# Visual, Material and Textual Cultures of Food and Drink in China, 200 BCE-1900 CE

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Edited by

Stacey Pierson

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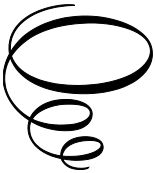

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This book brings together papers that were originally prepared for a conference entitled: *Visual and Material Cultures of Food and Drink in pre-Republican China*, part of the long-running series Colloquies on Art and Archaeology in Asia, no. 25. The conference was scheduled to be held at SOAS, University of London in March 2020 but due to the pandemic, the in-person meeting had to be cancelled. Fortunately almost all the original speakers agreed to prepare their topics for publication in the form of a conference book and I am grateful for their willingness to develop their presentations during a time of difficulty for scholarship. The original conference and this subsequent book were both made possible by the generous financial support of the Sir Percival David Foundation and the administrative support of two SOAS MA students, Lingyi Liu and Rachele Rosina, both of whom have now graduated but have continued to assist with this project. The editing of the book was completed during a term of research leave from SOAS and I am also grateful for this brief sabbatical from teaching, without which this book could not have been produced.

# CHAPTER ABSTRACTS

**Chapter One**
**Introduction**

This chapter begins by situating the culture of Chinese food and drink in the field of food studies, tracing its history as a discipline and the position of China within it. It then characterizes and considers the significance of representations of food and drink in texts, visual arts and material culture from early China to the end of the 19th century, using the example of tea, and in doing so highlighting the transmodal and intermedial nature of food and drink aesthetics that is explored in the chapters which follow.

**Chapter Two**
**Rosemary Scott**

This chapter will examine instances of historical changes in name, function or form among vessels which were originally used in connection with food or drink – often in a ritual context. Three aspects of this topic will provide the focus of the chapter. These are: changes in usage for particular forms in the Bronze Age, Song dynasty and Ming dynasty; changes in form of particular named vessels between the Bronze Age, Ming and Qing dynasties; and, finally, changes in both function and nomenclature of certain vessels between the Liao and Yuan dynasties and the Ming and Qing dynasties.

It is clear from textual sources and from contemporary paintings that in the middle Ming period particular bronze and ceramic forms – often formerly associated with food and drink – were employed for entirely different purposes. A pertinent example is illustrated by Qiu Ying's (仇英 *c*. 1494-1552 CE), *Passing a Summers Day Beneath Banana Palms,* which depicts two shapes previously used for sacrificial food or wine. A crackled-glazed ceramic *gui* vessel, which may be assumed to be a Southern Song Guan-glazed example, appears to be used as an incense burner, while a bronze *zun* is being used as a flower vase. The chapter will discuss the way in which 16th

and 17th century usage of Bronze Age and Song dynasty vessels reflected a vogue for collecting antiques and a concern amongst the scholar-official class to surround themselves with items reflecting perceived refined taste.

In the case of some ritual vessels, the name and function of the original bronze form was retained in the Ming dynasty, but contemporary illustrations of the layouts of certain imperial altars – specifically on the first level on the *Huanqiu* and at the *Taimiao* - make it clear that the forms of some vessels were radically changed. Other vessels, which perhaps could have been changed for practical reasons, remained in their original form. However, in the Qing dynasty versions of the original bronze forms were revived. The chapter will examine the possible political and practical reasons behind these changes of form.

Certain shapes associated with the consumption of alcohol in the Liao and Yuan dynasties – in particular the *meiping* and the *yuhuchunping* took on alternative functions in the Ming and Qing dynasties, while, in certain cases, alternative names were also adopted. The chapter will discuss changes in the vessels with which these vessels were associated from the Liao to the Yuan dynasties, as well as the changes of name and function in the Ming and Qing dynasties. The approaches to certain practical problems relating to these particular forms will also be discussed.

**Chapter Three**
**Q. Edward Wang**

The use of chopsticks is invariably related to how one eats food. It has been believed that chopsticks were originally invented in Asia, or North China in particular, because of the people's preference for eating food hot. If this were the reason (transporting hot food to the mouth without hurting your fingers), then all types of eating devices could meet the need. From the pre-Qin times to approximately the Tang dynasty (618-907), the spoon was not only used together with chopsticks but it was also regarded as the primary eating implement. Yet, as will be explained, it was also during and after the Tang that this eating custom, using both the spoon and chopsticks, experienced a marked change and spread from China to Vietnam, the Korean Peninsula and Japan, forming what has been known as the "chopsticks cultural sphere," in contrast to the other two cultural

spheres where people prefer to either use their fingers or a fork and knife.

No sooner had the “chopsticks cultural sphere” been formed than it witnessed the change of foodway in the region, which gradually turned chopsticks into a main eating implement. One instance was that the importance of the spoon became lessened because millet had been gradually replaced by wheat and rice as a main grain food in China and beyond; the latter, once made into foods like noodles and dumplings, were better conveyed by chopsticks. Chopsticks use thus helped people to better adjust to the changing dietary customs. A similar example was the wide appeal of tea-drinking, which was often accompanied by a variety of snacks, or dim sum in modern parlance, which also promoted chopsticks use both at home and restaurants. Both culinary changes occurred in the Tang period when chopsticks were being adopted as an eating tool among the peoples in the “chopsticks cultural sphere.”

Yet over time, the way chopsticks were used varied from one place to another. In Japan where fish was the main source of protein, chopsticks were more pointed or tapped off than elsewhere, which facilitated their users to separate fish bones and meat. The different ways of using chopsticks caused the differences in their length, shape and material. Koreans, for instance, customarily use chopsticks together with a spoon, which, per the instruction of Chinese classical texts, is used to convey the grain food. The chopsticks used in China are longer, which is necessary for them to share dishes, an eating custom developed from approximately the fourteenth century.

A greater change happened in the fourteenth century, where the Chinese began to adopt communal eating, followed by the Vietnamese and Koreans. While consuming a meal, eaters now sit on chairs, sharing dishes placed at the centre of a square table. Communal eating made chopsticks overtake the spoon to become an essential, at times the exclusive, eating tool. This chapter will analyze social, economic and cultural reasons for the growing appeal of chopsticks among their users.

**Chapter Four**
**James Lin**

Food and its containers have played a vital role in Chinese history. They were used to offer food and drink to deceased ancestors and performed as ritual vessels that were buried with them so that they could carry on the ceremonies in the afterlife. However, judging from recent archaeological finds, a new food revolution seems to have occurred in the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), in which traditional ritual vessels that had dominated the offering ceremony almost completely disappeared and simpler daily use utensils and new inventions for various purposes increased, some of them are still seen today. New inventions suggest a new fashion and a new ideology of living. The variety of food recipes and complicated cooking processes described on the bamboo slips that were excavated from a nobleman's tomb at Huxishan, Yuanling, Hunan province dated to 162 BCE, reveal why the new cooking utensils were needed at this time.

Among these new inventions, a tubular cup made of jade held by a quatrefoil jade disc, which is in turn supported by three gold-headed silver feline dragons soaring upwards from the broad rim of a bronze basin is the most unique object that has been found so far. It was excavated from an intact tomb at Guangzhou, belonging to the second King of Nanyue, Zhao Mo who died in 122 BCE. This tubular cup was found placed squarely in the middle of the outer coffin. To its left was a lacquer cup with gilt bronze handles and to its right a deep bronze basin. All these were placed in a line in front of the outer coffin, and they were probably related to a sacrificial or burial ceremony. Two almost identical tubular cups without any extra support were excavated from a Han tomb at Luobowan M1 tomb, Guixian, Guangxi and from the Epang Palace site at Chezhuangcun in Xi'an city, Shaanxi, dating to the Qin dynasty, third century BCE. A third cup with a single ringed handle and a different pattern is now kept in the National Palace Museum, Taipei. However, the scholar Yang Jianfang 楊建芳 suggested that this type of tubular jade cup is likely to have originated during the late Warring States period and then passed down to the later Han dynasty. Recent research by Eileen Lam reveals that these jade stem cups might have their origins in Central Asian glass but their function hasn't been discussed.

This chapter will explore the role of jade utensils in this period through archaeological evidence such as their physical structure, the position where they were excavated from the tomb, and other surviving objects in the same chamber. Contemporary texts, either orthodox, such as *Shi ji* and *Han Shu*, or unorthodox texts such as *Shan Hai Jing* and *Bao Pu zi*, as well as inscriptions from mirrors will be examined in order to understand the desire of Han people to exist in eternity and how this is related to the jade tubular cup discussed in this chapter.

**Chapter Five**
**Hajni Elias**

Depictions of banqueting and variety entertainment scenes known as *juedixi* 角抵戲 or *baixi* 百戲 feature prominently in Eastern Han dynasty (25 - 220 CE) tomb art. Current scholarship generally interprets these images as representations of enjoyments pursued by the deceased in his or her afterlife. They represent an ideal daily world which the dead were to find again on the other side. Although these images have been rationalised as activities of social and cultural importance with relevance to the afterlife, there is negligible focus on their connection with China's early funerary practices. This trend may be due to the nature of early texts on funeral practices which are scattered on the subject and allow neither an understanding of how funerary practices evolved nor an analysis of the reasons behind the choices made in early China.

This chapter examines the iconography of *juedixi* and *baixi* scenes found on Eastern Han stone sarcophagi unearthed from tombs in the Southwest, present-day Sichuan province, and suggests an alternative interpretation. Variety performances were a component of the social activities associated with funeral rites which would have drawn large numbers of people who required feeding and entertaining as part of a social network of obligations. By including such imagery on the sarcophagus and placing them in a tomb setting, the family may have wished to record - as carving on stone entailed the desire to preserve for posterity - how all necessary procedures and activities have been fulfilled for a proper funeral service. Guests, family members and attendees, especially those who travelled from far away, have been fittingly fed and taken care of, and entertainment was laid out for everyone's benefit.

An essential part of the deceased's family's responsibility at funerals included aspirations to re-affirm relations, maintain its hierarchical position and assert its rightful place within the lineage as well as in wider society for the future. This was especially true in a society where fealty was owed to a senior family member who, now deceased, made the renewing of such allegiance and social relationships to the remaining kinship members especially important. In this context, weight is given to the family's concerns at the time of mourning rather than what happens with the deceased in the hereafter. Especially in the case of the region's magnate clans (*haozu* 豪族) funerals would have drawn large numbers of people who required feeding and entertaining as part of the family's social and kinship network of obligations. Funerals of respectful or influential figures were also attended by colleagues, disciples and admirers, making it an important occasion for social networking. Overall, portrayal of entertainment and feasting give us an insight into an aspect of early China's funerary practices rarely mentioned in early textual sources but distinctly visible in art. These images give us a vivid insight into the social and funerary culture of the period, aspects of which continue to this day.

**Chapter Six**
**Chun-I Lin**

This chapter focuses on a group of figurines in the shape of kitchen servants preparing food with models of kitchen equipment. Scholars categorise tomb figurines in medieval China into four groups and this is one of the four basic groups. The chapter seeks to reveal the rise and fall in the use of this group of figurines and, in so doing, will illustrate the changes in the representation of food preparation in tombs.

The first part of the chapter focuses on the emergence of this group of figurines in 5th-century Pingcheng (present-day Datong, Shanxi Province) which was the capital of Northern Wei. It demonstrates that this group of figurines was a recreation from other media instead of an ordinary part of the long tradition of burying attendant figurines and household models to serve the deceased in Northern China which started long before the 5th century. In the 5th-century Pingcheng area potters paired up household models with kitchen servant figurines. Furthermore, the potters shaped them

showing them to be using equipment to prepare food. Instead of shaping the figurines as standing still, the sculptors and potters captured the movement of the figures in using the kitchen furniture, such as raising a leg and stepping on the pedal for crushing the grains. This suggests the kitchen servant figurines with models of kitchen equipment popular between the 5th and the 8th centuries had their origins in something different to the ceramic figurines and models in earlier periods. By comparing and contrasting the characteristics and assemblages of kitchen servant figurines with images in other media, this chapter argues that the murals in local tombs played a vital role in the creation of the kitchen servant figurines.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the development of kitchen servant figurines and models of kitchen equipment between the 6th century and the early 8th century. This figurine group was one of the basic figurine groups in elite tombs and was popular in northern China, especially the capital areas of the polities. The areas focused on in this part include Luoyang (Henan Province), Chang'an (present-day Xi'an Shaanxi Province) and Ye (present-day Handan, Hebei Province). The chapter reveals the transmission between regions by investigating the changes over time and the regional differences of the designs and assemblages of this group of figurines. It also explains how and why kitchen servant figurines with models of kitchen equipment stopped being popular in northern China between the end of the 7th century and the early 8th century. It does this by analysing the cross-media interaction between figurines and murals which often coexisted in elite tombs between the 6th and the 8th century.

The chapter studies the development of kitchen servant figurines with models of kitchen equipment from the perspective of cross-regional and cross-media transmission to reveal changes in representing food preparation for the after life in medieval China. By doing so, it also contributes to the study of image transmission more broadly.

**Chapter Seven**
**Yi Chen**

The forms of food and drinking vessels are often closely related to what they contain, as well as the ways in which food and drink are

processed, served and consumed. In early China, rice and millet were the major staples and herd animals were lacking. In this period, the extensive use of footed vessels with high walls and deep bellies corresponds to the main culinary practices of boiling and steaming dehusked full grains. Most everyday food and drinking vessels of the time were ceramics and lacquers, while those made of bronze or jade vessels were mainly used at ceremonial occasions and banquets as ritual objects.

The Tang dynasty is, however, among the few periods in the history of China when gold and silver vessels prevailed and were arguably even favoured over those of jade, bronze, and lacquer. A large number of gold and silver vessels have not only been found at sites which were closely associated with the Tang imperial court, such as the hoard of Hejiacun and the Famen Pagoda crypt, but also unearthed from burials of smaller scales of lower ranking officials and their families. Moreover, many of these vessels appeared in forms that were apparently foreign, such as large lobed plates, bowls with fluted design, and cups on high stems, resembling those with western and central origins. These contemporary forms display great contrasts to those used in early Chinese foodways. They may have come about with newly available food and drink ingredients and indicate changes and development in both culinary practices and ways of serving, eating and drinking.

This chapter examines the contexts of appearance and prevalence of gold and silver vessels in Tang China and explores the relationship between this material culture and the emerging new foodways of the time. The emergence and development of the use of gold and silver as well as the new vessel forms will be traced back to the Six Dynasties period (220—589 CE) when various non-Chinese groups ruled northern China in turn, stimulating access to Central and South Asia along the Silk Roads and bringing in exotic material culture and technologies. This was also the time when foreign religions, for instance Buddhism, arrived and started to flourish in China, along with a series of new utensils and ways of offerings (many in the form of food and drink) in religious practices. In the Tang dynasty, the relationship between food vessels in novel forms and new foodways became even more noticeable in both archaeological and textual materials, where vessels with names of foreign etymologies such as *poluo* (originated in Sogdian) and new cuisine like *humabing* (sesame flatbreads) can be found. By examining

a variety of use contexts of the new food and drinking vessel forms, from court banquets to marketplace catering, from culinary practices to serving furniture, the paper suggests that these new vessel forms were part of the great changes in the food and drink landscape of the time. Last but not the least, the lasting impact of these new vessel forms and foodways on the material culture of later periods after the Tang dynasty will also be discussed.

**Chapter Eight**
**Ivy Chan**

Produced in the imperial kilns of Jingdezhen, Chenghua mark and period (1465-1487) porcelain 'chicken cups' decorated in the *doucai* technique have been highly celebrated in China throughout the centuries. These cups were admired by emperors of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties and continue to be sought after by collectors today. After the first 'chicken cup' was created under the reign of the Chenghua Emperor, copies of the same design were produced in the following periods. 20th - century Chinese art connoisseurs such as the collector Sir Percival David (1892-1964) and the dealer-collector Edward T. Chow (1910-1980) were excited by the challenge of distinguishing a genuine Chenghua cup from later Qing versions, and competed against each other when sourcing and authenticating them. At least seventeen known 'chicken cups' dated to the Chenghua period are currently housed in private and public collections worldwide; among them are examples that had passed through the hands of David and Chow and are now in museum collections in the United Kingdom and private collections in China.

This chapter traces the biography of the 'chicken cup', starting from its original function and symbolism as a vessel related to the Ming *literati* tradition of wine-drinking, to its appreciation by connoisseurs as a collectible art form which is considered to reflect Ming imperial court taste. Taking the case study of David and Chow as the main focus, this chapter analyses how entangled networks between collectors, museums, universities and the art market shaped collecting trends in the 20th century. Through mapping the personal relationship between David and Chow, their efforts in organising exhibitions and scholarly publications and the ways in which they facilitated the circulation of several 'chicken cups' from the French Concession of Shanghai and the British colony of Hong