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Aspiring to Antiquity

The practices of collecting during the Northern Song dynasty (960 – 1127) in China

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Introduction

The Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens, Greece, and a ritual bronze vessel, or *ding* 鼎, coming from China (fig. 1-2). What do these two objects have in common? The answer is that both of them, in addition to belonging to the ancient history of a culture, have been admired, researched, and copied in later times. We all know how, in the Renaissance, people looked back at the ancient times of the Greek and the Romans, and how they admired, collected, and learned from items and texts from that time period. Items from ancient Chinese culture, like this bronze vessel, were in their turn collected and researched by Chinese people from later times. One big difference is, whereas Europe first started to collect antiquities fervently during the Renaissance, people in China have been collecting

antiquities throughout the whole history of China, almost without exception. Yet, until recently, it was only in the West that the history of collecting has been researched and discussed thoroughly. It is mainly for this reason that the phenomenon of collecting has been thought of as something essentially European. The European collections like the Kunst- und Wunderkammern, the large manuscript and book collections, and the sometimes vast collections of paintings and statues that European monarchs collected, as well as the reasons why they collected, are well-known both inside and outside the world of (art)history. But, as shown above, the people in Europe were most definitely not the only ones that collected, and China even seems to be on par with Europe in terms of its culture of collecting. This makes China a particularly interesting country to research, especially in light with recent developments in the academic world.

In the last few decades, a shift has occurred in the academic world from European centred research to a more global perspective. Studies that research cultures outside of Europe have become more and more important, and whole scholarly disciplines and sub disciplines are devoted to studying not just Europe, but the world as a whole, crossing boundaries of space and time. This is probably not such a remarkable development, considering our increasingly globalizing world. Today, a person can get into contact with other people from around the world in an instance, and consequently also with their cultures and their histories. Through the opening up of research, and thereby also our own perspectives, one can observe how similarities and differences can connect and disconnect disparate cultures from another, not just today but throughout the whole history of humankind.

The same shift have been recently made in the study of the history of collecting, and it has become apparent that collecting has, indeed, always been a universal, and not just an European, phenomenon. A seminal work in this regard is *World Antiquarianism: Comparative Perspectives*, edited by Alain Schnapp in 2013. In this book the history of collecting is discussed for countries both inside and outside of Europe, like Mexico, Egypt, India, Japan, and China.¹ This last country is paid much attention to in the book, and it shows that China has an extremely rich tradition of collecting, matching that of Europe. Throughout the whole history of China, people have been collecting things, especially remnants of their (ancient) past, and when China came into contact with other places, like Japan and Europe, they have been collecting foreign objects as well. Unsurprisingly, because of the similarities, many comparisons between China and Europe have been made in recent publications. *Collecting China. The World, China, and a History of Collecting*, edited by Vimalin Rujivacharakul and published in 2011, for instance, exists of various essays that discuss not only how the world collected Chinese objects, but also the phenomenon of collecting objects in China itself.² *Antiquarianism and Intellectual Life in Europe and China, 1500-1800* by P. N. Miller and F. Louis and published in 2012, is a

1 A. Schnapp (ed.), 2013.

comparative study of the fascination that both the East and the West had with antiquity.³ *Cultivated Curiosities. A Comparative Study of Chinese Artifacts in European Kunstkammern and European Objects in Chinese Elite Collections*, published in 2013, is a dissertation by A. K. Grasskamp that compares modes of collecting in both Europe and China.⁴ These are some important examples of the comparative studies that are available on collecting and collections in Europe and China. But not just comparative studies can give us insight into the world of collecting. Good, well-focused research into one or more aspects of this phenomenon as it occurs in one culture, and one time period, can give in-depth information that an intercultural comparative study can't always do. And that is exactly what will be done in this thesis.

It will probably come as no surprise that the main focus of this paper will be the history of collecting in China. In order to be able to give a solid, clear, and in-depth account of this topic, limitations will have to be set, and therefore the focus will be on one specific time period, or in this case one specific dynasty. This dynasty will be the Northern Song dynasty that was founded in 960 and fell in 1127. The Northern Song dynasty is chosen because it is a very interesting time period for various reasons. Before the establishment of the dynasty, China knew a long period of political and cultural upheaval. With the start of a new dynasty, possibilities arose. The country prospered enormously and the population grew fast. The fields of the arts and technology grew to unprecedented heights, and all in all, the Northern Song dynasty became one of the richest and wealthiest cultures in the world at that time. This would also have its effect on the culture of collecting. But it was not just the wealth that would have its effect. The exam system for civil servants was changed, so that more men could participate and, eventually, become scholar-officials. This growing group of educated officials would play an important role in the political and cultural spheres of the time. Also, Confucianism found its way back into society, in the form of Neo-Confucianism. All this, and more, would be reflected in the way people of the Northern Song dynasty collected, and this is what will be researched here. The main question of this paper will therefore "How did social and cultural factors determine the practices of collecting during the Northern Song dynasty?". Within this larger framework, one particular dimension of collecting will be elaborated upon most, namely antiquarianism, because of its importance during the history of China in general, and the Northern Song dynasty in particular. The past has always been extremely important in the history of China but the significance of the past grew to unprecedented heights during the Northern Song dynasty and,

2 V. Rujivacharakul, 2011.

3 P. N. Miller, F. Louis, 2012.

4 A. K. Grasskamp, 2013.

moreover, people started to write about it more than ever. However, to give a complete account of the history of collecting during the Northern Song, I will also briefly touch upon the general practices of collecting during this dynasty, as well as put the phenomenon of collecting during the Northern Song dynasty in historical perspective. To do so, the first chapter will give a general overview of practices of collecting in China up to the Northern Song dynasty so as to give solid background information for the next chapters. The second chapter will be a short history of the Northern Song dynasty. The third chapter will look further into any social and cultural factors like politics, religion, philosophy, etc. that were of influence on the practices of collecting during the Northern Song dynasty. In order to achieve this goal, the chapter is further divided into subchapters titled 'The Scholar-officials', 'Neo-Confucianism', 'Antiquity and Antiquarianism', and 'Collecting'. The fourth and final chapter will be a case study in which a very important Song collector will be discussed. This collector is Ouyang Xiu 欧阳修 (1007 - 1072), one of the first scholar-officials in Chinese history to create a private collection of antiquities. He was also the first person to write fervently about his collection, thus setting an example that would be followed by collectors centuries later still. This case study will be used to show how the complex and multi-faceted society of the Northern Song was reflected in the life and collection of one Song scholar-official, who stood as example for many collectors in China to come.

With this I hope to be able to give an insightful account of the practices of collecting in the Northern Song dynasty in China, where social and cultural factors created a complex society that influenced these practices of collecting, not just during the Song dynasty but also during all dynasties to come thereafter.

CHAPTER I

A Brief History of Collecting in China until the Northern Song Dynasty

The history of collecting in China, not surprisingly, doesn't start during the Northern Song dynasty. Collecting, and antiquarianism for that matter, have been practiced for centuries before the beginning of the Song dynasty in 960. It is important to look at what had happened in the past before collecting in the Song dynasty is discussed in more detail. This is not just because such a historical survey can provide a solid background for the chapters to come, but also because it is exactly that, looking at what has come before and learning from that, that has been a key aspect of life for the Chinese people throughout the centuries, and what has driven people to collect and become antiquaries in the Northern Song dynasty. This interest in the past and its significance for the Chinese comes, in part, from the strong ancestral cult, in which people look at their ancestors and preserve and learn from them.⁵ We will see that this aspect plays an important role throughout the history of China. This is why we will take a look here at some dynasties prior to the Northern Song dynasty, to see how interest and respect in and for what has come before resulted in preserving, collecting, and writing about objects from the past.

It was already during the Shang Period (ca. 1550 – ca. 1046 BCE) that a form of collecting was practiced. From excavated tombs evidence has been found that, during the Bronze Age, people collected items from an even further past. An example is the tomb of Princess Fu Hao 妇好 (died in ca. 1300 BCE) at the archaeological site of Yinxu, near Anyang (in the province of Henan). In this tomb 755 jade objects were excavated that date to Neolithic times. Some of these objects were remodelled into other objects, while others were left intact. As Lothar von Falkenhausen says in his article "Antiquarianism in East Asia. A preliminary overview", even though we can't know for sure today how much valued these objects exactly were for their antiquity, it is very well possible that they were appreciated for precisely that, especially when taking into account that the ancestral cult was already apparent in the Shang culture.⁶ Michel Beurdeley, in his book *The Chinese collector through the centuries*, also talks about the connection between collections from the Shang Period and the concern people had with their ancestors. He states that it seems that the earliest collections of the Shang were based on the family treasure that consisted mainly of ritual objects, of which the bronzes

5 M. Beurdeley, 1966, p. 15; L. von Falkenhausen, 2013, p. 35.

6 L. von Falkenhausen, 2013, p. 46.

were probably the most valuable. These treasures were meant for the next generations and losing them would mean catastrophe for the family.⁷

Also during the Zhou Period (ca. 1046 – 221 BCE) did people collect remnants of their past and attention was paid to what had come before. Tombs dating to the Zhou Period, just like tombs from the Shang era, contain a lot of jade that is much older than the tombs themselves, and, just like the Shang, families had treasure collections to be handed down from generation to generation.⁸ Another similarity between the two periods that attest to the importance people attached to the past, are the objects that were made in imitation of older objects. In both the Shang and the Zhou Periods, the bronze vessels from older times were imitated, copied, and even emulated. A good example of a collection of such objects is a tomb dating from the period of the Eastern Zhou, at Yan Xiadu, Yi Xian (Hebei province), where ceramic vessels were found that imitated bronze ritual vessels and bells from all periods of the Bronze Age. As Falkenhausen observes: “This is the closest equivalent in pre-imperial China to a proto-archaeological ‘antiquarian mentality’.”⁹

Taking a small step forward in time, to the Han dynasty (202 BCE – 220 CE), one finds that ritual bronzes were extremely sought after, both by emperors and other collectors. Michel Beurdeley even compares the passion with which these kind of ancient vessels was collected to “the feverish excitement that accompanied the quest for Greek and Roman vessels in the Renaissance”.¹⁰ It seems that ancient vessels were appreciated, not just for their aesthetic appeal, but also for their old age. This extreme love for bronzes could now quite easily be fed, as it was during the Han dynasty that many bronzes were unearthed. Finding an ancient ritual bronze was seen as an auspicious omen, and such a find was often recorded in official histories. These findings even inspired emperor Wudi 武帝 (141 – 87 BCE), the emperor that turned Confucianism into a state philosophy, to give the name Yuanding 元鼎 (Period of the cauldron) to a new reign period.¹¹ It was not just the ancient objects that were collected that showed the respect the Han people had for the past. The successors of the early Han emperors restored the ancient laws and founded an university that followed the classical tradition, particularly the teachings of Confucius 孔子 (551 BCE – 479 BCE).¹² Unsurprisingly, it was during the Han dynasty as well that the influence of scholars who studied the ancient texts grew

7 M. Beurdeley, 1966, pp. 16-17.

8 M. Beurdeley, 1966, pp. 16-17; L. von Falkenhausen, 2013, p. 46.

9 L. von Falkenhausen, 2013, pp. 46-47.

10 M. Beurdeley, 1966, p. 19.

11 M. Beurdeley, 1966, p. 19-21; L. von Falkenhausen, 2013, p. 47.

rapidly. They looked back into the past, to an idealized version of the Western Zhou period, and wanted to use elements from that past in the management of the Han dynasty.¹³ Just like during the Shang and Zhou periods, the people from the Han dynasty also used elements from ancient objects into the design of contemporary works. The Wu Liang shrine 武梁祠 in Shandong dates to the Eastern Han. It does not only contain stone-carved figures from the earliest times of antiquity to more recent times, these figures are also depicted in a rather simplistic style, that reminded the viewer think of antiquity and perceive the persons depicted as historical figures. The simplicity in form would remain to be associated with the elegance of antiquity throughout the history of China.¹⁴

During the Han dynasty, things other than objects from the past were collected as well. Eugene Wang, in his article “Collecting the World: Sculptural Ensemble of Bestiary on General Huo Qubing’s (140 – 117 BCE) Tumulus”, directs attention to a different type of collection. In his garden, emperor Wudi had a collection that consisted of curios and exotica that functioned as symbols of the unknown world outside of the Chinese empire.¹⁵ The emperor had them collected to make this unknown world known, quite like the collections we know of in Europe of a much later date where the collector wanted to create a microcosm by means of his collection within the macrocosm, the world itself. But, as Wang points out, the collecting of foreign objects also had another meaning. It functioned as a sort of symbolic territorial mapping, as a project of world-making.¹⁶ With the expansion of the empire, the Chinese people came into contact with other cultures, and so it became important to order the newly acquired knowledge and know what belonged to the empire and what not. The collection could also show what once was foreign, now falls within the boundaries of the empire. This would be an important aspect of imperial collections for centuries to come, especially when the Chinese empire came more and more into contact with foreign countries, for instance those of Europe.

The period following the fall of the Han dynasty was one of great turmoil. In spite of this, wealth and luxury were still very much known to the Chinese, especially in the cities that, because of the expansion of the Han dynasty, had sometimes doubled in size. The arts flourished and men of a

12 M. Beurdeley, 1966, pp. 20-21.

13 B. J. Ter Haar, 2009, p. 69.

14 L. von Falkenhausen, 2013, p. 48.

15 E. Wang, 2011, p. 155.

16 E. Wang, 2011, p. 163.

higher social status collected fervently.¹⁷ This is also the period that saw the introduction of Buddhism into China. Religious institutions have played a key role in practices of collecting throughout East Asia. Buddhist monasteries, for instance, have collected and preserved ancient objects for religious purposes, for study, but also just for their material value. These objects were ordered and recorded, and this kind of preserving objects influenced the practices of collecting for centuries to come.¹⁸ Monasteries and temples thus also became important places, in the sense that these were the kind of localities where collectors could find precious ancient objects. There is even an anecdote about a famous Song collector, named Mi Fu 米芾 (1051 – 1107), who visited a temple where he stole a small plaque that had a famous poem inscribed on it. He apparently ran off with the men from the temple in pursuit.¹⁹ Of course, we don't know whether this is really true or not. Mi Fu was known to be an eccentric man but many stories about him were exaggerated or entirely made up. Whether it is true or not, it does reflect the fact that religious institutions were important collection sites.

The last major dynasty before the Northern Song is the Tang dynasty (618 – 907). It was during this period that China was more open to foreign influences than ever before. This was due to the enormous expansion that the Chinese empire saw during the reign of emperor Taizong 太宗 (626 – 649). People from different cultural and religious backgrounds flooded into China and made it into a vast cultural melting-pot. This would have its effect on the practices of collecting. We already saw how, during the expansion of the Han empire, foreign objects were collected to somehow make sense of the world. During the Tang dynasty, the availability of all this foreignness made that the Tang people developed a true taste for the exotic.²⁰ The expansion also brought great wealth to the Tang court and many luxurious items were made and collected. Buddhism also rose to more prominent grounds during this period, and many commissions were made to sculptors to create Buddhist statues. Despite the love for foreign objects and the many different cultures that were present in the Tang empire, the state remained nationalistic and protected Chinese culture and institutions.²¹ The Tang people also continued looking at their own past and in addition to a taste for the exotic, there

17 M. Beurdeley, 1966, pp. 23-24.

18 L. von Falkenhausen, 2013, pp. 42, 49.

19 M. Beurdeley, 1966, p. 73.

20 M. Beurdeley, 1966, pp. 33, 35.

21 M. Beurdeley, 1966, pp. 33-38.

was therefore also a taste for the antique.²² Buddhism may have gained in importance during this dynasty but one should not forget that during the Tang dynasty Confucianism also gained renewed importance. Because of this, it was during the Tang that, slowly, antiquarian studies began taking shape.²³ Confucius himself strove to re-create an ideal society that only existed in remote antiquity, and so Confucianism became a philosophy that had its face turned towards the past, looking for the moral values of history.²⁴ As we have seen, Confucianism played a very important role in China throughout the centuries, and its influence in the field of collecting and antiquarianism should definitely not be underestimated. A good example of this is a coin collection that appears to be one of the earliest examples of an organized collection guided by a historical interest. This coin collection was found at Hejiacun in Xi'an (Shaanxi province) and dates from around 755 CE. Coins from all historical periods in China were assembled, from the Eastern Zhou until the last dynasties preceding the Tang. The taste for the exotic is also discernible in this collection, because foreign coins were found in it as well. Unfortunately, as Falkenhausen also points out in his article, too little is known today about Tang antiquarianism and the exact motivations of why people collected objects like these.²⁵

Another, separate, remark concerning the history of collecting in China until the Northern Song dynasty, pertains to imperial collections. In every dynasty, rulers collected both sacred and secular objects. The most common and most accepted reason that has been given for rulers to accumulate such collections, is that this was a way to legitimize their rule, and to show their political and moral authority. By using their knowledge of the past a ruler could show why he was the rightful ruler, which previous dynasties one should aspire to, and, not unimportantly, which previous dynasties one should not aspire to. This also led to collecting antiquities. It often happened that emperors accumulated the imperial collections of previous eras, and thereby amassing a huge collection themselves. Unfortunately, more than once, imperial collections were destroyed as well when a new dynasty came to power.²⁶

There is one last aspect that was important for the whole history of collecting in China. This is the significance of texts for the Chinese. If there is one continuum in China's history, it is the

22 L. von Falkenhausen, 2013, p. 49.

23 P. Demattè, 2011, p. 166.

24 L. von Falkenhausen, 2013, pp. 36-37.

25 L. von Falkenhausen, 2013, p. 49.

26 P. Buckley Ebrey, 2008, pp. 11-18; P. Demattè, 2011, p. 165; L. von Falkenhausen, 2013, p. 41.

importance attached to the collecting of books and manuscripts. Both private collectors and rulers have been collecting books and manuscripts for centuries, and these textual sources became the key to researching and understanding the past.²⁷ Just like the rulers, the elite and educated class looked back, through the ancient texts, to find the moral values of history. Through these so-called classics one could find examples of appropriate behaviour, virtue, and uprightness.²⁸ Antiquity became something to aspire to, a model of norms and ideals which reflected an utopian idea of an older and better age. This practice already started during the Zhou dynasty and continued for centuries to come. As Dieter Kuhn states in *Perceptions of Antiquity in Chinese Civilization*, every dynasty, and even every generation, uses these texts to look back at the past and interpret its content according to own specific image.²⁹ It is because these texts from the past, in addition, were so open to interpretation and sometimes difficult to understand, antiquarianism became extremely attractive, for material culture could provide additional information and, when handled correctly, could provide more insight into the past.³⁰ And so, antiquarianism lay down its roots into the Chinese culture.

In summary, this chapter has shown that collecting objects, and especially collecting objects from the past, has been important throughout the history of China. It also gave a solid base on which Song antiquarianism was built, as we will see in the following chapters. What also has become apparent is that collecting in China is not just an act performed out of mere pleasure. Rather, it has been driven by many different cultural factors, and this is something that will become even more clear when discussing the practices of collecting in the Northern Song dynasty.

27 P. Buckley Ebrey, 2008, p. 4.

28 D. Kuhn, 2008, pp.22-23

29 D. Kuhn, 2008, pp. 23-24.

30 L. von Falkenhausen, p. 37.

CHAPTER II

The Northern Song Dynasty: A Short Historical Overview

After the fall of the Tang dynasty in 907, China knew a period of chaos and turmoil. Many small empires and kingdoms alternated each other or existed side by side. In 960 the Song dynasty was officially founded and within the next twenty years China was united under the reign of the Northern Song dynasty. Only one area in the north of China, near modern-day Beijing, remained in the hands of the Liao empire (907 – 1125). This empire would remain troublesome for the Northern Song emperors through the whole of the dynasty. Still, in comparison with the previous dynasties, China knew a relatively steady period of prosper, expansion, wealth, and peace. In fact, the Song empire belonged to the most powerful and stable empires in the world, in terms of its political, military, economic, and cultural dimensions.³¹ The capital of the dynasty was established in the strategically situated Kaifeng that became a large economic and intellectual centre. Even though the dynasty was founded with a strong military force, it were the non-military officials that rose to power during the dynasty. The power of the military leaders had been systematically cut down to prevent any new threat to court, as had happened in previous eras. In fact, it were the non-military bureaucrats that completely took over the administrative machinery and management of the state. This will set the example for dynasties to come, all the way until the beginning of the 20th century. But the power of the officials was limited as well. To prevent any individual person from getting too much power, the government of the state was divided into several institutions, and one person almost never worked in all of the institution at the same time.³² Through this, no official could gain enough support to be able to rise against the emperor.

In contrast with for instance the Tang empire, the emperors Song dynasty was only focussed on what they thought of as the “real” Chinese. Any territories outside of the Chinese realm, they simply did not thought of as Chinese, and they didn’t bother to conquer them. An exception was the Liao empire but because of the constant failure to bring this part under the reign of the Northern Song dynasty, emperors of the Song felt the need to try and legitimize their power in other ways. They made use of different cultural and religious means to achieve this. Good examples are the huge compilations of for instance politics, literature, history, and medicine that the emperors ordered to be made. This would supposedly lead to a growth in their status and prestige among the important social and cultural elite. They were able to make such compilations partly because of the huge

31 B. J. Ter Haar, 2009, pp. 191-192; J. T. C. Liu, 1967, p. 7.

32 B. J. Ter Haar, 2009, pp. 193-194.

developments within the field of printing.³³ Since the 8th century woodblock prints were already used in a Buddhist context but these were often just loose sheets, not bound together as a book. Printing really started to develop during the Northern Song dynasty. Schoolbooks, religious texts, the classic texts, calendars, and paper money, another invention of the Song empire, were all getting printed. This enlarged the availability of texts throughout the empire, which, consequently, both enlarged the level of literacy among the Chinese people, and broadened the social and cultural elite.³⁴ This also made sure that more men could enter the all important civil service exams, which were needed to become an official. This, in turn, would bring a lot of prestige and social and financial advantages to the official as well as his family. In these exams, one is not so much tested on his knowledge of governmental issues but more on his literary and analytical abilities that would portray his moral values. Another reason for the fact that more men were able to participate, and succeed, the exams was because of another important development concerning the exams. During the Northern Song dynasty the actual competence of a person became far more important than once connections. To make sure that this really was the case with the exams, participants were tried to be kept anonymous by copying their answers by clerks before they were checked. This was a big step forward. Unfortunately, as B. J. Ter Haar explains in *Het Hemels Mandaat. De geschiedenis van het Chinese Keizerrijk*, the exams weren't as open as one might believe they were. Certain social groups still had an advantage, financially, because the costs to participate were high. Still, participating, even if you did not succeed, created nonetheless a certain esteem and prestige to the family and was seen as very important.³⁵

Through the whole of the Northern Song dynasty, a lot of changes occurred that would have a lasting effect until the 20th century. The changes in printing, examinations, and social classes are only a few of the changes that occurred. One must not think, however, that the whole Chinese society was turned upside down, as James T. C. Liu explains in *Ou-yang Hsiu: An Eleventh-century Neo-Confucianist*. Some scholars have explained the developments and growing wealth as a kind of Renaissance in China, or as the beginning of an early modern period. The problem with these kinds of terms is that they are European and do not fully tell the story of what exactly happened during the Northern Song dynasty. Instead, he uses a different term, one that might be very useful in discussing the Song culture as well as the practices of collecting during this dynasty. He uses the term "neo-traditionalism" to explain how elements of the past were used to solve problems of the present,

33 B. J. Ter Haar, 2009, pp. 194-195.

34 B. J. Ter Haar, 2009, pp. 219-220 and 242-243; J. T. C. Liu, 1967, p. 7.

35 B. J. Ter Haar, 2009, pp. 205-210 and 243.

or, in his words, how it is “an integration of selected elements of the ancient heritage with selected elements of change to form the ingredients of a new tradition”.³⁶ In essence it means that the people from the Song dynasty used the knowledge they had of the past and incorporated it in their present way of life. Both old and new problems and challenges were solved, and new ideas and issues were explained by their ancient heritage, and reshaped into a new definition.³⁷ We will see that this is indeed the case with many aspects of Song life, and that it definitely played an important role when it comes to the practices of collecting during this period.

Despite all these progressions and developments, The Northern Song dynasty was not without its problems. We already saw how the incapability of conquering the north, left its mark on the Song empire but from within tribulations existed as well. In 1043 - 1044 a minor reform started, in which one of our main characters, Ouyang Xiu, played a part. This reform was short-lived, however, and order was soon restored. The major reform of 1069 – 1085, lead by Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021 – 1086), who had been a student of Ouyang Xiu, was not so short-lived and had its consequences on the Song empire.³⁸ The reforms that Wang Anshi came up with were called the New Laws and it tried to sort out the many fiscal and military problems that the Northern Song empire faced. Despite the fact that some military success was achieved, mainly in the south and northwest of China, Wang Anshi’s biggest concern was to create a better government and healthier state finances.³⁹ Even though success was achieved, the reforms didn’t work as well as they could have worked. It created many resistance among the people who thought that Wang Anshi paid too much attention to the state and not enough to the people. This resistance originated from the old Confucian thought that something better can be achieved by good moral character and mutual support, and not just by money and profit. Most of the resistance came out of self-interest however, which was ironically hidden behind the strong moral values of the officials.⁴⁰ Another problem was the relatively false feeling of hope that the successes of the reform gave to the emperor. The imperial household spent

36 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, pp. 7-8.

37 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, p. 9.

38 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, p. 9. See also: J. T. C. Liu, 1967, pp. 52-64, for more information about the minor reform and Ouyang Xiu’s role in it.

39 B. J. Ter Haar, 2009, pp. 197-200. Here you can also find some more in-depth information about what the New Laws encompasses. See also: J. T. C. Liu, 1967, p. 11, for more information about this subject.

40 B. J. Ter Haar, 2009, pp. 199-200.

an extravagant amount of money on their lifestyle and went on military ventures that were ill-advised. Both helped the dynasty towards its fall.⁴¹

After Wang Anshi was forced to resign in 1076, the reforms were continued till 1085. This is the date that emperor Shenzong 神宗 (r. 1067 – 1085) passed away, the man who supported Wang Anshi and his reform from the beginning.⁴² In the year of 1100 emperor Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1100 – 1126) rose to power. Historically, he and his chancellor Cai Jing 蔡京 (1046 – 1126), were held responsible for the fall of the Northern Song dynasty. They were accused with spending too much money and attention on luxurious and decadent things, and too little on matters of the state. Of course, the situation was slightly more complicated than that. The weak military forces, and the financial state of the empire played an important role in the fall of the dynasty as well. In spite of his bad reputation as a leader of the state, Emperor Huizong had been important for the flourishing of the arts, and with that the practices of collecting.⁴³ His imperial collection was unprecedented, and is still very well-known today.

In 1126 Huizong's son was made emperor, but in 1127 the Northern Song dynasty was conquered by the Jürchen people. What was left of the Northern Song population fled south and started the Southern Song dynasty. In the year 1276 they would fall in the hands of the Mongols who founded the Yuan dynasty (1272 – 1368). Huizong and his son were captured with the fall of the Northern Song and died in captivity.⁴⁴

41 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, p. 12.

42 B. J. Ter Haar, 2009, pp. 197-200.

43 B. J. Ter Haar, 2009, pp. 200-201; P. Buckley Ebrey, 2008, pp. 10-11.

44 B. J. Ter Haar, 2009, p. 202; J. T. C. Liu, 1967, pp. 9-10.

CHAPTER III

Collecting during the Northern Song Dynasty

The practices of collecting during the Northern Song dynasty were based on many different aspects of Song life. By looking at some of the most important aspects, an insight can be given into this complex and multi-layered society, that influenced the way in which the Song people collecting.

The Scholar-officials

As mentioned before, to prevent any threat from military leaders to the court, it were the bureaucrats that started to gain power. Because of the widespread availability of books and the renewed examination system, in principal, every men could become an official. The most common and used name for these men is “scholar-official”, indicating both their education as well as their political position. Other names that are used are for instance “literati”, “bureaucrats”, or “the elite”. It were the scholar-officials that stood politically, socially, culturally, and often also economically at the top of the Northern Song society. Because of the changing system, the aristocratic elite was confined to the direct line of the imperial family, instead of a large widespread group consisting of several families. This made the growing group of scholar-officials technically speaking the largest elite group of Song society. They were the ones that managed the state, and they were often rewarded well for that, not only in cash but also in privileges and prestige. It were often these men that others tried to emulate, in terms of what they did, how they acted, and what they possessed.⁴⁵ It was also the social elite that brought the refinement into their culture by their knowledge of classical literature, poetry, critical scholarship, philosophy, and even painting. This, together with the large urbanization that was taking place during the Northern Song dynasty, and the overall growing welfare of the state, enabled that refined culture to spread throughout the empire and across almost all layers of society, which in turn helped cultivating the Song empire even further.⁴⁶

An interesting aspect of the scholar-official is his dependence on the emperor. As Liu explains, all the power a scholar-official owed was dependent on his appointment to work in office, which was ultimately subject to the will of the emperor. It was also only the emperor that could appoint a scholar-official. This way, to oppose the emperor would be the same as to oppose your own position. This made officials extremely loyal to the emperor, and with that, to the dynasty as a whole. This was further enhanced by allowing people from lower social classes to participate in the exams. If they

45 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, pp. 14-15.

46 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, p. 14.

would pass, they would be extremely grateful for the chance they were given, which would enlarge their loyalty.⁴⁷

The scholar-officials also played a very important part in the culture of collecting during the Song dynasty. Despite the fact that the power they had was depended on the emperor, the emperor could not just take the officials for granted, and the relationship between the emperor and the elite was therefore a complex one.⁴⁸ Leaving some aspects behind for the sake of the length of this thesis, and focussing on their relationship concerning collecting, a mutual need to impress and emulate each other can be observed in both groups. Because the emperor needed the scholar-officials for their knowledge to rule the empire, he needed to make sure that they would have the proper respect for him and see him as a true and worthy leader. To achieve this, it was important to position himself as a man of culture. Collecting, and writing about it, was one important way to do this. Apart from the relationship the elite and the emperor had concerning the government of the state, it were the politics of imperial collecting that connected the two groups on another level. As Patricia Buckley Ebrey says in *Accumulating Culture. The Collections of Emperor Huizong*, it was the act of “collecting and writing about books, art, and antiques” that became the area “in which the educated elite and the throne subtly competed for cultural leadership”.⁴⁹ The emperor had to legitimize his right to rule and show that he was on par with, if not above, the educated elite. He could do this with his collection, while at the same time the elite could show their knowledge and prestige with their collections and writings. And so a complex relationship emerged where the emperor had the power to appoint an official, while the official had the power to put pressure on the emperor.⁵⁰ It was the field of collecting that became one of the battlegrounds where both the emperor and the scholar-officials could compete with each other for prestige.

Collections were also used by scholar-officials to show which political ideas they had. This was especially made clear during and after the major reform. As Ya-Hwei Hsu makes clear in “Antiquaries and Politics. Antiquarian Culture of the Northern Song, 960-1127”, writings about collections often showed a strong favour for one political faction or another.⁵¹ This is particularly visible with compilations of collections that were made by scholar-officials, either individually or assigned by the

47 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, p. 15; B. J. Ter Haar, 2009, p. 206.

48 P. Buckley Ebrey, 2008, p. 42.

49 P. Buckley Ebrey, 2008, p. 17.

50 P. Buckley Ebrey, 2008, pp. 18-19.

51 Y. Hsu, 2013, pp. 230-248.

emperor. It starts with which collectors gets included and which do not. The *Kaogu tu* 考古圖 for instance, an illustrated catalogue of ancient bronze collections, dates from 1092 and was compiled by Lü Dalin 呂大臨 (ca. 1047 – 1093) (fig. 3). It clearly reflects the group of collectors that opposed the reform of Wang Anshi, for it is only them that were included in the catalogue. This same compilation was also used to make a political statement the other way around. The catalogue of the Imperial bronze collections, the *Xuanhe Bogu tu* 宣和博古圖 which was commissioned by emperor Huizong, catalogued more than eight hundred bronze objects. In the compilation, many references were made to previous writings that were used for the *Xuanhe Bogu tu*. Even though there is many evidence that the *Kaogu tu* was used, no reference to the work was made. This was probably done deliberately, for emperor Huizong was actually in favour of the reforms of Wang Anshi, and therefore did not want the work of opponents in the imperial catalogue.⁵²

They way both the emperor and the scholar-officials acted, was often dictated by their belief in the philosophy of Confucius. We have seen that Confucianism have played an extremely important role in almost all the dynasties leading up to the Northern Song dynasty, and its influence was no less during this time period. Also concerning the practices of collecting and the development of antiquarianism, one should not forget this philosophy. It will therefore be very interesting to see how Confucianism played its part during the Song dynasty, and how it was developed into what we know today as “Neo-Confucianism”.

Neo-Confucianism

It was during the Zhou dynasty that the great philosopher of China, Confucius, lived. As already told in chapter one, Confucius believed that the problems he and his fellow men faced could be solved by looking at the ancient era that came before, and then recreate that ideal society with all their moral values. On his teachings is what the philosophical school of Confucianism was inspired on, that was founded during a period of violence and disorder that followed the fall of the Zhou dynasty. This was not the only philosophical school that was founded at that time that tried to give answers to the problems people faced. Apart from Confucianism, Daoism, Mohism, Legalism, and the Five Elements were among the most influential.⁵³ All these schools existed next to each other until the Han dynasty, when Confucianism became the orthodox, for a large, part because the Confucian texts were used for the important civil service examinations. Daoism did manage to keep on existing but the other schools disappeared. At least, as independent schools. Many ideas of the other philosophies were incorporated into the Confucian train of thought that had therefore become somewhat different from

52 Y. Hsu, 2013, pp. 233-243.

53 S. Huang, 1999, p. 1.

the original school. For the Han scholars, the most important Confucian thing was to collect and revive the ancient texts and bring them all under one name.⁵⁴ At the end of the Han dynasty, Buddhism was introduced into China and became, together with its strongest rival Daoism, a dominant force in China, making Confucianism less important. During the first half of the Tang dynasty, Buddhism rose even further but from the second half of the dynasty it fell into decline. It was Confucianism, with its pragmatic stance and importance for the examinations, that gained in power. It even became the state philosophy again. During the Song dynasty, Buddhism continued to decline, while Confucianism relived its glory days.⁵⁵ It wasn't however the Confucianism that was know of earlier eras. What happened during the Song dynasty, has already been described as "Neo-traditionalism" in a previous chapter. They used the old Confucian texts and teachings, and applied them to their own new, and contemporary, world, slightly adjusting what they knew to fit the problems of their own age. In this way Neo-Confucianism was the "intellectual and ethical fabric of neo-traditional society".⁵⁶ This "new" philosophy would play a major role in the way people lived, acted, and collected.

Neo-Confucianism is a name that the Jesuits came up with in the 17th century. So, at the time of the Northern Song dynasty, it would probably just have been known as their own interpretation of Confucianism. There are a couple of reasons that Confucianism, or Neo-Confucianism, started to gain in importance and popularity during the Northern Song dynasty. One reason is the fact that, with the founding of the Northern Song dynasty, an empire was created under the rule of Han people again. Han people were seen as ethnically Chinese. The dynasties directly preceding the Song were all from foreign origin, and therefore seen as not really Chinese by the Song people. At the same time, the Song dynasty was the only dynasty ruled by Han-Chinese at that time. The other regimes that existed during the same period, like the troublesome Liao in the north, were from a non-Han ethnicity. This all contributed to a need for the Song people to revive and return to, what they saw as, their traditional heritage. With that they could recover the ancient traditions that they thought were lost. This is also reflected in the emphasis on scholars, instead of military men. From the time Confucianism was founded, China knew a separation between *wen* 文 and *wu* 武, or culture and military force. The real meaning of *wen* is "writing or text". Confucius' meaning of *Wen*, or culture, should be understood as the culture that knew and respected the ancient texts, and was governed through ritual and tradition instead of force, which was reflected by *wu*. The Tang dynasty was

54 S. Huang, 1999, pp. 1-2.

55 S. Huang, 1999, p. 3.

56 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, p. 18.

militarily strong, and therefore reflected the *wu* part of government. As we know by now, the Song culture was focussed on the civil or *wen* part of government, as the scholar-officials were the ones who ruled. This was probably done to contradict the previous dynasties, and to link the Northern Song dynasty to an earlier, and better, age. This could not be more in line with the Confucian way of thinking.⁵⁷

The fact that Buddhism originated from a foreign country, namely India, and the fact that Buddhism had flourished during the Tang dynasty, may have played a part in its decline in popularity. However, this is probably not the whole story. With the revival of Confucianism, the emphasis was placed upon more pragmatic and humanistic thinking, rather than religious and spiritual beliefs, which was reflected by for instance Buddhism. It should be noted however, that both Buddhism and Daoism had their influence on Neo-Confucianism, as it unconsciously absorbed some elements of the two religions. Daoism diminished slightly in power, just like Buddhism, but was still very much present during the Northern Song dynasty. Many Song emperors, just like emperors of dynasties before them, used Daoism to justify their power, and to fulfil the need of a more religious approach to their rule. It was also used to counteract Buddhism, the rival of Daoism. The emperors did get a lot of criticism for their use of Daoism, especially by those scholars who were fervent Neo-Confucianists.⁵⁸

The beginning of the Neo-Confucian school actually had its roots in the Tang dynasty, where important scholars already tried to revive some of the teachings of Confucius. Their most important goal was to collect and comment on these ancient, Confucian, texts.⁵⁹ This beginning helped the Neo-Confucianists of the Northern Song dynasty on their way. Together with the above mentioned reasons for the growing importance of Confucianism, the overall prosperity and development of culture during Song the dynasty, and the tradition of scholars to use classical texts for their vision on the present, Neo-Confucianism was bound to be (re)created. The reason that it is called “Neo”-Confucianism these days, is that it didn’t directly follow the line Confucianism of previous times. It was seen as the task of the Neo-Confucianists to study the ancient texts and find the “true” meaning in them. When they did, the Neo-Confucianists claimed to have found a “new” interpretation of the classical texts, and therefore deemed scholars of previous eras unimportant, for

57 L. von Falkenhausen, 2013, p. 44; P. Buckley Ebrey, 2008, p. 6. See also: P. K. Bol, 1992, pp. 1-3 and 148.

58 L. von Falkenhausen, 2013, p. 44; S. Huang, 1999, pp. 3-5. See also: B. J. Ter Haar, 2009, pp. 226-227.

59 S. Huang, 1999, p. 5; B. J. Ter Haar, 2009, p. 231.

they did not know this “true” meaning.⁶⁰ Interestingly, in their search for the real meaning, many interpretations emerged, one slightly being slightly different from the other.⁶¹ The objects that belonged to antiquity could help the scholars interpret the ancient texts correctly, and this is the reason why they became very desirable collectables, as will be shown in chapter four.

That the Neo-Confucian scholars wanted to know the real meaning of the ancient texts and learn from them, is the result of the four core aspects of Confucianism. Liu describes them as follows: “ethical fundamentalism”, which describes the importance of ethics and how to achieve the right behaviour by reading the ancient texts, “restorationism”, the belief that the ideal society of the ancients should be reconstructed, “historical-mindedness”, which was the study of history to see how and why society could degenerate, and “humanism”, which lay the emphasis on self-cultivation.⁶² They thought that, through education, one could acquire the necessary knowledge to cultivate oneself and gain the all important moral values that a man needed to become a truly good man.⁶³ This would be the first step to bring order into society. A very important term that was used within this context is the word *gewu* 格物, which means “investigating things”. This term was used in the *Daxue* 大學, one of the Four Books, or *Sishu* 四書, the canonical texts of Confucian origin that were used for the all important examinations during the Northern Song dynasty. If one would research things, it would be the first step towards a better world. It was not however used to investigate things in a scientific way but more to know which principles underlay these objects of study. Researching the ancient canonical texts, and the objects that could enlighten these texts, was seen as the most important way to understand the ways in which the universe worked.,⁶⁴

Antiquity and Antiquarianism

It is not difficult to see how these four key aspect of Neo-Confucianism played a role in the practices of collecting during the Northern Song dynasty, especially concerning the collecting of ancient objects. The minds of the Neo-Confucianists were faced towards the past, and they saw it as their obligation to cultivate themselves into better men. This would be their solution for the creation of a

60 B. J. Ter Haar, 2009, pp. 232-233.

61 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, p. 21.

62 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, pp. 18-19.

63 S. Huang, 1999, p. 6.

64 K. van der Leeuw, 2011, pp. 100-101 and 232; B. Elman, 2007, p. 131. See also: W. Ding, 2010, pp. 326-351, for more in-depth information about the *Daxue*.

more solid, and truer, world. A world that would perhaps reflect the utopian world they strove to recreate. During the Northern Song dynasty this ideal developed into the movement called *fugu* 復古 (restoring the past/antiquity).⁶⁵ To be able to restore the past, they had to understand antiquity. They did this by means of reading the ancient texts and investigate ancient objects.

We have already seen how, through the whole history of China, knowing about what has come before and collecting remnants of the ancient past, had been an important aspect of Chinese life. Books and texts from the (ancient) past were collected during almost every dynasty, and emperors founded collections that often consisted of objects and books from previous eras. During the Shang and Zhou Periods items that were of a much older date than the periods themselves, were already fervently collected. The discoveries of tombs that date to this era has made this clear. It was also in the last years of the Zhou, and the period that followed, that Confucianism was founded, the philosophy that looked towards the ideal ancient past and that wanted to recreate that past in its own era. During the Han dynasty, the ancient ritual bronzes were extremely sought after, and Confucianism practically became the state philosophy. After the fall of the Han dynasty, it wasn't just Confucianism that played a role in preserving the ancient past. Buddhist monasteries often had large collections consisting of ancient objects themselves. These religious places became important collection sites and scholars often visited them to see special objects. The Tang dynasty really marked the beginning of antiquarian studies. During the second half of the dynasty, Confucianism gained in importance again, and collections were founded that reflected this interest in the past. Unfortunately, too little of the importance of antiquity during this era is known to really further elaborate on it.

During the Northern Song dynasty, culture flourished, and with that came the rise of antiquarianism. After the long era of foreign reigns, the educated class started to look at what they saw as their rightful ancestors. Confucianism thrived and Neo-Confucianism was being developed. The ancient, canonical texts were used in the examinations, and they were discussed and reinterpreted, and inventories, encyclopaedias, and catalogues of antiquities were amassed. These catalogues of antiquity could moreover be spread due to the developments of the printing techniques. Objects from antiquity could replace the foreign taste of the previous era, and ancient bronzes and early jades were researched with the precision and passion of collectors and connoisseurs. I already mentioned how objects were used to help understand the ancient texts but they were also used the other way around. The ancient texts actually helped to understand the objects as well, and could assist the collector in dating the object. This was often done by researching the inscriptions on for instance bronze vessels. Ancient texts could help translate those inscription and thereby date the object. The Song painter and antiquities collector Li Gonglin 李公麟 (1049 – 1106) for instance, was known for his capability to translate and date ancient objects, which gave him great

65 Y. Hsu, 2010, 63; D. Kuhn, 2008, pp. 51-54.

status.⁶⁶ The popularity for antiquities is also reflected in the price of these kinds of objects, which rose to unbelievable heights during the dynasty. The field of the arts was also affected by its popularity. During the Northern Song dynasty, many craftsmen tried to imitate the bronze and jade vessels. Most of them weren't successful though.⁶⁷ The inscriptions on these ancient vessels were important for another reason, namely their calligraphy. Calligraphy, as a textual document, had been important during many dynasties. If they belonged to old objects or texts, they good provide inside into the past. If done by contemporary persons, it was believed that their handwriting could reflect their personality, and with that their moral values. It was also believed that, by copying old works, one could improve their own skills in calligraphy and with that his moral character. Inscriptions on bronze vessels, for instance, could also provide support in understanding the early stages of the writing system. In this way, bronze vessels became historical documents. This constant interaction of words and objects is seen as typical for the Northern Song's practices of collecting.⁶⁸

This systematically collecting and studying of ancient vessels, that first occurred during the Northern Song dynasty, was called *jinshixue* 金石学 (study of metal and stone). This research discipline became extremely important, not just for the Northern Song dynasty but also for the dynasties after that. Some even say that modern-day Chinese archaeology derives from this practise.⁶⁹ The scholar-officials initiated this type of research, with Ouyang Xiu as instigator. With their Neo-Confucianists ideals in mind, they attempted to recover the real meaning of the ancient objects and texts, and recreate their cultural ideal. The competition between the different scholars, or one may say antiquaries, for having the most antiquarian knowledge, is what made antiquarianism flourish during the Northern Song dynasty.⁷⁰

Jinshixue wasn't the only thing where antiquity, and its importance, came to express itself. In two others fields, antiquity was used and investigated. These were the fields of geography and philology. Falkenhausen stresses the importance of the link between geography and history. From the time of the Han dynasty, travelers' manuals were written that listed important sites that one ought to visit while travelling. Under the influence of Confucianism, these types of geographical writings developed into texts that named places with mythological or historical importance. After the Tang

66 M. Beurdeley, 1966, pp. 61-65; Y. Hsu 2010, pp. 6-7.

67 M. Beurdeley, 1966, p. 65.

68 P. Buckley Ebrey, 2008, p. 77 and 101; L. von Falkenhausen, 2013, pp. 42-43.

69 Y. Hsu, 2013, p. 230.

70 Y. Hsu, 2013, pp. 244-245; L. von Falkenhausen, 2013, pp. 44-45.

dynasty, scholars organized them according to provinces or counties and pointed out where the actual physical traces could be found of a certain historical event. The inspection of such historical sites to find some kind of evidence was commonly accepted by scholars in China, and it were these kinds of practices that have been instrumental for the founding of antiquarianism. It was started by perhaps the best known historian in the history of China, Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145 – 86 BCE). He wrote the *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Historian), which described the known history of China up till the Han dynasty, and which was seen as the standard for all histories to come after that.⁷¹ From the Tang dynasty, it became important, during these special journeys, to make copies of stone inscriptions (*fangbei* 方碑) that served as monuments or memorials in the landscape. Making inscriptions onto stone or other natural features became a sort of tradition from Han times on. To make copies, the travellers used the technology of ink-squeeze rubbings (fig. 4). This way, multiple copies could be made, and were often circulated among both the elite and the common people. These rubbings became desirable collectables for their historicism, their beauty, and their calligraphy.⁷²

Philology was the other field in which antiquity was both used and expressed. From early times on the Confucian classics, as other ancient texts, were studied, translated and tried to be understood. The Chinese writing system changed a lot over the course of time but it does originate completely from the writing system of the Shang Period, and through the ages these archaic script styles have been preserved. Over time, many interpretations have been given and dictionaries were made, explaining what these ancient writings meant.⁷³ With the constant presence of Confucianism, and the significance of understanding the past, the preserving and understanding of the ancient script was a main concern throughout Chinese history. In line with this concern was the revival of the antique prose, or *guwen* 古文. Again, Ouyang Xiu played a major part in this revival, which occurred during the second half of the 10th century. It is even said that he is the initiator of the movement. *Guwen* is an unadorned writing style that was modelled on the prose used during high antiquity (12th – 3rd century BCE). The revival's concern lay with restoring the writing styles used by for instance Confucius and objected against the embellished writing styles that were currently used by the Song elite. It was thought that the focus should lay on the moral values of the ancients, which could be grasped by using the simplified prose, and not by the ornamentation of texts.⁷⁴ We already saw how, during the Han dynasty, simplicity was used in works of art to recreate the feeling of antiquity and

71 L. von Falkenhausen, 2013, pp. 37-38.

72 L. von Falkenhausen, 2013, p. 39.

73 L. von Falkenhausen, 2013, p. 40.

reminded the viewer of its history. During the Northern Song dynasty, we basically see the same happening in the writing styles.

This is only a brief survey of how and why antiquity became so important during the Northern Song dynasty.⁷⁵ It became something imbedded in the Song society, never dependent on which class you came from or which faction you belonged to, and lay the foundations for centuries to come. The forming of collections, and writing about them, became an essential part to express antiquity in and to show ones knowledge of such an important era. It was during the Song that more than forty collections of antiquities were amassed by both private collectors and the government, and catalogues of those collections were published.⁷⁶ Ouyang Xiu was a key figure within this Song world of antiquities, and will therefore be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. But first we will take a look at some of the more general aspects of collecting during the Northern Song dynasty.

Collecting

In the beginning of the Northern Song dynasty, the emperors were the most fervent collectors of books, paintings, antiquities, etc. but soon the educated elite took over. Their growing class, together with the increasing wealth of the empire, and their growing status, transformed them into the leading collectors of the dynasty. Just like the emperors, they collected books, paintings, and antiquities, as well as rubbings of inscriptions, and other treasured objects. The collecting of objects that invoked just pleasure and aesthetic appeal, like jewelry or ceramics for instance, weren't always seen as appropriate. In the Confucian society that the Song dynasty was, collecting such items was seen as a sign of a morally weak person.⁷⁷ This does not mean that objects like that weren't collected. The Northern Song dynasty prospered enormously and the elite was very much capable of purchasing the beautiful items that are inherent to a wealthy society. Besides, having a collection showed both wealth and cultivation, and was a good way to manifest oneself. Still, we see that scholar-officials struggle with all this wealth and luxury and try, more than once, to excuse themselves for collecting aesthetically pleasing objects. Some are not even comfortable with collecting at all, like our main

74 Y. C. Sena, 2013, p. 213; Y. Hsu, 2013, pp. 230-231. See also: A. McNair, 1994, pp. 209-225, for a more detailed survey of how different scripts were important during the Northern Song dynasty in the relationship between scholars and the throne, quite like catalogues of collections were.

75 See: Y. Hsu, 2010 and Y. C. Sena, 2007, for two elaborate studies of the concept of antiquity during the Northern Song dynasty, and its aftermath.

76 P. Demattè, 2011, p. 166.

77 P. Buckley Ebrey, 2008, p. 6 and 76-77.

character Ouyang Xiu, who constantly emphasizes the importance of the historical value of the items in his collection. Most of the time, however, if a collection consisted of objects that had something to do with the written tradition, it was generally accepted, and even seen as a pastime that could enhance one's character, and with that his status.⁷⁸ This meant that every object that was a work of the brush, so books, manuscripts, calligraphy, but also paintings, were acceptable collectables. Interestingly, the already mentioned collector Mi Fu, apparently never felt the need to justify his collection, for he never made such a notion. His collection was good, because of the obvious value of his works.⁷⁹

There were different ways in which a collector could acquire the desirable objects. During the Northern Song dynasty, it became in vogue to buy or exchange objects from one scholar to another. There were also enough shops to buy objects and other works of art. Another way to acquire items for a collection was by making copies. It was quite normal and accepted to make and own copies. It often happened that scholars copied pieces from each other's collections. This could reduce the costs, while still amassing a decent collection. Rubbings of inscriptions were obviously also copies, and became extremely desirable during the Song dynasty, especially when it were rubbings from an inscription that could only be found in one specific place. Care was being taken of course, that certain copies weren't sold on for the price of a real piece. Forgery was unfortunately a common business, and not every collector was also a good connoisseur. Mi Fu was known to have an extremely good eye for good quality collectables, and he often criticized those collectors who didn't have the knowledge to distinguish fake from real. A last means of acquiring was by gift. This was especially true for calligraphy, for it was common to give each other pieces of writing, like poetry.⁸⁰

Just like the fact that antiquity, during the Northern Song was the concern of all factions and parties, collecting on the whole wasn't necessarily confined to one class or specific social group. It could be used to create status and respect, or to increase one's financial situation. This was not only done by trading one item for a more valuable one, collecting was also seen as a way to ensure the family's overall fortune, for collections were often handed down to later generations. The connection between words and objects was also a significant one. It was during the Northern Song dynasty that for the first time, people started to write fervently about their own collection, as well as does of

78 P. Buckley Ebrey, 2008, pp. 76-77, 86-88, and 97-99.

79 P. Buckley Ebrey, 2008, p. 88; R. Egan, 2006, p. 164 and 199.

80 R. Egan, 2006, p. 163 and 205-206; P. Buckley Ebrey, 2008, pp. 89-91.

others. Studying the objects in their collections, people could become better calligraphers, better painters, better Confucianists, and even better men.⁸¹

To summarize this chapter, we have seen that many different aspects of the Northern Song life played an important part in the field of collecting. The rise of the social elite group of scholar-officials, the technological developments, the revival of Confucianism, and with that the importance of antiquity, the overall prosperity of the Song society, the rich literary culture, and the long historical heritage all together created a complex society in which each part influenced another. When connected, these various aspects created the culture of collecting that was so significant for the Northern Song dynasty.

81 P. Buckley Ebrey, 2008, pp. 99-101.

CHAPTER IV

Ouyang Xiu: A Song Collector of Antiquities

As we have already seen, Ouyang Xiu was a prominent figure in the history of the Northern Song dynasty, especially in the history of collecting and when it comes to the importance attached to antiquity. In addition to being a collector, he was a poet, calligrapher, historian, and statesman. He was also part of the minor reform in 1043-1044, and his student, Wang Anshi, led the major reform of 1069-1085, though Ouyang stressed the fact that he played no part in this. His attempt to revive the ancient prose, or *guwen*, was an important part in the regained importance of antiquity during the Song dynasty. Among the many scholars that collected antiquities, Ouyang Xiu's collection of rubbings of stone inscriptions have played a significant part in both the revival of antiquity and the general practices of collecting, not just for the remaining period of the Northern Song dynasty, but also for the dynasties to come. This was mainly because he was among the first people to write extensively about his collection. His action of collecting and writing about it is what spurred fellow scholars, and those of later generations, to collect both antiquities and other art objects. Ouyang Xiu was the one who stood at the start of what would become an almost unbroken tradition of researching and writing about collections of art and antiquities.⁸²

Ouyang Xiu's Life and Career

Ouyang Xiu was born in 1007 in Mianyang in the province of Sichuan. He came from a relatively modest background with only a few uncles and his father that served at official posts. At an early age, after the death of his father, he moved to Suichow, Hubei province, where his uncle was posted. Ouyang was a self-educated man. In Suichow, he never attended a formal school but nonetheless was eager to study. Since his family wasn't the most wealthiest of families, they did not own many books, yet a good friend, a certain Li, did and this is where Ouyang would have read most books during his youth. It was in Li's house where Ouyang apparently found some parts of the work of the great Tang author Han Yu 韩愈 (768 - 824). Han Yu is seen as the forerunner of the Neo-Confucianist movement and had written in the ancient prose style. Apparently, Ouyang was very taken with the texts written by Han Yu in ancient prose. This style was not yet the norm but as we know, Ouyang set out to revive it and eventually succeeded.⁸³ When Ouyang took the important examinations he was sixteen, and failed. Four years later he tried again but still hadn't had the luck to succeed. One year after he took his second chance at the examinations, he tried to find another way

82 R. Egan, 2006, pp. 8 and 58.

83 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, pp. 25-26; Y. C. Sena, 2007, p. 38.

into political spheres. He took his works of writing, in ancient prose, to a high official who was known for his literature. This official actually liked this style of writing and took Ouyang under his wing. He brought Ouyang to the capital of the Song empire, Kaifeng, where he could learn more and create a network. In 1029, six years after his first attempt, Ouyang passed his examinations and one year later he earned the degree of doctors of letters.⁸⁴ Ouyang's first post was in the old Tang capital Luoyang. Here, he had ample time for his writings as well as some other social activities. It was also here that he could develop his skills in the ancient prose style, that some of his friends in the city practiced as well. Other topics he discussed with his new friends were the classics, philosophy, and even military affairs, a by-product of the constant threats along the north border where the Liao empire lay. After Ouyang had completed his service in Luoyang he was appointed to the Imperial Academy in the capital of Kaifeng. It was here that Ouyang got himself involved in the minor reform. After the reform ended he got demoted for his involvement. He was sent to the northern provinces of China. Here, he devoted himself to study and reflection. Since he earned the degree of doctors of letters, he had been interested in collecting rubbings of steles, the stone inscriptions found throughout China. His enthusiasm for the ancient has further been fuelled by the friends he made when in Luoyang, who were keen to see the revival of the ancient prose as well. In the northern provinces there were few distractions, and therefore Ouyang decided to systematically make a collection of ancient rubbings. He continued collecting for almost twenty years, and gathered about a thousand rubbings. These were rubbings from all over the Song empire. To be able to do this, he enlisted the help of friends, who were posted in various areas of the empire, to make rubbings of whatever stone inscription was available near them and send it to him. This way, Ouyang could amass a collection of objects, especially rubbings, he otherwise, on his own, wouldn't have been able to do.⁸⁵ In one of the colophons Ouyang wrote, about an inscription in his collection, we can get a glimpse of one of the reasons Ouyang started to collect. It is about a stele dating from the Tang dynasty in a Confucian temple. For the sake of fully understanding his reasoning, a translation is given:

To the right is "A Stele from the Temple Dedicated to Confucius", both composed and written out by Yu Shinan (558 – 638). When I was a boy, I had a copy of this inscription, which I used to practice my calligraphy. At that time, the engraved strokes were complete and in excellent condition. Twenty years later, when I obtained this copy, the engraved characters were as badly deteriorated and incomplete as seen here. Moved by the thought that all material things eventually go to ruin, and realizing that even metal and stone, for their hardness, do not last forever, I resolved to collect and

84 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, pp. 26-27.

85 R. Egan, 2006, p. 8; J. T. C. Liu, 1967, p. 32-34. See also: Y. C. Sena, 2007, pp. 53-55.

record inscriptions left to us from ancient times and preserve them. It was eighteen years ago that I started and in that time I have obtained one thousand examples. Truly, my collection may be called extensive!⁸⁶

What is interesting in this rather personal account about an inscription, is Ouyang's concern with preserving something from the past. He has noted how things can deteriorate and thereby enter oblivion. As a true scholar of his time, being a rather strict Confucianist, this aspect of the transience of material things effected by time, made him want to save as much information from the past. The striking thing with this is that Ouyang's perception of the past is everything pre-Song times, so from antiquity all the way till the Tang dynasty. For him, you had simply the past and the present. Not many other scholars shared this vision. For them the past mostly meant antiquity. To the more recent past, not much attention was paid to. An exception was perhaps Mi Fu, who was from a later generation than Ouyang. He was actually very interested in the Tang dynasty and was even notorious for wearing clothes in the Tang fashion. Then again, he was also known for being notorious about his unconventional behaviour.⁸⁷

It was also during his years at his post in the north of China that Ouyang wrote a new history of the Five Dynasties (907-960), the chaotic period between the fall of the Tang dynasty and the establishment of the Northern Song dynasty. This work became to be seen as a standard history, and with that Ouyang became one of the leading historians in the dynasty.⁸⁸ After the minor reform had ended, and the growing threat from the north made the Song empire in need of internal peace, Ouyang was given a new position. As recognition of his activities as a scholar, he was signed up to catalogue the imperial library. When he finished this task, he was promoted again to a prominent position at court, that of councillor in charge of state affairs, together with two of his friends. After the reform, their primary goal was to create stability, in which they succeeded partially. However, Ouyang would be demoted to a local administrator and removed from court again, after an attack on the grounds of immoral behaviour in his private life.⁸⁹ He became prefect of Chuzhou, in the province of Anhui. With a damaged reputation he, again, devoted himself to studying and writing. Three years later he got a small promotion and became prefect of Yangzhou, Jiangsu province. Ouyang, however,

86 R. Egan, 2006, p. 21. Most translations found in this text are taken from this book by R. Egan. In this book he uses translations directly from primary sources.

87 R. Egan, 2006, pp. 35, 38, and 213.

88 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, p. 34.

89 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, pp. 36-37 and 65; Y. C. Sena, 2007, pp. 42-43.

didn't want to stay in this large city for fear that the people who tried to ruin him might become jealous and will take another attempt at his ruination. His request was accepted and he got a post in Yingzhou, modern Fuyang in Anhui province, where he and his family would ultimately settle.⁹⁰ It took quite a while before Ouyang was summoned back to court again. Those who weren't in favour of his return tried to send him away but he was supported by some who knew Ouyang's qualities. The latter group won and Ouyang was appointed to compile the New Tang History. Not long after, he was also promoted to the Hanlin academy, a prestigious institution where people worked for the emperor. This had restored some of his reputation, as well as given him some power again.⁹¹ Since he came back to the capital, his power grew more and more, and he was given several leading positions, together with some old friends that he knew from the minor reform. They had often discussed among themselves what had gone wrong, and Ouyang even showed regret for being involved so intensely in the reform. In his new post he wanted to act more thoughtful and Ouyang and his fellows were often credited with much respect by later scholars for how they had managed the state. From the minor reform they had learned that change would be best applied when done in a gradual process and under stable circumstances.⁹²

All through Ouyang's life, he had a keen eye for talented men, and during the years that he had a leading position at court he recommended many of them. Among these men were not just Wang Anshi and other men who would lead the major reform, but also those who would lead the opposition. As a true Confucianist, Ouyang always believed that the matters of the state went before matters of personal interest. But however much Ouyang and his colleagues were respected for their work, they only achieved limited success. In the end the changes they wanted to make gradually, literally happened too gradually, and sometimes, because of that, not at all. One mustn't underestimate the influence they had and the things they did achieve, however, especially concerning internal conflicts and their influence on the examination system. For instance, when Ouyang was appointed to take charge of the examinations in 1057, he announced that the participants would no longer be judged on their writing in the classical tradition but on their thoughts on how the classics could be used to solve current problems, expressed in archaic style. However, with the rise of a new generation of scholars, critique began to be levelled at Ouyang. Just like in the first half of his career, he was accused of improper behaviour, and again, no proof was being delivered. In the end, Ouyang wasn't found guilty, but he knew a new tide was coming and wanted to serve the rest of his career

90 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, pp. 67-68 and 25; Y. C. Sena, 2007, pp. 42-43.

91 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, pp. 68-69.

92 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, pp. 70-71.

outside of the capital. Out of respect for his long and good service he was given a post near Yingzhou, where his family residence was situated.⁹³ On the eve of the major reform, the emperor did request for Ouyang to return to the capital for advise but Ouyang reclined. In a letter to the emperor he wrote:

While the time favours what is novel and unconventional, your servant alone wishes to keep his backwardness...it would be better for him, through his insistent begging, to be excused, for three reasons. First, in good conscience, he would not be comfortable in a position of any importance. Second, his energy has been exhausted. And third, the acts that he would be required to perform would not agree with what he has learned.⁹⁴

His decline was accepted by the emperor and Ouyang could serve the remains of his political career in Yingzhou. When he was sixty-four, Ouyang finally retired. A year later, in 1071, he passed away. Despite his many critics, Ouyang was an excellent scholar-official, but it were his other achievements in several scholastic fields, that earned him a rightful place in the history of China. Together, they made Ouyang Xiu, as J. T. C. Liu says, “one of the greatest Neo-Confuciansts” of his time.⁹⁵

Ouyang Xiu's Collection

It was late in his life that Ouyang started to write about his collection, which he called *Jigu lu* 稽古錄 (Collected Records of the Past). In 1062 he started to compose a preface to the colophons he planned to write on each inscription he owned. The colophons were intended as a separate compilation. Before his death in 1072, Ouyang managed to write about four hundred colophons. His son Ouyang Fei 頌 was entrusted with his father's collection during the last years of his life, and he is the one who arranged the colophons chronologically in ten different chapters, beginning with the earliest inscription. Ouyang himself had ordered his collection according to the date of acquirement. Fei renamed the newly ordered colophons *Jigu lu bawei* 稽古錄跋尾 (Colophons on Collected Records of the Past), and also added a catalogue. This catalogue was also divided in ten chapters and mentioned the title, author, calligrapher, and, when known, the date of each inscription. What we know today of Ouyang's collection is based on the original colophons that passed the test of time, and a reconstructed catalogue, for the original catalogue made by Fei was last during the Southern Song dynasty. Many of the original inscriptions were lost too but, fortunately, because of the remaining

93 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, pp. 70 and 73-81; P. K. Bol, 1992, pp. 176-210.

94 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, p. 83.

95 J. T. C. Liu, 1967, p. 84.

colophons and the reconstructed catalogue, at least seven hundred inscription titles are known today. Most of Ouyang's colophons are rather lengthy. This is probably because he wanted to make some sort of point about the inscriptions, out of a Neo-Confucian consideration, as well as make sure that their significance was understood. The subjects in his colophons vary from information about the author to the historical value of the inscription.⁹⁶ Ronald Egan points out in *The Problem of Beauty. Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China*, that the colophons reflect the many attitudes Ouyang had toward the antiquities in his possession: "He alternately speaks as historian, antiquarian, moralist, connoisseur, art critic, philosopher, and poet".⁹⁷ This many-faceted approach is characteristic, not just for Ouyang Xiu, but also for a Northern Song scholar-official's life in general.

We have already seen a colophon in which Ouyang describes one of the reasons behind the assemblage of his collection but to fully understand his reasoning, it would be interesting to take a look at a translation of his preface. It provides a good insight into the man himself, the world in which he lived, as well as why he cared so much about his collection:

As a rule, material things accumulate where they are enjoyed and are likewise possessed where the resources to obtain them are greatest. If there are resources but no enjoyment, or enjoyment without resources, then even if the things in question are close at hand and easy to acquire, they will not be brought to you.

Elephants, rhinoceroses, tigers, and leopards are wild beasts that live in remote mountains or foreign lands and are capable of killing humans. Yet their horns, tusks, and skins are accumulated and possessed by men. Jade comes from the Kunlun Mountains, which lie beyond a desert that stretches ten thousand miles. The jade obtained there must pass through ten different language regions before it finally arrives in the central kingdom. Pearls come from the South Sea, where they are usually found deep under water. Those who dive for them tie a rope around their waist before they jump in and hardly look human. Sometimes the divers never reappear and end up as a meal for sea monsters. Gold is buried deep inside mountains. It is only obtained after drilling deep mines into the rock. The miners carry torches and dried food with them as they go inside. When there are landslides or a tunnel collapses, it is not unusual for as many as a hundred men to be trapped inside and die. Such is the remoteness, difficulty, and loss of life involved in acquiring precious things. And yet accumulations of gold, jade, and pearls are something we see all the time. This proves that any material thing can be brought to you, if it is enjoyed enough and resources are adequate.

96 R. Egan, 2006, pp. 9-10; Y. C. Sena, 2007, pp. 210-221. Here she elaborates further on the structure of the colophons and the catalogue and later copies of both texts.

97 R. Egan, 2006, p. 10.

King Tang's wash basin, Confucius' cauldron, the stone drums from Jiyang, the inscribed stones at Mt. Dai, Zhouyi, and Kuaiji; the great steles, sacrificial vessels, bronze inscriptions, poems, prefaces, and dedicatory essays written by sage rulers and worthy officials from the Han and Wei dynasties down to today; and calligraphy by various masters done in archaic, greater seal, *bafen*, and clerical scripts – all these are priceless treasures from the Three Dynasties and later times, and they are the most bizarre and extraordinary, majestic and striking, skilfully crafted, and delightful of material things. They are not found in remote places and acquiring them does not involve danger or risk. Why is it, then, that exposed to the elements and ravaged by war, they are abandoned and damaged, and lie strewn about amid hillsides and ruins where no one gathers them up? It is because those who enjoy such things are so few. Even if someone does know how to enjoy them, if his resources are inadequate, he will be lucky to obtain one or two of them and will be unable to make them truly accumulate before him.

In general, resources are less important than finding enjoyment in the thing, and normal enjoyment is not as good as single-minded concentration. By nature I am eccentric and am inordinately fond of antiquity. That which men of the world generally crave holds no interest for me. Consequently, I have been able to concentrate my enjoyment on these things. My enjoyment being extreme, I have been able to bring them into my possession despite having inadequate resources. Beginning with King Mu of the Zhou, down through the Qin and Han, the Sui and Tang, and the Five Dynasties, gathered from throughout the lands within the four seas and nine provinces, famous mountains and great marshes, sheer cliffs, and precipitous valleys, overgrown forests and ruined graveyards, including even those that tell of gods, demons, and anomalies, I have them all and have collected them together in what I call *Collected Records of the Past*. Fearing that copying them would introduce mistakes, I have had the rubbings themselves mounted and bound together. The collection has its orderly arrangement but not according to the original date of each inscription. Since there are so many pieces, and I am still acquiring new ones, I simply add each one to the compilation in the order it is received. Knowing that a collection as large as this is bound eventually to be broken up, I have chosen the essentials concerning them and entered them in a separate catalogue of colophons, where I have also recorded the facts they contain that may be used to correct the textual historical record. It is my hope that this will be transmitted to future scholars as a contribution to learning.

Some may belittle my efforts, saying that when material things are accumulated in such quantity, it is difficult to keep the collection intact, and that sooner or later it will inevitably be broken up and scattered about. So why am I making such a fuss over these things? I can only say, by way of reply, that doing so supplies me with what I enjoy. What harm is there if I grow old amusing myself

with these things? Are not accumulations of ivory, rhinoceros horn, gold and jade also bound to be scattered about eventually? I simply cannot bring myself to exchange one for the other.⁹⁸

A couple of interesting things can be drawn from this preface. First we get a pretty good insight in the type of luxurious items that were collected during the Song dynasty, and also of the resources and possibilities that this dynasty apparently had available. Next, Ouyang lists some objects that an antiquarian, and especially a Confucianist one, would deem very important. Ancient bronze vessels, objects of ritual, written documents of the past, etc. are all mentioned as being as important as the luxury objects, and perhaps even as something better, for no great sacrifices have to be made to obtain them. At the same time, he also lets his reader know that there aren't many who collect these kind of objects yet. This may come as a surprise, since China, and especially the Northern Song dynasty, is known for its interest and concern with history and historical objects, as we have seen. Still, it is indeed true that Ouyang's collection was unprecedented. Emperors and other royals of the Song, and of dynasties before, had collected relics from the past but on the level of private collections, no one had ever made such an attempt as Ouyang had, and certainly no one had written so fervently about it. It was only after Ouyang that private collectors and writers of antiquity started to emerge.⁹⁹ He is therefore justly seen as one of the founding fathers of antiquarianism. Then, reading his preface further, one of the reasons why Ouyang collects, is given. As we have seen with the colophon about a Tang dynasty stele, Ouyang is concerned about the fact that many of these important historical objects and texts are quickly getting damaged and forgotten. We see the same concern with his own collection. One of the reasons he starts to write about his collection is to make sure the knowledge his collection contains will be secured for future generations, even when the objects themselves are long lost. In the same sentence we also see the use ancient objects could have for the interpretation of the classical texts. The sentence "...I have also recorded the facts they contain that may be used to correct the textual historical record" refers to the belief that objects from the past are less likely to be changed, for they are not copied and recopied like the ancient texts.¹⁰⁰ This belief is also reflected in one of his colophons:

The stele is carved contemporaneously (with the event) and must not be wrong. It can only be that the written history misreported the incident.¹⁰¹

98 R. Egan, 2006, pp. 11-13.

99 R. Egan, 2006, pp. 13-14.

100 R. Egan, 2006, pp. 17-18; Y. C. Sena, 2007, pp. 63-64.

Interesting are also his “excuses” for collecting and his enthusiasm about it. Not only in his preface but also in the colophons themselves he constantly defends his collection as well as his collecting activities, and tries to show its use. One of the values he ascribes to the inscriptions he collected are their historical value, as we have seen. But, as Egan points out, that is not the only value he ascribes to them. Another important one, that isn’t mentioned in the preface but in some of his colophons, is their worth as legacies from morally exemplary persons from the past. According to Ouyang it is important to preserve the texts that convey the good moral values those persons had. Remarkably, these aren’t all known or important persons. What’s more, these moral values aren’t necessarily shown through the story that is told but also through the brushwork of the calligrapher. It is often that it is because of their aesthetic appeal that Ouyang appreciates them. Still, despite the emphasized claims to these values, there are only few of the first two types of items in his collection. Of the items that are appreciated solely for their attractive calligraphy there are far more.¹⁰² This is because there is another reason why Ouyang appreciates the inscriptions. Not because they seem to have any specific value but just because of his sheer love for the past. In one of his colophons about an almost unreadable inscription he writes:

The things that scholars who are fond of the past collect and preserve do not necessarily serve any use in the world today. It is just that when they come across such fragments that are buried or strewn about the countryside, they view them with special affection and pity. Such is the obsession of fondness for the past!¹⁰³

What we see here, is that his own valuation of the works in his possession is based on a much more personal matter. His “fondness for the past” is something that played a huge role in his collecting, from the reason why he started to collect, to what he collected. It was important to him that the past was revived again and he wanted to bridge the gap between what once was and what is. He saw this past reflected in the calligraphy used for the inscriptions as well as in the object itself. He was known for particularly liking inscriptions that were damaged, even to the point that they had become unreadable. He got the chance to save them, preserve them, and thereby creating a link between what was, what is, and what is yet to come, and that is ultimately what he enjoyed the most.¹⁰⁴ So,

101 Y. C. Sena, 2007, p. 64.

102 R. Egan, 2006, pp. 23-37.

103 R. Egan, 2006, p. 27.

104 R. Egan, 2006, pp. 38-43 and 59; Y. C. Sena, 2007, p. 60.

inevitably, we actually come back to what Ouyang in his preface calls the “enjoyment” of his collection. He constantly refers to ‘enjoyment’ being a key aspect of collecting. However, this does not seem to cohere with Confucian beliefs. There, an act must have some use, some moral value in it, and so collecting for pure enjoyment doesn’t seem to fit. Ouyang acknowledges this and agrees that normal enjoyment isn’t as good as ‘single-minded concentration’. To justify this, he turns it around and tells us that, because of his extreme enjoyment for these important objects and the fact that he has no interest in what men normally crave for (the luxurious items of the world), he was able to concentrate completely on the act of collecting and preserving the precious objects from the past. Still, despite their historical value, the objects remain material things, and in both the Confucian sense, as well as the Buddhist one, a truly cultivated or enlightenment person does not attach oneself to material things. The reason that Ouyang wrote his preface was probably because he wanted to be able to justify himself, and also to keep others from judging him. Whether he has been entirely successful in achieving this, is another question.¹⁰⁵ As it was already pointed out, many scholar-officials who collected could recognize themselves in this struggle. Ouyang Xiu was perhaps even more conscious about his morals, because of the many accusations about improper behaviour he had to endure in his life.

Another important aspect of Ouyang’s collection that Egan brings to the attention, is its inclusiveness. In his preface he stresses the many different objects one can collect, as well as the many places one can find them. This is another way in which the collection Ouyang assembled, differs from any imperial collection of the kind. Ouyang wasn’t so much interested in outstanding masterpieces of calligraphy, as he was in preserving any historical document he could get his hands on. For the imperial collections, works in the classical tradition of calligraphy, especially those made by or in the style of Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303 – 361) and his son Wang Xianzhi 王献之 (344 – 386), were the most interesting. Ouyang, however, managed to make pieces of calligraphy in other styles that were made by unknown persons, attractive and important, even if the content did not always match Confucian morals. With this he opened up the standard and broadened the possible objects that could be collected and appreciated.¹⁰⁶ In the next generation we see that this gets more accepted. Su Shi 苏轼 (1037 – 1101) for instance, who was an important official, writer, painter, and collector, also thought that there should not be one superior style in calligraphy. Rather, he thinks that each style has its specific appeal.¹⁰⁷

105 R. Egan, 2006, pp. 19-20.

106 R. Egan, 2006, pp. 14-17.

107 R. Egan, 2006, p. 209.

Overall, Ouyang's preface, and the collection itself, reflects the fact that Ouyang was a pioneer in the field of antiquarianism. It is also drained with Confucian thoughts, or excused for the lack of it. Not only does he pay attention to objects and texts from the past, ranging from antiquity till the more recent past, he also tries to justify his collection by explaining its use and importance and the hope that it can be used for learning by future scholars. Even though his collection was dispersed soon after his death, as his fear already predicted, its legacy was enormous. It was already during Ouyang's life that his collection was appreciated, as a certain colophon tells us.¹⁰⁸ But in the generations after him, and even in the centuries to come, Ouyang and his collection had a lasting influence. His love for the past, from antiquity till the more recent past, had led him to create a private collection of antiquities as one of the first persons in China, to revive a writing style that wasn't appreciated for a long time, to set the standard for writing about what was collected, and to create a whole new field of expertise that would lead future scholars to use their knowledge of ancient times to solve problems they faced in every aspect of their lives. The fact that Ouyang was a respected scholar-official, and that his texts were drained with Neo-Confucianist thoughts, made him a good and easy example to follow. It was Ouyang Xiu that made it possible to define the scholar-officials as a new kind of social group who collected, and he also changed the practices of collecting by offering an alternative in objects that could be collected. The types of objects that Ouyang collected, and the rubbings that he made from such objects, would be called *jinshi* 金石 (metal and stone), and the practice of collecting and researching them would become associated with the already discussed term of *jinshixue*, which had been a key aspect in the development of antiquarianism during the Northern Song dynasty.¹⁰⁹ Ouyang Xiu therefore can rightly be called not only an important historical figure in terms of his achievements as a statesman and historian, but also in terms of his significance in the fields of antiquarianism and collecting.

108 Y. C. Sena, 2007, p. 213.

109 Y. C. Sena, 2007, pp. 32-33.

Conclusion

The scholar-officials, Neo-Confucianism, antiquity, each of these aspects of the Northern Song life, could have been used separately to research how it influenced the practices of collecting during the Song dynasty. Indeed, most of them have already been subjects of research. However, the goal of this thesis was to show the complexity of the multi-layered situation that, as a whole, contributed to and even created a completely new dimension of collecting during the Northern Song dynasty. This new dimension was built on an almost continuous tradition of collecting that started during the Shang Period (ca. 1550 - ca. 1046 BCE). Throughout almost all dynasties in China, it was an interest in the past and its remnants that was one of the driving forces behind assembling large collections, especially concerning imperial collections. Many royal tombs have been uncovered that contained material proof for this. Of course, as time went by, and China knew more prosperous periods, people also started to collect other, luxurious, items that didn't necessarily belong to the past. But time and time again, people returned to their past and objects from that past were sought after.

During the Northern Song dynasty, the empire's wealth grew to unprecedented heights. Objects from all over China, and even beyond, could get acquired and collected. With the constant threat from the north, the emperors of the Song had to find a way in which they could legitimize themselves as the rightful rulers on earth. After years of foreign rulers, and being the only Chinese empire in the region, the Song emperors found their strength and consolidation in the ancient history of China. With this renewed importance of antiquity, and the complex interdependent relationship of the emperor and the scholar-officials, Confucianism thrived and could even become the orthodox view in the form of Neo-Confucianism. One important aspect of Neo-Confucianism was to understand the ancient texts so that the ideal society of old could be recreated in the present. The information that the ancient texts conveyed, could be used to solve problems in the present and new ideas could get defined and legitimized by it. To be able to fully understand these texts, objects from the past could help. It was generally believed that mistakes could occur in the texts because of the constant copying and recopying that had happened throughout the centuries. However, the texts inscribed on objects made of metal or stone, never changed. Much value was therefore attached to these objects. This intellectual environment, with its revival of the ancients and the growing importance attached to objects from the past, made possible the rise of antiquarianism in the Northern Song dynasty.

There are two differences between the previous eras in which antiquities were collected and the Northern Song dynasty. One was the way in which antiquarianism became associated with the new social elite of the time, the scholar-officials. The power of the scholar-officials was growing because of the fact that military men weren't used anymore in the management of the state, and the exams to become an official were opened up, so more men could participate. As a new social elitist

group, of which most of the men were fervent Neo-Confucianists, it became important to cultivate oneself and with that gain prestige, status, and respect within society. Antiquarianism became an important scholarly field with which to do that, given the intellectual environment explained above. In addition, it also became an important way in which the scholar-officials could compete with the emperor for cultural leadership. For the first time, private collections of antiquities started to emerge and were used in competition with the emperor and with each other. They became an extremely important means to express oneself, no matter which class someone originally came from or to which political faction he belonged to.

The other difference with previous eras is the amount of writing that was done on the subject of collections and antiquarianism. The emperors of the Song already gave commissions to amass huge compilations about everything that could be written about: religion, history, philosophy, the imperial collections, etc. but we see that, for the first time now, scholar-officials started to write fervently about their collections and the values that were inherent to it as well. This gives future scholars unique insights in the mindset of the collectors and the world they lived in. These writings became such a significant part of the collections and the lives of the scholar-officials that the texts almost became as important as the collections themselves.

Of course, objects other than antiquities were collected as well. Contemporary paintings for instance, became extremely popular as collectables during the second half of the Song dynasty.¹¹⁰ But antiquities remained one of the most accepted and sought after collectables during the Song and subsequent dynasties. Ancient bronze vessels, ritual objects, rubbings of stone inscriptions, etc. were the key objects any self respecting man should collect. And so did the protagonist of the case study in this text as well. Ouyang Xiu has proven to be a pioneer in many fields but especially in the field of antiquarianism and in the revival of the ancients. In the true spirit of the Northern Song dynasty, Ouyang was a multi-faceted man, in who all aspects of Northern Song life came together. He was an excellent statesman, Neo-Confucianist, writer, antiquarian, philosopher, historian, and collector, and he has proven his worth in more than one of these fields. In short, he was just an excellent scholar-official, representative of the Northern Song society in which he lived. Being one of the first private collectors of antiquities, and being the first person to write about it, he set the standard for generations to come. Antiquities could be collected, and scholar-officials could now be the ones to do so.

To summarize, the practices of collecting of the Northern Song dynasty, and with that comes antiquarianism, were based on a long history in which the Chinese people looked back at what had come before and used that knowledge in their own lives. It was during the Northern Song dynasty that a lot of these practices were revived, renewed, and put into a new context to suit the need of a

110 R. Egan, 2006, p. 163.

new time period. New scholarly fields started to emerge from this and new standards were set to follow. All the interconnected social, cultural, political, and economic aspects in this complex society influenced the way in which people of the Song collected and how they thought about this practice, as has hopefully been made clear. It was because of this that, during the Northern Song dynasty, the huge culture of collecting that China had always known, was spurred on. It would be these practices of collecting that would have a lasting effect, all the way till the 20th century, and some even say until the very present.

List of Illustrations



Fig. 1: Parthenon (Temple of Athena Parthenos), Acropolis, Greece, 447-438 B.C.E.

Source: http://employees.oneonta.edu/farberas/arth/ARTH209/Parthenon_gallery.html

(Consulted on: 2016-05-29)



Fig. 2: Ritual bronze vessel, *ding* 鼎, China, 12th- 11th century BCE.

Source: <http://jameelcentre.ashmolean.org/collection> (consulted on: 2016-05-29)

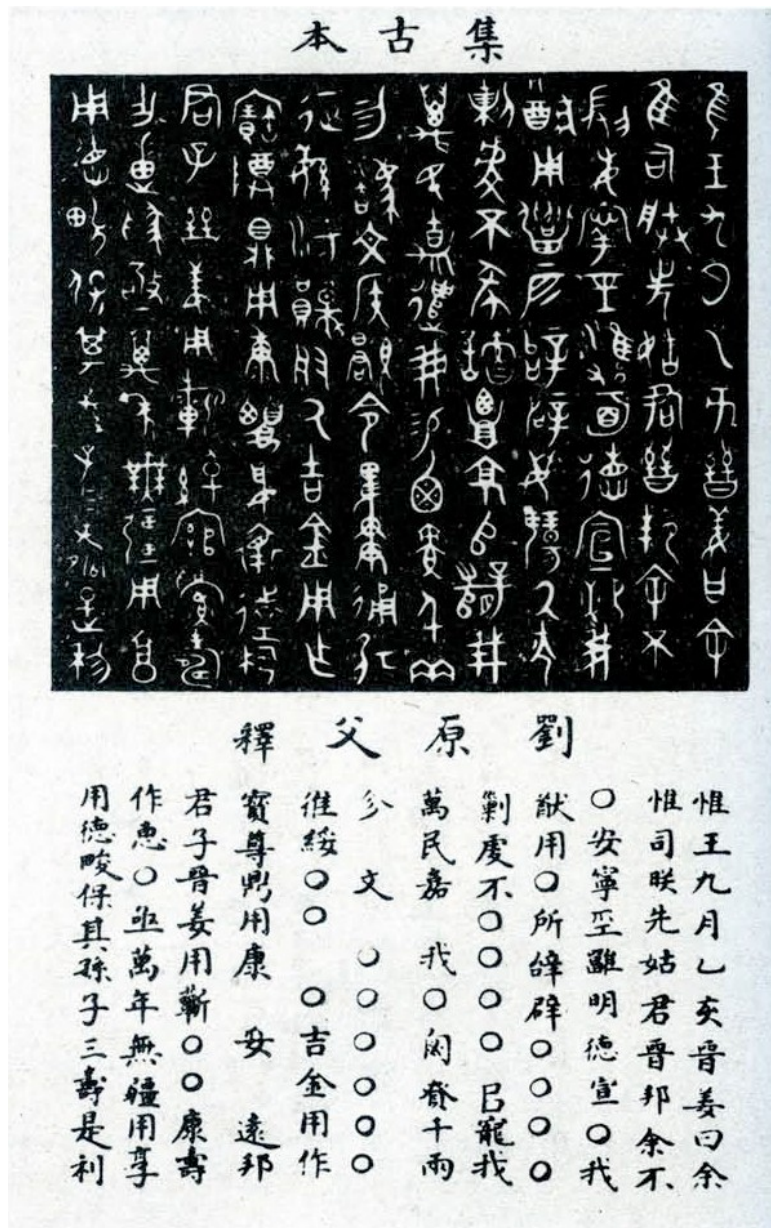


Fig. 4: Rubbing and transcription of Jin Jiang-ding inscription. Reproduced in Ouyang Xiu's *Jigu lu* 集古錄 (Collected Records of the Past), 1062.

Source: Y. Hsu, 2013, p. 240. (This figure is also used for the front cover).

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