 (2002): 15 and 17, <https://www.cnki.com.cn/Article/CJFDTotal-SHIJ201116036.htm>.

22 Liu Xu, ed., *Jiu Tang shu* [Old Tang history], 16 vols. (945; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), Vol. 3, 26.979–95. Citation refers to the Zhonghua shuju edition. See also Xue Juzheng, ed., *Jiu Wudai shi* [Old Five Dynasties History], 6 vols. (974; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), Vol. 1, 4.66–67, 9.132; Vol. 2, 30.418–22, 31.425, and 32.438–44; and Vol. 6, 142.1893. Citations refer to the Zhonghua shuju edition.

and supported the rulers' claim for legitimate dominance over the territory which once belonged to Tang. However, rulers of Later Zhou (951–960) decided to vacate these sites and built new ritual sites in the new capital, Kaifeng.²³ In 958, Nie argued against some ritualists' concern that the new imperial ancestral temple was too small for a grand sacrifice.²⁴ This debate regarding the scale of the ancestral temple seems to suggest new ritual sites were not satisfactory enough for certain ritualists, while Nie was ready to compromise and cooperate with his colleagues and rulers who initiated the construction project.

Furthermore, Nie opposed his senior colleague's plan to follow the Tang design of sacrificial jades. In 953, court ritualists had to downsize the Tang design because of a shortage of jade at court. In 956, a new set of jades was about to be produced, with supposedly enough raw material available. Hence, Yin Zhuo (891–971), who happened to be Nie's director, proposed the return to Tang guidelines, while Nie was busy coming up with a new design by citing the *Classics of Rites* and other ritual texts from the early imperial era, leaving a good impression on many other senior ritualists. Nie's proposal was approved by the ruler.²⁵

Nie's role in the reconstruction of ritual sites and reproduction of ritual implements of the 950s was crucial to his design of the *jue*, as well as other items in the *Illustrations*. Jeffrey Moser argues in his dissertation that Nie intentionally emphasized his agency by interpreting previous ritual texts and designs to make room for conclusive opinions from the imperial authority.²⁶

However, Nie's design of ritual paraphernalia was an outcome of imperial intervention since the early 950s, rather than a cause or a proposal for it. As discussed above, the court had started moving away from Tang ritual legacies by building new rituals sites. In 956, Nie's proposal to abandon Tang design of sacrificial jades was acknowledged by Later Zhou ritualists as well as the ruler. Thereafter, Nie gained the appointment for himself to examine the other forty-three ritual vessels, including the *jue*.

Thus, it was probably a Later Zhou court's expectation, if not a requirement, for Nie to produce a convincing design of ritual vessels which was different from those prominent in the recent past. Nie's knowledge in early ritual manuals and his capability to utilize his knowledge to build and design Later Zhou ritual implements gave Nie the opportunity to redesign the *jue*, the jade *jue*, and the other forty-one ritual vessels between 956 and 957. In Nie's writing about his design of the *jue*, there is an explicit emphasis on early sources and pronounced disagreement about the designs produced after the early imperial era. This should be considered an attempt

to match his design of the *jue* with Later Zhou's ongoing project to distinguish their rituals from their contemporary counterparts. Nevertheless, the actual design of the *jue* revealed by the illustrations suggest the change is modest. This could be the result of a laconic description of the *jue* from early texts. However, such change could also be related to the strong legacy of the Tang design in the tenth century, which is clear in Nie's design of the other four cups of the "Five *jue*" category.

2: The Shape of the Other Four Cups of the "Five *Jue*" Category—*Gu*, *Zhi*, *Jue*², and *San*

Unlike the design of the *jue*, Nie's design of the other four cups from the "Five *jue*" category—*gu*, *zhi*, *jue*² (a homophone written differently in Chinese from *jue*), and *san*—is heavily influenced by the Tang design.²⁷ In the entries dedicated to these four cups, which follow the short entry of the *jue*, Nie quotes some Tang ritual texts as a justification for his designs of these cups and models his design after some cups used at the Tang court.

In this section, I focus on the shape of these four cups, because the shape has been elaborately discussed in ritual texts, including the *Illustrations* and the ones quoted in the *Illustrations*. By focusing on the shape of these four cups and analysing the origins of the shape, I want to demonstrate the contradictions coming up between Tang shapes and ancient ritual guidelines Nie advocated in the design of the *jue*. Furthermore, I suggest the application of the "Five *jue*" cups at court feasts required some incorporation of Tang features into Nie's design.

The entry text of these four cups groups them together by citing the same sources, making numerous cross-references, providing measurements of the cups in a unanimous order, and explicitly classifying these four cups in the "*shang* (drinking cups)" category rather than the "*jue*" category. First, three sources are cited throughout these four entries. The text by the early-imperial ritualist Zheng Xuan cited in the entry of the jade *jue* has been mentioned to provide information on the capacity of cups. Nevertheless, Nie abandons his critical attitude to the previous designs in the *jue* entry and cites "old illustrations" instead, which refers to six sets of illustrated ritual manuals produced between the early imperial times and the Tang Dynasty, to provide references on the outlook regarding these four cups.²⁸ Meanwhile, Nie quotes a Tang source, which is absent from the entry of the jade *jue*. Secondly, cross-referencing can be found. In the *jue*² entry, Nie says "its design follows [that of] *san* cup." In the *san* entry, Nie says the *san* cup "is similar to *gu* cup." But these cross-references make

23 Wang Pu, ed., *Wudai huiyao* [Collected Documents of the Five Dynasties] (961; Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), 3.44 and 48. Citations refer to the Shanghai guji chubanshe edition.

24 Wang, *Wudai huiyao*, 3.44–45.

25 Wang, *Wudai huiyao*, 3.51–52. See also Louis, *Design by the Book*, 42–44.

26 Moser, "Recasting Antiquity," 65–75.

27 Homophones and polyphonic characters are common in Chinese language. "*Jue*²" is a polyphonic character usually pronounced as "*jiao*", but it is pronounced as "*jue*" when referring to a cup. There is another pair of homophones in this article, which pronounces as "*zhi*". To differentiate the homophones, I add a superscript "2" after the word that appears later. Hence, "*jue*" refers to the first cup in the "Five *jue*" category and the main focus of this article, while "*jue*²" is the fourth one in the "Five *jue*" category. "*Zhi*" refers to the third cup in the category, and "*zhi*²" is the other type of cup.

28 Dou Yan, preface of Nie, *Illustrations*, Vol. 1, 1a–1b.

no mention to the *jue* or the jade *jue*. Thirdly, Nie measures the cups and provides measurements in the following order: diameter of the mouth, depth, and diameter of the bottom of the four cups. This unanimous order seems to indicate that the shape of the four cups is identical. As such, in the *san* entry, Nie paraphrases the Tang source, stating that these four non-*jue* cups (*gu*, *zhi*, *jue*², and *san*) should have been categorised as “*shang*”. This proposal is repeated in the entry of *gong*—another ritual cup—later in the text.²⁹ Nie’s pronounced recategorization has reinforced a quote in the *zhi* entry, which states that “all *shang* cups shape the same” (Figure 2).³⁰ The sources cited by Nie in these four entries seem to indicate that these cups have always been identified alongside each other in early texts like Zheng Xuan’s work and Tang ritual texts. Furthermore, the measurements and discussion about the appearance of the “*shang*” cups consolidate Nie’s proposed categorisation. These efforts in re-categorisation had probably convinced Song illustrators to picture the four cups in similar shapes.

Nevertheless, the measurements provided by Nie, the capacity quoted from Zheng Xuan’s work, and the illustrations of these four entries create two contradictions, which suggest Nie had modeled his cups not only on a design from ritual manuals as he insisted in the entries of *jue* cups but also the actual ones used at the Later Zhou court. On the one hand, the existing capacities of these cups estimated based on the measurements provided by Nie do not match the totals mentioned by Zheng Xian or Nie’s quotations. For instance, *san* is about one-half larger than *jue*² based on Nie’s measurements, but Zheng Xuan suggests a much more moderate increase in size.³¹ The measurements provided by Nie seem to be empirical data since Nie states in the entry of *gu* that the measurements of the four cups are “all counted based on a millet ruler [Nie’s special ruler].”³² Besides this statement, there are no other references to the source of Nie’s measurements. Thus, Nie might have prioritised the cups in use over the design proposed by previous ritual texts.

On the other hand, the width-depth ratio of these four cups based on the measurements provided by Nie does not balance with the cups in the illustrations. Both *zhi* and *san* should look squat with their mouth slightly wider than their height, like in Figure 5. The slimmest cup among the four happens to be the first cup among the four—*gu*. According to Nie’s text, its width-depth ratio is around 1:1.125, while its illustration shows a ratio of around 1:1.25.³³ In other

words, the illustration of *gu* is not entirely wrong. Thus, this contradiction may have two causes. One is that the illustrators wanted to follow Nie’s statement that the four “*shang*” cups have the same shape, and the other one is that the illustrators did not read Nie’s text carefully but reproduced the established illustrations.

The slim shape of *gu* and the cups in the illustrations could be traced back to, according to Yan Buke, the pre-imperial era. Yan has noticed that many of the drinking cups incised on some pre-imperial objects look like horns or tall cylindrical cups.³⁴ While the design of the “Five *jue*” might have changed slightly, the Tang cup from the tomb of Empress Ai still has a slim body.³⁵ Although none of the “old illustrations” Nie referred to have survived, archaeological discoveries suggest that slim ritual cups did exist before Nie. These “old illustrations” and some existing slim cups might be the source of the design of *gu* and the representations of the slim cups in Nie’s *Illustrations*.

In contrast to the slim shapes, the design of squat cups is not rooted in ritual manuals and the early design of the ritual cups. The squat *zhi* and *san* cups designed by Nie are like some drinking cups used at the Tang and, later, Song courts. Four gilt-silver cups unearthed from a Tang hoard at present-day Hejiacun, part of the ancient Tang capital Chang’an, have a ring foot, handle, and wide rim. One of these cups depicts eight foreign musicians surrounded by garden scenes common in China (Figure 6). Its ring handle is topped with a triangular plaquette known as thumb rest, which was common among Sogdian cups.³⁶ The diameter of the mouth of this cup surpasses its depth, like *zhi* and *san* in the *Illustrations*. The other three cups from the same hoard have different surface décors and body shapes, but they all appear squat. According to Qi Dongfang, a contemporary scholar of material culture along the Silk Road, these cups were buried in 783, and many scholars have agreed that these objects were typical of the eighth-century Tang court.³⁷ However, these cups display originality and creativity by combining different cultural motifs and patterns with little intention to generate replicable standards that allow ritual paraphernalia to be produced in multiplicity. The court fashion resembled by these cups might have little to do with Tang’s official design of the “Five *jue*.”

By the twelfth century, the Sogdian thumb rest and squat body shape did not disappear. Instead, these two features formed a cup that survived to the present in great quantity. This type of cup was referred to as “*zhi*” (a homophone written

29 Nie, *Illustrations*, Vol. 2, 12.4b–5b.

30 Nie, *Illustrations*, Vol. 2, 12.5a.

31 Nie, *Illustrations*, Vol. 2, 12.5a.

32 Nie, *Illustrations*, Vol. 2, 12.4b.

33 Nie, *Illustrations*, Vol. 2, 12.4b.

34 Yan, “Lishu ‘wu jue’ de chengwei yuanli,” 12–28.

35 Hsieh, “Ji Tang Gongling Ai Huanghou mu chutu de taoqi,” 188–90.

36 Qi Dongfang, *Hua wu Datang chun: jiedu Hejiacun yibao* [Flowers dancing in spring of the Great Tang: Deciphering the Survived Treasures from Hejiacun] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2018), 185–92; Valerie Hansen, “The Hejia Village Hoard: A Snapshot of China’s Silk Road Trade,” *Orientalism* 34, No. 2 (2003): 16.

37 Qi, *Hua wu Datang chun*, 250–72; Han Jianwu and He Daxin, “Qiao duo tian gong — Hejiacun jinyinqi de zhizuo gongyi ji zuofang [Prodigious Workmanship — The Technic and Workshop of the Gold and Silver from Hejiacun],” in *Hua wu Datang chun: Hejiacun yibao jingcui* [Selected Treasures from Hejiacun Tang Hoard], ed. Qi Dongfang, and Shen Qinyan (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2003), 21–23.

differently in Chinese from *zhi*) or “*Qu* (bent) *zhi*².”³⁸ It usually has a very shallow body, a big flat bottom, no ring foot, limited surface decorations, and, more importantly, a handle with a flat plaquette like the Sogdian thumb rest (Figure 7). Ts’ai Mei-fen, a researcher at the National Palace Museum, points out that this type of cup was one of the vessels manufactured under official monitor with standardized models at different kilns.³⁹ In 1187, Song officials proposed to replace “*jue*” with *zhi*² at the court feasts that celebrated the winter solstice and the new year.⁴⁰ The surviving examples of shallow cups with Sogdian thumb rest suggest some elements popular among luxurious cups used in court life in Tang times had survived in the post-Tang era and, eventually, developed into a new form of ritualised objects used at the Song court.

Incorporating fashionable design into the design of ritual cups sounds implausible, yet Nie had adapted the squat shapes without criticism. In the *gu* entry, Nie states that he uses a ruler made especially for the *Illustrations* to measure the cups, which indicates Nie was aware of the exact appearance and the popularity of the cups he modelled on. In the *jue* entry and many other entries of the *Illustrations*, Nie stresses the importance of returning to early ritual manuals and criticising the design of ritual vessels, like *jue*, in the tenth century. However, the four non-*jue* cups of the “Five *jue*” category adapt the shape popularised since Tang.

Nie attempts to differentiate these four cups from the *jue* and other ritual vessels, which seems to be his justification for his problematic design of the four cups. In the entries of these four cups, Nie uses a Tang source to decipher the meaning of the names of the four cups, highlighting the moral problem of intoxication and its connection to the four cups. According to this Tang source, “*gu*” (the name of the smallest cup among the four) means drinking “little” with etiquette, while “*san*” (the name of the largest one) means “mockery” of over-drinking.⁴¹ This way of explanation should have been humiliating to some officials, who were required to use *san* cups at certain court sacrifices. However, these explanations serve as moral judgments to drinking behaviours when one has the freedom to choose his drinking cup. Hence, an implicit assumption behind Nie’s interpretation of the Tang source and

his re-categorisation of the cups could be that the four non-*jue* cups could be used on occasions where rigid ritual guidelines were absent.

These occasions could be court feasts, whose ritual guidelines were lifted in Tang. Initially, court feasts were considered part of court rituals, and the “Five *jue*” cups were implemented.⁴² *Ritual Code of the Kaiyuan reign of the Great Tang*, a critical Tang official ritual manual since 732, has only a few court feasts listed and regulated. For example, this ritual manual instructs an official to request a *jue* cup or a *zhi* cup of liquid from the Tang emperor to make a toast at court feasts that celebrate the winter solstice and the new year. This manual also indicates that these feasts are important diplomatic occasions when representatives from different regions of the empire and foreign envoys attended.⁴³ As mentioned earlier, Song officials changed this practice in 1187, replacing the “*jue*” cups with *zhi*². In the meantime, other court feasts, like feasts to celebrate the ruler’s birthday, have been neglected by the Tang ritual manual. However, the “Five *jue*” cups might have been still used at these feasts. Yue Ke (1183–1243), a low-ranking court official, describes a “*jue*” cup, with which he drank at a feast that celebrated the Song emperor’s birthday in 1207, in his private memoir: “The ‘*jue*’ is [made of] silver and [gets] thick at its rim. [But] because it only has one ear, [it is] pretty difficult to drink [from].”⁴⁴ Yue’s description mentions neither bird décor nor the antiquarian three-legged shape. Instead, the cup with a single handle is likely to be a *zhi*² cup. But Yue Ke had miscategorised the cups as “*jue*”, believing the birthday party was one of the occasions where ritual cups like the “Five *jue*” and ritual guidelines should be implemented.

By using some popular shapes that originated from the Tang court, Nie sustained a visual connection between his design and the prominent Tang design. This connection was crucial in materialising imperial authority in a time of turbulence. While the Tang Empire had collapsed for more than fifty years when Nie worked on the design of these four cups, Tang ritual standards and the design of ritual objects still facilitated the numerous regional powers to regulate and perform their court rituals, as well as communicate efficiently via gifted ritual objects. For example:

38 Meng Yuanlao, *Dongjing meng hua lu jianzhu* [Annotated record of dreaming of splendor in the Eastern Capital], ed. Yi Yongwen, 2 vols. (1187; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), Vol. 2, 9.831 and 35. Citation refers to the Zhonghua shuju edition. Xu Song (1781–1848), ed., *Song huiyao jigao* [Recovered Draft of the Collected Essential Documents of the Song Dynasty], ed. Liu Lin, Diao Zhongmin, Shu Dagang, Yin Bo, etc., 16 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2014), Vol. 2, 642; Tsai Mei-fen, “Guanfu yu guanyang — qianlun yingxiang Songdai ciqi fazhan de guanfang yinsu [Government and official style — a brief discussion of the influence of Government on the Development of Song ceramics],” in *Qianxinian Songdai wenwu dazhan* [China at the Inception of the Second Millennium: Art and Culture of the Sung Dynasty, 960–1279], ed. National Palace Museum (Taipei: Guoli Gugong Bowuyuan, 2000), 326–27.

39 Tsai, “Guanfu yu guanyang,” 327.

40 Xu, *Song huiyao jigao*, Vol. 2, 642.

41 Nie, *Illustrations*, Vol. 2, 12.5a.

42 Zheng Xuan, and Jia Gongyan (fl. 650s), ed., *Zhou li zhu shu* [Annotated Rite of Zhou], ed. by Li Xueqin (Beijing: Beijing Daxue chubanshe, 1999), 464–70.

43 Xiao Song, ed., *Da Tang Kaiyuan li* [Ritual Code of the Kaiyuan Reign of the Great Tang] (732; Gong shan tang, 1886), 95.1a–98.6b. Citation refers to the Gong shan tang edition.

44 Yue, *Ying shi*, 88. For the date of the birthday, see Tuoketuo, ed., *Song shi* [Song history], 40 vols. (1345; Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1934; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), Vol. 3, 38.742–39.751. Citations refer to the Zhonghua shuju edition.

In the sixth month of the third year (of the Tongguang reign, 925), the Ritual Academy of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices reports: "It is about to perform the ceremony that confers Qian Liu as king of the Wuyue Kingdom. According to ritual manuals, [we] should use bamboo slips [to deliver the appointment]." The emperor orders, "It's better to ask the bureaus to make jade slips to match with [Qian's] great merit."⁴⁵

This is a Later Tang (923–936), Later Zhou's predecessor, record of a discussion on designing and making ritual slips to confer the king of the Wuyue Kingdom (907–978)—an independent state to the southeast of Later Tang. In both the Tang and Song, jade or marble slips were reserved for emperors and empresses, while bamboo was a more common material for ritual. The Qian family had received one or two sets of bamboo slips from Central Plains states for the conferment ceremony, though it is unclear when and who had used them.⁴⁶ By 925, Qian Liu had been ruling Wuyue *de facto* for almost two decades. The jade slips could be a sign of respect and help to consolidate Qian's political dominance in Wuyue. He Jianming, a contemporary historian, spots that Wuyue's close relation with Later Tang was a geopolitical strategy to contain its enemy—the Wu state (907–937).⁴⁷ For Later Tang, an ally was probably valuable in 925 as it was preparing for a big war against another state.⁴⁸ Hence, the jade slips could be Later Tang's bribery of Wuyue, an effort to sustain a strategic peace. Without the spread of Tang regulations and symbolisms of the different materials of ritual slips, the recorded discussion on materials of the conferment slips would be meaningless.

Meanwhile, this event also indicates that minor changes to ritual objects were politically significant to the tenth-century officials and rulers. Since Nie's designs were meant to be implemented, Nie needed to consider which occasions his vessels would be used and who would use his ships. Had the "Five *jue*" cups been used at court feasts, Nie should have been cautious about changing the design too dramatically to deteriorate the court's hospitality and authority to guests invited to a feast.

Although I have suggested that the Tang cups with Sogdian handles impacted the four drinking cups measured by Nie, it is hard to prove that these surviving samples were the prototypes of the four drinking cups. Instead, the popularity of these cups in Tang court and their similarities with some Song cups were signs that Nie might have incorporated the design of some common types of cups that have been widely accepted and used at court feasts in the tenth century. This decision to reuse some up-to-date designs from the Tang creates apparent conflicts with the ritual manuals Nie appreciated in the entry of *jue*. Nevertheless, Nie neglects the problem raised by modelling his design on different sources in these entries by shifting the focus of his description of the cups from his design to over-drinking and the usage of these cups at feasts unregulated by ritual manuals since the Tang. The unsolved contradictions could be careless mistakes made by Nie, illustrators, or other officials involved in the compilation and printing project of the *Illustrations*. However, the decision to measure some squat cups at the Later Zhou court for the design of the four non-*jue* cups was a meaningful decision, which has been explained implicitly by Nie's suggestion to separate the four cups from the "Five *jue*" category. Thus, the shape of these four non-*jue* cups reveals a calculated and practical design to make the objects suitable for an imperial commission in a time when numerous states competed under the waning Tang legacy for a new dominating authority.

3: Conclusion

Catherine Bell, a scholar of rituals, has argued that ritualisation is a process of strategically separating certain activities from daily routines.⁴⁹ Similarly, Nie's designs of the *jue* and other drinking cups could be, according to the demonstrations above, a process for the ritualisation of the drinking cups. In Nie's process of ritualising the ritual implements, he had carefully selected ritual manuals and previous models for different ritual vessels.

Nie expressed his appreciation and heavy dependence on early ritual manuals in his design of the *jue*. However, his design displayed no significant difference from the previous models, namely the Tang model and the one in use. The Later Zhou rulers went in pursuit of a departure from ritual practices

45 Wang, *Wudai huiyao*, 4.64; Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, Taiwan edn. (Taipei, Southern Materials Center, Inc., 1985), p. 476.

46 Wang, *Wudai huiyao*, 4.57-58; Tuoketuo, *Song shi*, Vol. 40, 480.13910; Li Fang, ed., *Taiping yu lan* [*Great Peace Imperial Reader*], 3rd ed., 4 vols. (1977; Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), Vol. 3, 593.2671–72. Citation refers to the Zhonghua shuju edition.

47 He Jianming, "Lun Nantang yu Wuyue de zhanzheng ji qi dui Nantang shiguo de yingxiang [Wars between Nan Tang and Wu Yue and Their Influence on Nan Tang's Down Fall]," *Journal of PLA Nanjing Institute of Politics* 18, No. 4 (2002): 68–71, <https://www.cnki.com.cn/Article/CJFDTQ-TAL-LZZB200204018.htm>.

48 Xue, *Jiu Wudai shi*, Vol. 2, 32.449, and Vol. 6, 132.1741.

49 Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 2nd ed., foreword by Diane Jonte-Pace (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7–8, 67, and 74.

of their recent past, especially Tang. As mentioned in the first section, Later Zhou rulers had moved their ritual centre from the Tang capital to their new capital. Meanwhile, although Nie's writing on ritual paraphernalia indicated a set of it was available at Kaifeng, the court still undertook a systematic redesign and reproduction of ritual paraphernalia, which led to the production of the *Illustrations*. Hence, Nie utilised early ritual texts to justify his changes in the design of the *jue*, distancing his design from the routine of tenth-century rituals practised in the post-Tang world. In the entries of *jue* and jade *jue*, Nie's criticism of the design of *jue* in his recent past, including Tang, was an excuse for him and the Later Zhou court to return to the ancient standard.

While the Later Zhou court and Nie attempted to advocate a new design of ritual objects like the *jue*, the Tang legacy was still prominent throughout the tenth century. The need to use the "Five *jue*" cups at court feasts, at which guests outside the court attended, might be a reason for urging Nie to incorporate the shapes of cups familiar to tenth-century "daily routines" into his design of the four non-*jue* cups. Though the shapes Nie adopted have shown some inconsistencies with the ritual manuals cited in the *Illustrations*, Nie neglects the contradictions by re-categorising the four cups into a new group and justifies the big difference between his design of *jue* and the four cups by distancing the cups into two types.

The different sources Nie used to justify his design of the "Five *jue*" cups suggest that it is essential to place the *Illustrations* in the mid-tenth century, or rather its historical background, to comprehend some contradictions or inconsistencies in Nie's design. The historical background includes the Later Zhou court's ambition to establish a new and authoritative paradigm of design to replace the Tang and contemporary design, as well as Nie's career and the practical need to apply these drinking cups at court feasts. Though this article only focuses on the "*jue*" cups, I hope my strong emphasis on the historical background of the *Illustrations* could help future studies on the work, as well as highlight the value of this text to reflections on the medieval design of ritual cups.

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Figure 1. Illustrations of *jue* in the *Illustrations*. Adapted from Nie, *Illustrations*, Vol.2, 12.4b.

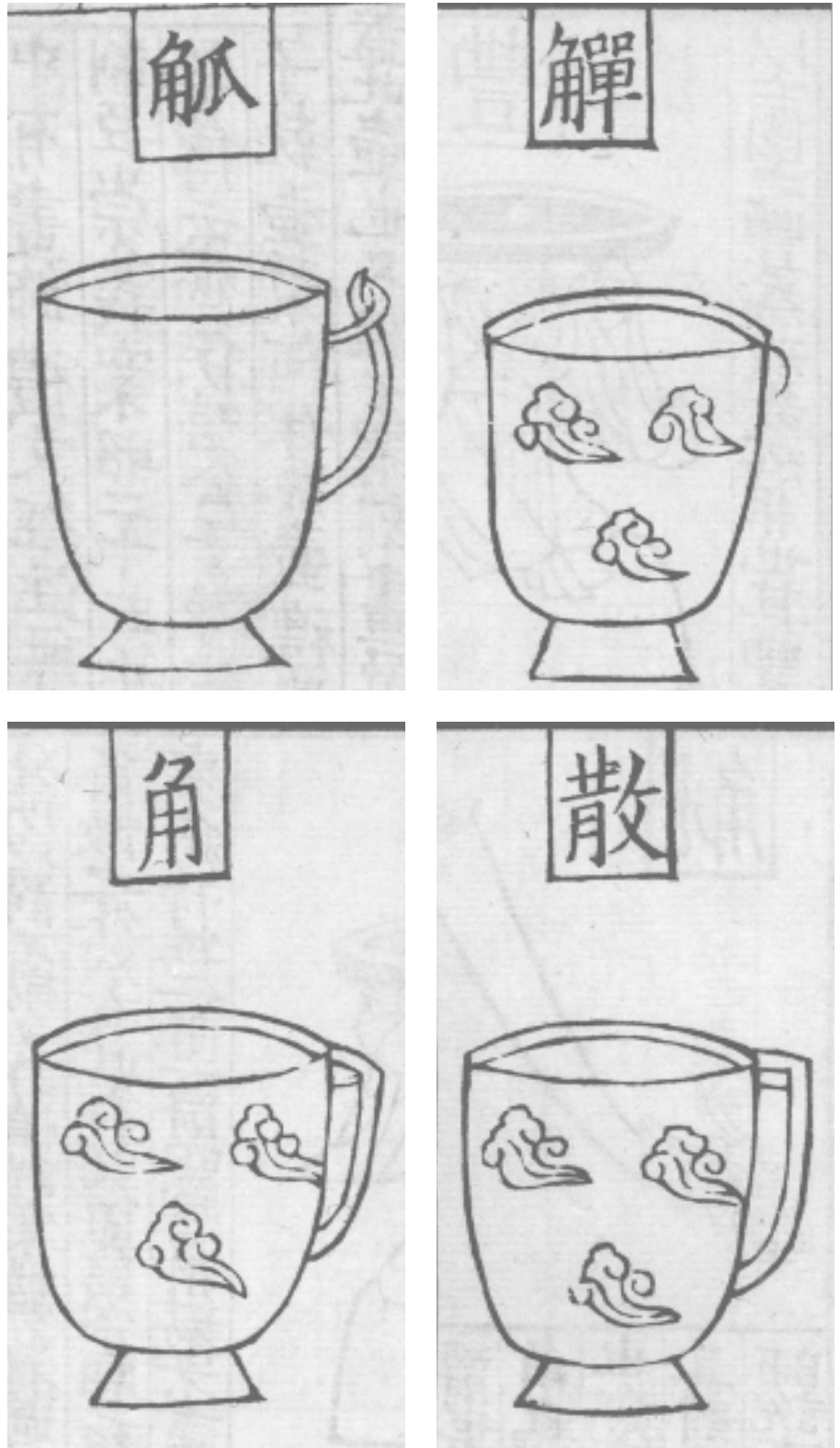


Figure 2. Illustrations of gu, zhi, jue2, and san in the Illustrations. Adapted from Nie, Illustrations, Vol.2, 12.4b-5a.



Figure 3. Illustration of zhi in Investigation of the Six Classics. Adapted from Yang, *Liu jing tu kao*, Zhouli.21b. Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University (990079180350203941).



Figure 4. *Bird-shaped Pottery Jue*, ca. 687, Tang. Painted pottery; height: 7.5 cm; diameter of mouth: 4.5. From the tomb of Empress Ai of Tang in Gongling, Yanshi, Henan Province. Adapted from Guo, "Tang Gongling Ai Huanghou mu bufen chutu wenwu," 14.

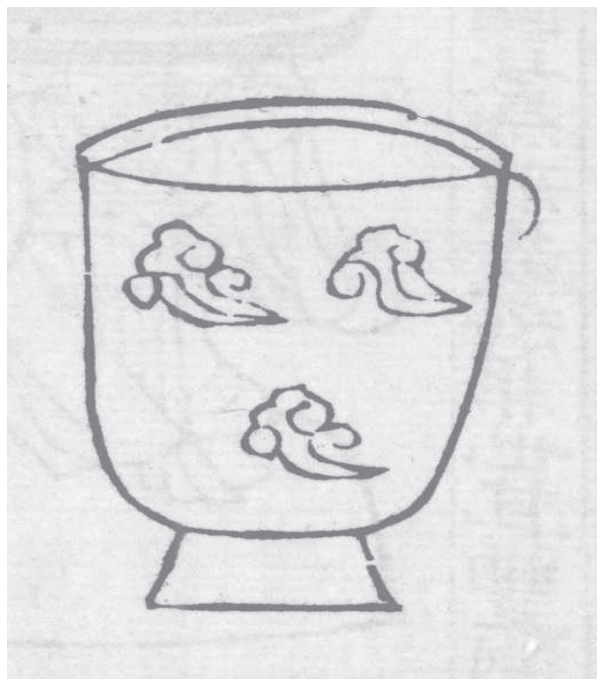


Figure 5. Illustrations of *gu*, and *zhi* in the *Illustrations*. Edited by the author. Adapted from Nie, *Illustrations*, Vol.2, j. 12, pp. 4b-5a.



Figure 6. *Gilt Silver Cup with Handle and Musician Patterns*, 8th century, Tang. Gilt Silver; height: 6.7 cm; diameter of the mouth: 6.9–7.4 cm; diameter of foot: 4.4 cm; weight: 285 g. From the hoard at Hejiacun, Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. The Shaanxi history Museum, Xi'an, No. 71:99. Adapted from Qi, *Hua wu Datang chun*, p. 184.



Figure 7. *Single Handled Cup*, 12th–13th century, Song or Jin. Ceramic; height: 4.2 cm; diameter of the mouth: 16.9 cm; diameter of foot: 10.8 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei, Cu-ci-016628-N000000000.

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