Myth, History and Memory: The Modern Cult of the Simuwu Bronze Vessel*

神話、歷史與記憶：從司母戊鼎的現代際遇談起

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摘要（ABSTRACT）

本文探討了伏羲的現代思想。伏羲是現代思想的集大成者，他嘗試以現代的觀念來解析古典的象徵，並在現代的社會中展現其思想。本文將伏羲的現代思想分成三個部分：一是伏羲的現代觀念，二是伏羲對現代社會的影響，三是伏羲的現代社會。本文將伏羲的現代思想與現代社會的影響相結合，探討現代思想的發展。本文將伏羲的現代思想作為現代社會的重要參考，以現代的觀念來解析古典的象徵，並在現代的社會中展現其思想。
摘要（ABSTRACT）

重達八百七十五公斤的司母戊鼎，為本世紀出土的最大銅鼎。該鼎首次在河南安陽地區被發現時，正值日軍入侵、華北淪陷之際，日人聞風欲高價收購，鄉人們不為所動，費力將其掩埋地下。中日戰爭結束後，司母戊鼎再次出土，作爲獻給當時國家領袖六十華誕的賀禮，從安陽運抵運至首都南京，在中央博物院公開展示。不久之後，政權丕轉，因港口設備不足，司母戊鼎未能隨其它國寶渡海至台。其後，中共爲慶祝建政十週年，重新規劃天安門廣場，又將司母戊鼎運抵由南京運至北京，安置在新建的中國歷史博物館內。由出土、入土再出土，自安陽、南京到北京，司母戊鼎儼然如傳國器般地爲世人寶重。

本文擬從司母戊鼎的現代際遇，分梳出土文物所處的三種意義網絡。首先，古代文物本有其屬於製器當代的意義網絡，如司母戊鼎在商代是商王為祭祀其母親而鑄造的禮器，此種製器行為已隨青铜時代的結束而告終；其次，古代文物出土後因種種原因而另具屬於現代認知的意義網絡，如司母戊鼎在現代中國被視為政權的象徵，與其在商代扮演的角色大相逕庭。古代文物在製器當代和出土時代的意義容或不同，兩者之間並非沒有移花接木的蛛絲馬跡可尋，透過歷史記憶的傳遞與塑造，文物製成的當代性得以延續並轉化爲文物出土的現代性，這就是本文所謂的第三種意義網絡。透過何種歷史記憶，商王為祭祖母親而鑄造的司母戊鼎能在現代中國成爲政權的象徵，便是本文討論的重點。

銅鼎與政權的關連，首推夏禹鑄九鼎的傳說。夏禹是否真鑄過九鼎，九鼎是否倣由夏而商、商而周代代相傳，目前並無法確知。不過，在分崩後的東周時期，九鼎作爲天命和正統的象徵，屢屢出現於縱橫交言中，成爲後來秦始皇泗水撈鼎，漢文帝汾陰候鼎的張本。如果九鼎的傳說是一種神話，那麼在東周政客的推波助瀾之下，於秦漢之際確已成爲人們堅信不疑的歷史。在秦始皇、漢文帝尋鼎不得之後，九鼎的象徵意義藉由兩種方式繼續在後代政治發揮作用。第一種方式是重鑄九鼎，武則天爲了讓其奪篡的武周政權更具正當性，曾鑄九鼎置於新建的明堂之中。第二種方式是將偶然獲致的銅鼎，聯繫到九鼎的神話，視爲得天命的物證，漢武帝將汾陰出土的大鼎運至甘泉宮，於群臣「周鼎」抑或「漢鼎」的論辯中完成了此一象徵意義的轉移。九鼎的歷史記憶經過漢武帝時期的重新塑造，遂使得任何偶拾的大鼎，都具有伸張天命與正統的價值。本世紀出土的司母戊鼎能夠由商代的祭祀用器一躍而成現代政權的象徵，不但根植於九鼎的
歷史記憶，更與漢武帝重修之後的得鼎的歷史記憶息息相關。九鼎的歷史記憶最遲成於東周，得鼎的歷史記憶則始於西漢，如果這些歷史記憶仍然雜揉在現代中國人的意識之中，那麼令這些歷史記憶得以延展滋長的社會機制便值得深究。由於九鼎或得鼎作爲天命與正統的象徵，首先產生於統治階層，如何在統治階層強化象徵意義，並進而推及非統治階層，爲此類歷史記憶社會形成的主要模式。在統治階層，鼎的象徵意義可經由儀式或文字兩種模式來強化，如得鼎的漢武帝和鑄鼎的武則天都曾在宮廷內舉行盛大儀式，不但各有頌歌流傳，整個事件始末並且納入正史記載。這些形諸文字的頌詞和史傳，既可在統治階層代代相傳，又可爲非統治階層或遠離權力核心的文人士子所熟知，北宋的蘇軾便曾將銅鼎與政權的歷史記憶納入其雄辯滔滔的文學修辭中，晚明的董其昌則運用相關的歷史記憶來滿足其西湖得鼎的思古情懷。至於目不識丁者，也可能在說書或唱戲的場合聽聞九鼎或得鼎的故事，或在其他歷史演義中熟知「問鼎」或「鼎運」一類由鼎的象徵意義衍生的用語。此外，圖像也是形塑或積澱歷史記憶的方式之一，漢代畫像石中常見的「升鼎圖」便是一例。於是，透過儀式、文字、口語和圖像等方式，九鼎或得鼎作爲天命與正統的象徵，不論在統治或非統治階層，逐漸凝聚成一種集體記憶，自古至今，傳衍不絕。

總之，藉由司母戊鼎的個案研究，本文希望能照顧出土文物特有的三種意義網絡，爲器物研究拉出縱向的歷史深度；而文中對九鼎和得鼎的歷史記憶的探討，旨在突顯器物作爲歷史載體的豐富內涵，也期能爲歷史研究開拓追古索今的更多面向。
This essay sets out to bring together two distinct inquiries: the first, an inquiry into the formulation of the past through the interaction among myth, history and memory; and the second, an inquiry into the modern cult of an ancient but newly discovered object, the Simuwu bronze vessel (ca. 1300-1100 B.C.) (Fig 1). The reason that lies behind this juxtaposition is that the two inquiries are one and the same: we can view the modern cult of an ancient object as itself an inquiry into the formulation of the past. Regarding this inseparability, the argument will, therefore, begin with an introduction to contemporary reactions towards the Simuwu bronze vessel, then shift to an exploration for the related past, and end with an interpretation of the recovered roots of modern perception through a discussion of collective memories and historical communication.

This is an essay growing out of the contemporary fascination with the representation of the past, in which myth, history and memory are three main articulating categories. Focusing on myth and history, anthropologists have moved from emphasizing their distinction to re-thinking their integration; "mythic histories" hence become a new genre. Similarly, interested in history and memory, sociologists and historians began to blur the boundary of the two: history can thus be considered as an art of memory, and collective memories, a major form of historical communication. Based on

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2 The special issue on "Between Memory and History" in History and Anthropology 2 (1986), edited by Marie N. Bourguet, Lucette Valensi and Nathan Wachtel, marks an early effort; while the journal History and Memory, edited by Gulei Arad, Dan Diner, and Saul Friedlander, shows further devotion to the topic since its first issue in 1989. Concerning history as an art of memory, see Patrick H. Hutton, History as an Art of Memory (Hanvors: U P of New England, 1993). As for collective memories,
these studies but beyond their scopes, this essay would further explore a complex compounded of all the three categories, where myth permeated history and this mythic history became collective memories.

This essay is also given an expression by the recent concern with visual materials, rather than written documents and oral traditions, as a form of representing the past. Maurice Agulhon's approach to the political history of the Republican France from the imagery of Marianne, primarily monumental sculpture, foretells a new field; since then, image-making in commemorative practice has emerged as a major focus of interdisciplinary research. Compared to the artistic genres frequently discussed in the studies of commemorative art, such as architecture, sculpture, painting or public monuments, this essay would, however, focus on a bronze vessel, a genre categorized in the West as minor arts but having great significance in China. Hung Wu has argued that bronzes with their comparatively unimpressive size and preferably hidden display represent the very Chinese notion of monumentality. Probing further, this essay would map the commemorativeness of a bronze vessel into a wider field, engaging not only its original constitution in the ancient period but also its re-collection and re-mod-

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eling in social-historical process.

The *Simuwu Ding* and Its Commemorativeness

The *Simuwu ding* 司母戊鼎 is a four-legged bronze vessel in the shape of a *ding* (tripod or tetrapod). As an archaeological find, this bronze vessel is endowed with an evident discontinuity caused by its ancient internment and its modern re-discovery. The discontinuity gives it at least two contexts: the original one that archaeologists intend to restore and the modern one which is, as Alois Riegl suggested, made by either the historical value or the age-value, or both. Except for the archaeological reconstruction and the arbitrary superimposition, there further exits the third context in which the object is attached or transplanted to some historical memories irrelevant to its original, historical and aged values. The modern perception of the *Simuwu ding* is hence sketched within all these contexts in the following.

Discovered in 1939 by local people at Wuguan 武官 in Anyang 安陽, Henan Province, the *Simuwu ding* remains perplexing in many respects with regard to its original context. The first issue of uncertainty is the relation between the object and its site since it was not under scientific excavation. Chinese archaeologists made their efforts to investigate the location of the *Simuwu ding* in the 1950s and unearthed Tomb no. 260 where the bronze vessel might

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6 The bronze vessel is called *simuwu ding* by modern Chinese: *simuwu* is the inscription cast inside the vessel, and *ding* refers to its shape as a tetrapod. For the further discussion on the inscription, please see the first section of this article. As for the explanation of how the term *ding* can indicate both a tripod and a tetrapod, see the fifth section.

7 In addition to the category of intentional monuments erected for a specific purpose, Alois Riegl particularly indicated the working of the historical value and the age-value in perceiving other historical relics. According to his distinction, the historical value would make unintentional remains of the past, such as the earliest sheet of paper, become new monuments in the present because of their rarities in human history. Through mere visual perception, the age-value would, on the other hand, lead the appreciation of all remains from the past, intentional or unintentional, into nostalgic evocation with no concern about their historical contexts. Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin," Trans. Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo, *Opinions* 25 (1982): 21-51. Riegl wrote this article in German in 1903 as a preface to the legislative proposal for the protection of historical monuments.
come from in the 1980s. However, because of previous looting, archaeologists were unable to restore the original order of funerary objects in the tomb structure (Fig 2). 8

For lack of contextual evidence, the dating and attribution of this vessel are thus controversial. The inscription inside the vessel is supposedly a key to the enigma; yet there is some debate over whether the three-character inscription should be identified as si mu wu or hou mu wu 后母戊 (Fig 3). 9 The argument over the identification of the first character might not provoke a fundamental conflict because the writing principles in the Shang dynasty allowed a character to be written as its mirror image; that is to say, si and hou could be viewed as a pair of mirror images (Fig 4). 10 If we mediate the disagreement about the first character in this way, then the two remaining characters, mu wu, are without question the ancestral name of the commissioner’s mother. However, there are at least two kinds of opinion about whom this commissioner could be. 11 In addition to its inscription, scholars also analyzed its casting, shape and exterior decoration in order to give the vessel the more precise date. They have reached the conclusion that this vessel should date back to the late Shang period (ca. 1300-1100 B.C.); yet there remains


10 Zhou Fagao 周法高, ed., 金文詮林 Commentaries on Bronze Incriptions (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Chinese University Press, 1975), 5544-5576.

11 Yu Xingwu attributed wu as King Wu Yi’s wife and King Tai Ding’s mother, but Dong Zuobin and Du Naisong suggested that wu is King Wu Ding’s wife and King Zu Jia or King Zu Geng’s mother. See Yu Xingwu, “司母戊鼎的铸造和年代问题 Casting and Dating of the Shouougou Ding”; Dong Zuobin 董作賓, “司母戊大鼎 The Great Shouougou Ding,” in 董作賓先生全集 Complete Works of Mr. Dong Zuobin (Taipei: Yiwen,1977), 804-806; Du Naisong 杜迺松, “司母戊鼎年代問題新探 Re-thinking the Date of the Shouougou Ding,” Wenwizhe 1 (1980): 63-64.
a dispute over whether the Simuwu ding belongs to the second or the third phase of the late Shang period.\footnote{12}

Although partly hidden under a veil of mystery, the purpose of casting this bronze vessel in the Shang dynasty is self-evident. The words inscribed inside the vessel announced the intention of the individual who commissioned the object. If we interpret si as "worship" or "offering sacrifices", then simuwu can be understood as "worshiping or offering sacrifices for Mother Wu."\footnote{13} The inscription therefore very directly addressed the king's wish to commemorate his deceased mother.\footnote{14} This commemorative practice further flourished through the conspicuous consumption of object-making.\footnote{15}

The massive size and extraordinary weight of the Simuwu ding (1.160x 0.790x 1.328 m; 875 kg) required enormous amounts of precious raw materials and human labor, but also demanded a high degree of technological knowledge and craftsmanship. Made by a method called "section-mold casting," a rectangular tetrapod generally consumed an inner core piece, an interleg core piece as well as four outer mold pieces (Fig 5).\footnote{16} Despite the gigantic size of the Simuwu ding, amazingly, the number of mold pieces required for its casting did not increase.\footnote{17} The first challenge for the bronze caster

\footnote{12} The periodization used here is based on Zou Heng 鄒衡, "論殷墟文化分期 On the Periodization of the Culture in the Yin Ruins," \textit{Beijing daxue xuebao} 5 (1964): 77-87. Yu Xingwu and Chen Mengjia dated it in the third phase; Du Naisong put it in the second phase. See Yu Xingwu, "司母戊鼎的鑄造和年代問題 Casting and Dating of the Simuwu Ding"]; Du Naisong, "司母戊鼎年代問題新探 Re-thinking the Date of the Simuwu Ding;" Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, "殷代銅器 Shang Bronzes," \textit{Kaogu xuebao} 9 (1954): 15-60.

\footnote{13} Yu Xingwu, "司母戊鼎的鑄造和年代問題 Casting and Dating of the Simuwu Ding."

\footnote{14} Since Tomb no. 260 where the Simuwu ding may come from is located in the royal cemetery of the Shang dynasty in Anyang, the commissioner of the vessel should have been one of the royal members. For its connection with the Shang kings, see Note 11.

\footnote{15} For the notion of "conspicuous consumption" and its usage, see Bruce G. Trigger, "Monumental Architecture: A thermodynamic explanation of symbolic behaviour," \textit{World Archaeology} 22. no. 2 (1990): 119-132.


\footnote{17} The recent research suggested that the molds used for casting the Simuwu ding are six pieces. See Hua Jueming 华覺明, "司母戊鼎鑄造工藝的再研究 Re-examination of
was to see how these six massive molds could be precisely combined. The more difficult task, however, was to determine a way to prevent the molten bronze from solidifying too quickly because of the longer period of time it took to pour the liquid substance and let it flow all over the whole casting space between the inner core and the outer molds (Fig 6). The cooperation among craftsmen in catching at a proper timing to tackle the molten metal also required more advanced training and more sophisticated techniques (Fig 7).

Made by an ancient king in this costly way for commemorating his deceased mother, the Simuwu ding was undoubtedly an intentional monument for the royal family in ancient China. Nevertheless, after it was rediscovered in the 1930s, without the original context and sacrificial function, the content of commemo- rativeness of the Simuwu ding in modern China did not remain unchanged. First of all, its peculiar historical value as the largest bronze vessel known to exist caused the Simuwu ding unintentionally to become a modern monument. This vessel has been highly admired by scholars today, even though objects unearthed without scientific methods of excavation are usually regarded as less important in modern scholarship. In Archaeology of Shang and Zhou, one of the most influential textbooks on ancient Chinese archaeology, the compilers even had the Simuwu ding instead of other well-recorded archaeological finds printed on the only color leaf bound before the texts.


18 For instance, Dong Zuobin, a preeminent Chinese archaeologist, could not help but sigh with appraisal: “I have excavated the Yin ruins for many years and found several big dings such as the so-called ox ding or deer ding. However, their sizes are far inferior to that of the simuwu ding. I believe that the simuwu ding is the only heavy and huge vessel in ancient Chinese ritual objects.” See Dong Zuobin 董作賓, “司母戊大鼎 The Great Simuwu Ding.”

The significance of the Simuwu ding in the modern context not only depends on its rarity but also relies on its involvement in important national events. When this vessel was first discovered by local people in 1939, the Japanese had already invaded and occupied northern China. It is said that after being informed of this new find, the Japanese sent an army to search for it and at the same time offered a high price to buy it. In the end, the Simuwu ding was never touched by the Japanese during the war, for it was hidden under the earth by local people. In 1945, after Japan was defeated and its armies retreated, the Simuwu ding was unearthed again. Due to ownership disputes, the vessel was finally made the property of the provincial government. These anecdotes were later written down by archaeologists and art historians from oral sources.\(^{20}\)

In 1946, the Simuwu ding was carried from Henan Province to the capital Nanjing 南京 in celebration of the sixty-year-old birthday of Chiang Kai-shek 蒋介石, the highest leader in China. The vessel was then kept in the National Central Museum, now the Nanjing Museum, in the capital.\(^ {21}\) However, merely three years later, Chiang was defeated by the Communist Party in the civil war and lost his political power in mainland China. In his retreat to Taiwan, Chiang not only brought his army but also took with him the most precious art objects from the Palace Museum and National Central Museum. It is said that the Simuwu ding was given priority to be taken away, but the lack of cranes at the harbors near Nanjing and Taipei made the shipping of this exceptionally heavy object impossible.\(^ {22}\) The Simuwu ding therefore stayed in Nanjing. Yet ten years later, in 1959, the Simuwu ding was moved again to the Museum of Chinese History in Beijing 北京, the capital of Communist China, in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the establishment of new China (Fig 8).

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21 Tan Danjung, “司母戊大鼎收藏經過及其特徵 Collection Process and Formal Characters of the Simuwu Ding.”

22 Ibid.; Dong Zuobin 董作賓, “司母戊大鼎 The Great Simuwu Ding.”
Given the dramatic fate of the Simuwu ding in the twentieth century, there are some questions which deserve to be raised, concerning the high value immediately associated to the vessel. First, Why would this vessel be excavated, re-interred and re-excavated during the Japanese invasion? Secondly, why should this vessel be moved from Anyang to Nanjing to Beijing, and moreover, placed in the major areas of the capitals? And the third, more fundamentally, is the fact of the vessel being in the shape of a ding a determining factor in its valuation?

The Myth of the Nine Tripods and Its Historical Perception

The association of a bronze vessel in the shape of a ding with politics can be traced back to the ancient legend of the Nine Tripods. The casting of the Nine Tripods was attributed to the Great Yu 大禹, who unified various regional tribes into one kingdom and established the first dynasty in Chinese history, the Xia (ca. 2200-1700 B.C.). This event was first mentioned in Zhuo zhuan 左傳, a book compiled much later after the fifth century B.C. Having achieved unification, the first king of the Xia dynasty was said to have collected copper from the governors of his nine administrative districts to cast nine ding-shaped bronze vessels representing each of the Nine Provinces 九州 under his control. As a physical representation of a unified and centralized political power, these tripods were then said to have been passed down from the Xia dynasty to the Shang dynasty and then to the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1100-256 B.C.). We are further told that the kings of the Zhou dynasty even constructed the city of Luoyi specially to install the

Nine Tripods. By the time of the Three Dynasties, the Nine Tripods had apparently become a hereditary royal treasure, handed down from dynasty to dynasty when one political power replaced another. Therefore, as the Zhou fell into decline, the Nine Tripods still captured the spotlight in the chaos.

The disintegration of the late Zhou royalty (771-256 B.C.) inevitably led to the rise of chiefdoms as strong political entities. The first challenge to the Nine Tripods as a hereditary royal treasure came from the lord of the Chu state, the most powerful leader in the south. In 605 B.C., on his way to attack the Rong in Luhun, the Chu lord inquired about the size and weight of the tripods while reviewing his troops near the Zhou capital at Luo. Fully understanding this as an implication of the Chu lord’s ambition for the throne, Wangsun Man, a minister sent by the Zhou king, shut the lord’s mouth by pointing out that the strength of the kingdom depends on the ruler’s virtue and not on the tripods. After giving an account of the transfer of the Nine Tripods in the Three Dynasties, Wangsun firmly concluded that “Though the virtue of Zhou is decayed, the decree of Heaven is not yet changed. The weight of the tripods may not yet be inquired about.”

Since they were highly coveted by those who had ambition for royal authority, the Nine Tripods had been used by some of the Zhou kings as a tool to manipulate their feudal lords. In the mid-fourth century B.C., the Qin, the most powerful state in the west, mobilized troops to advance towards the Zhou and demanded the Nine Tripods. In order to persuade the most influential state in the east, the Qi, to send military forces to protect him from being threatened, the Zhou king followed his minister Yen Shuai’s suggestion and promised to grant the Nine Tripods to the king of

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26 The task of moving and installing the Nine Tripods in the newly constructed city Luoyi was started by the King of Wu, the founder of the Zhou, and finished by his son, the King of Cheng, with the assistance of the Duke of Zhou. See Yang Bojun, ed., 春秋左傳注 Annnotations on Chun qiu zhu zhuan, Xiangong 3: 669-72.

27 Ibid.


the Qi. While the king of the Qi asked for the tripods after accomplishing the mission, Yen Shuai very slyly made excuses by indicating the inconvenience of transporting these ritual objects. Yen first exaggerated the heaviness of the Nine Tripods to intimidate the Qi king: "Of old when Zhou conquered Yin (Shang) and got the tripods, ninety thousand men drew a single bronze, and the nine of them required all together eight hundred and ten thousand men."  

30 This clever minister of the Zhou further dealt the Qi king a blow with a key question: "It is our wish that the tripods be given you. It remains only to know by what road they should be delivered to Qi."

31 Since the State of Qi was not adjacent to the Zhou, the Qi king had to move the tripods either through the State of Wei or by way of the State of Chu (Fig 9). However, the kings of both states had harbored their intentions to take possession of the Nine Tripods for a long time; they would not easily let go of the tripods if these vessels passed through their lands. Daring not to take such a risk, the Qi king finally gave up his supposed reward, and the Zhou king safely kept his royal treasure.

From the aforementioned anecdotes, the Nine Tripods served as no less than a sign standing for the other in these ingeniously devised rhetorical ploys. The substance and significance of the Nine Tripods as a sign in political rhetoric can be further understood in a more straightforward speech made by Zhang Yi 張儀, one of the leading political schemers in the late Zhou period. 32 In 316 B.C., when the king of the Qin was indecisive about whether he should first make a foray into the States of Shu or Hann, Zhang Yi strongly advocated an attack against the Hann because this state was located geographically next to the Zhou (Fig 9). In his opinion, having conquered the Hann, the Qin army could directly approach the Zhou; the Zhou king would then have no choice but to give the Nine Tripods to the Qin once the king realized he was about to meet his fate. The main argument of Zhang Yi was that, "Appropriating the Nine Tripods and grasping land charts together

31 Ibid.
with census records, (the Qin) can hold the Son of Heaven as hostage to command the world under heaven, and the world under heaven dare not follow with reluctance.\textsuperscript{33}

Regarding the nature of a sign, Charles S. Peirce proposed three categories to articulate a triple connection among the speaks sign, the thing signified and the cognition produced in the mind: if there is a relation of reason between the sign and the thing signified in resembling, then the sign is an \textit{icon}; if there is a direct physical connection, then the sign is an \textit{index}; if there is a relation which rests in the fact that the mind associates the sign with its object, then sign is a \textit{symbol}.\textsuperscript{34} Peirce's three categories are very helpful to explain for what the Nine Tripods actually stood. I will explain the iconic and symbolic aspects here, leaving the indexical one to the following argument. When the Great Yu first cast the Nine Tripods to represent the Nine Provinces, the vessels became a sign which had real connection to the thing it signified -- the number nine and the material from the places represented -- and thus the Nine Tripods stood as an \textit{icon} representing purely demonstrative application from objects to territory. However, the transfer of the Nine Tripods from the Xia to the Shang and then to the Zhou made the function of the Nine Tripods change. The Nine Tripods were originally made to commemorate the first unification of China; yet, since they also consolidated the consequence of this monumental event, i.e., the working of a centralized political power over the whole country, the Nine Tripods gradually became a sign of the legitimacy of a unified and centralized political power. Here the Nine Tripods were used as a \textit{symbol} showing an appeal to the mind; the tripods represented an abstract idea such as the legitimacy of political power essentially because they were so perceived and interpreted. The fact that the concept of "the Nine Tripods" was employed as a key term in political rhetoric during the late Zhou period revealed an intertwining of the above discourses. Wangsun Man and Yen Shuai's eloquence focusing on the issue of legitimacy.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.

seemed to favor the symbolic aspect of the Nine Tripods; while in addition to the symbolic implication, Zhang Yi was particularly concerned with the problem of territory and deliberately extended the iconic function of the Nine Tripods from its reminding feudal lords of an once unified country into its assisting them to re-unify the whole country.

Despite the fact that politicians in the late Zhou dynasty frequently employed the Nine Tripods to refer to the legitimacy of centralized power and unified territory, the location of the Nine Tripods was controversial after the decline of the Zhou. Since it was King Zhaoxiang of the Qin 秦昭襄王 (r. 306-251 B.C.) who vanquished the Zhou in 256 B.C., the Qin state was supposed to possess the Nine Tripods. Both records in the "Basic Annals of the Zhou" and in the "Basic Annals of the Qin" from Shi ji 史記 supported the above assumption.\(^{35}\) Nonetheless, in the "Treatise on the Feng and Shan Sacrifices" in Shi ji, the Han historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145-86 B.C.) provided his readers another story: after the altar of the Song state for worshiping its Shang ancestors was destroyed, the tripods sank into the River Si 漕 and disappeared near the place Pengcheng 彭城.\(^{36}\) Moreover, the Tang scholar Zhang Shoujie 張守節 in his interpretive notes on Shi ji (preface dated 737) explained that while King Zhaoxiang carried the Nine Tripods on his way back to the Qin, one of the tripods fell into the River Si.\(^{37}\) Regardless of what truly happened to these vessels, it seems as though the Qin never took possession of them because the First Emperor of the Qin 秦始皇 (r. 221-210 B.C.), King Zhaoxiang's great grandson, still sent a thousand persons to seek the lost Nine Tripods in the River Si after he successfully unified the whole of China.\(^{38}\) Therefore, after the fall of the Zhou, the whereabouts of the Nine Tripods remained an unsolved mystery.

The truth of the legend of the Nine Tripods has been questioned by modern scholars. In 1923, based on J. G. Andersson's hypothesis, Hu Shih 胡適 claimed that the Nine Tripods were no

\(^{35}\) Sima Qian, 史記 Records of the Historian, 4: 169, 5: 218.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 28: 1365, 1392.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 5: 218.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 6: 248.
more than a myth because the Xia dynasty had not yet entered the bronze age.39 Hu's opinion was disputed in 1979 by Tang Lan, who introduced the new archaeological finds -- the bronzes excavated at Erlitou and Erhigang -- attributed to the late Xia and the early Shang periods.40 In his response to Hu in 1920s, however, Gu Jiegang was more concerned with the theoretical issue of the relationship between myth and history. Gu thought that the origin of the Nine Tripods could be a myth, but the existence of the Nine Tripods may not be historically fallacious since they were mentioned more than once in earlier records. In his usage, myth as the fallacious past was opposed to history as the actual past; partly false and partly real, the legend of the Nine Tripods was hence a mythical-historical complex.41

The legend of the Nine Tripods became more and more complicated and varied as this mythical-historical complex was continuously reiterate in different written documents. The structural analysis of myths suggested by Claude Lévi-Strauss is useful to examine and clarify the inner logic of such a complex if there is any logic among different sources.42 In his method, Lévi-Strauss particularly neglected the diachronic dimension of myth such as the progress of various versions or the sequence of narrative order. He claimed that there is no one true version of which all the others are but copies or distortions. Rather, he argued that the inner logic of myth which stands behind the narrative order is composed of chaotic variants. Thus, the key to understanding the hidden meaning of a myth is to recognize the variants of one version and to compare them with variants of other versions. According to Lévi-Strauss, the result of the analysis can be expressed by the following table in which the rows stand for the sequence of the story (from 1 to 8), and the columns account for different kinds of relations.


grouped by similar variants (1, 2, 4---):

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having broken down the narrative sequence in each version, one is then able to tell the inner logic of a myth based on the hidden relations noted in the columns.

If we apply Lévi-Strauss’ structural analysis and comparative study to the legend of the Nine Tripods, we may reach our conclusions found in Table I. In this table, the rows from left to right are the given order described in the written documents; while the columns from top to bottom are the new relations grouped by separated variants of stories. Basically, the items put in the first two columns tell the situation of political power, while the items in the rest of the columns explain the location of the Nine Tripods. The first column contains those matters which are without virtue, especially relating to military might, and the second, those which are linked with benevolent rule. The first two columns therefore constitute two contradictory aspects of political power. The third column includes the events made by human efforts, and the fourth, the events beyond man’s control. They hence display two kinds of force - human and super-human - dominating the location of the Nine Tripods.

This analysis at first reveals the basic structure of the legend of the Nine Tripods in all versions: the location of the Nine Tripods always corresponds to the situation of political power. There is even a law of causality between legitimate power and the Nine Tripods. To own the tripods is a natural consequence of legitimate power, which is an established pattern in the Three Dynasties. To legitimize political power in turn requires taking possession of the tripods, which is an accepted rule of competition between the rising powers during the late Zhou period. Moreover, behind the

43 Ibid., 89.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zhuo zhuang</td>
<td>The last king of the Xia had no virtue.</td>
<td>The first king of the Xia had virtue.</td>
<td>He cast the Nine Tripods.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The last king of the Shang had no virtue.</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Nine Tripods were transferred to the Shang.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Although the virtue of the Zhou became weak.</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Nine Tripods were transferred to the Zhou.</td>
<td>because Heaven's mandate had not yet changed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mo zi</td>
<td>The last king of the Shang had no virtue.</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Nine Tripods were transferred by themselves.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhan guo ce</td>
<td>The Qin planned to attack the Zhou and seized the Nine Tripods.</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Qi protected the Zhou from being attacked by the Qin. The Qin thus did not get the Nine Tripods.</td>
<td>The Qi could not have the Nine Tripods because of the inconvenience of transport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Qi king then asked for the Nine Tripods as a reward based on his strong army.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shi ji</td>
<td>The King Zhaoxiang of the Qin finally conquered the Zhou.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1) The King Zhaoxiang carried the Nine Tripods back to the Qin. Or 2) The location of the Nine Tripods was unknown because the First Emperor of the Qin still sent thousands of people to seek the lost tripods in the water.</td>
<td>The First Emperor of the Qin did not get the Nine Tripods.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The law of causality stands the premise that the Nine Tripods belong only to the legitimate power with benevolent rule. An existing power without benevolence, although once legitimized, will ultimately lose the tripods. Further, what is more profound is the belief that political power cannot, even with virtue, guarantee the owner-
ship of the tripods because it is Heaven’s mandate that finally dominates the transfer of both political power and the tripods. In Mo zi 墨子, the Nine Tripods were even endowed with divine power and had their own will to choose their location.\textsuperscript{44}

During the late Zhou period, the Nine Tripods were used as both an icon embodying unified territory and a symbol representing legitimacy of political power. The employment of the Nine Tripods could be a faithful re-collection of history; yet it could also be invented myth based on some historical events, for no one had witnessed these vessels since the fall of the Zhou. For lack of cogent evidence, the question of whether or not the Nine Tripods were a part of the real past still goes unanswered. Nonetheless, we should not because of this ignore the desire hidden behind this perplexity. In any case, be it re-collection or invention, it was the strong need of the ruling class to justify its legitimacy that made the ownership of the Nine Tripods become a symbol. Similarly, as analyzed above, it was also cared to be a rhetorical claim of an existing government or its challengers that the emphasis of benevolent rule and the notion of Heaven’s mandate was attached to the transfer of the Nine Tripods. That is to say, benevolent rule and Heaven’s mandate became the supplementary contents of the Nine Tripods as a symbol of legitimacy.

The symbolic meaning of the Nine Tripods would, once shaped, be delivered from generation to generation and become a part of historical reality, no matter how arguable the existence of these objects was. The re-casting of Nine Tripods by Empress Wu (r. 684-704) of the Tang dynasty (618-907) 唐武后 could serve as an example to observe how the memory of the Nine Tripods worked in Medieval China. As the only female ruler in Chinese history, Empress Wu was first forced to seek justification for a female emperor outside of Chinese traditions. She borrowed a Buddhist

\textsuperscript{44} Sun Yirang, ed., 墨子問說 Annotations on Mo zi, 11: 266-67. The notion of Heaven’s mandate was later combined with the theory of "Five Elements," which progressively took position of the legend of the Nine Tripods on the issue of legitimizing political power in the Han Dynasty. The divine power of the Nine Tripods was then expanded and blended with the belief of longevity by Taoists, which became a branch of the legend of the Nine Tripods and gradually lost its political color. See Tu Cheng-sheng 杜正勝, "墨華無極—鼎的歷史與神話 With Everlasting Glory: History and Myth of Tripods," Gugong wenwu yuekan 8, no. 2 (1990): 6-19.
sutra to demonstrate that when Maitreya was reborn as a woman, the long-awaited reincarnation would be the Empress. As a usurped reign in the mid-dynasty at the same time, the insecurity of the empress' legitimacy dictated, however, that she also elaborate her state ideology as closely as possible within the traditional framework. The installation of a set of nine huge bronze tripods in the new Bright Hall (mingtang 明堂) in the year 697 was one of her efforts. As replicas, these vessels were meant to transform the verbal descriptions of the bronzes, which appeared in written historical documents, into physical substance as faithfully as possible: they were thus huge and heavy; they were also nine in number to represent the nine provinces of China subdivided by the Great Yu. On each tripod there were even pictures representing the mountains, rivers and natural products of the province it stood for as described in Zuo zhuan.

In order to realize how Empress Wu appropriated the myth of the Nine Tripods to support her political argument, it is more significant to see what was not mentioned in documents but physically shown on these replicas. It was probably for the purpose of indicating their representation of a unified country more unambiguously that each of the vessels was given a geographical name from one of the nine provinces cast or carved on its wall. It was also probably to emphasize their representation of a centralized reign that the tripod signifying the capital and the central region was larger than the others. The intention of casting of the nine tripods was further declared in the inscription personally composed by Empress Wu on the largest vessel. In this short rhymed inscrip-

46 The whole event has been excellently discussed by Riccardo Fracasso in his "The Nine Tripods of Empress Wu," in Tang China and Beyond, ed. Antonino Forte (Kyoto: Italian School of East Asian Studies, 1988), 85-96.
47 Ibid. The bigger one was 1 zhang and 8 chi in height (a. 5.4 m) and had a capacity of 1,800 dan (a. 1,062 hl). Each one of the rest was 1 zhang and 4 chi in height (a. 4.2 m) and had a capacity of 1,200 dan (a. 708 hl.).
tion, Empress Wu first listed the sacred succession of the legendary rulers in ancient China with high admiration of their benevolent governments. She then pointed out that it is based on Heaven’s decree that these sage-like kings made their eminent contributions. If we take into consideration the fact that Empress Wu named her reign after the Zhou, then the inscription may imply that the commissioner of the reproduction of the Nine Tripods, i.e. Empress herself, could compare to the Zhou king and would carry on this sacred succession after the Great Yu.

Therefore, in the seventh century, the new nine tripods served as bearers of historical memory. The number nine and the carved geographical names appealed to the iconic aspect of the Nine Tripods, which embodied a unified territory. The hierarchy in size and the inscription on the bigger tripod further invoked the symbolic significance of the Nine Tripods, reminding people of the tripods’ representation of a centralized legitimate power performing with benevolence and with Heaven’s mandate. As Riccardo Fracasso has evaluated, Empress Wu’s choice of casting the tripods proved to be wise. These vessels became a visible emblem of the legitimacy of the new Zhou dynasty – a dynasty hailed to surpass the glory of all the empires from the Qin onward and directly linked to the ancient Three Dynasties. Furthermore, the tripods could also serve to appease anti-Buddhist and nationalist sentiments, since the tripods, which put down roots in the first dynastic ruler of China, were something unmistakably Chinese.50

**Acquiring a Tripod and its Political References**

The Nine Tripods disappeared after the decline of the Zhou. It is said that before the Qin’s unification, the tripods had fallen into the River Si. Thus, the First Emperor of the Qin once sought the lost tripods in the River Si. According to some sources, his efforts were in vain; the tripods were nowhere to be found.51 Other sources said that the First Emperor did locate the tripods. However, just as the tripods were raised above the water, the ropes for lifting them were

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51 Sima Qian, 史記 Records of the Historian, 6: 248.
suddenly cut off by the bite of a jumping dragon. In any case, it was true that the First Emperor never possessed the Nine Tripods.

Since the Nine Tripods became such an important token of legitimacy during the late Zhou, the kings who ruled after the Zhou could not help but regret the vanishing of the vessels; they would have liked to justify their reigns by simply having claim to the Nine Tripods. In addition to the First Emperor, the Emperor Wen 文帝 (r. 179-157 B.C.), the second ruler of the Han dynasty, was also drawn to the irresistible charm of the Nine Tripods. During his reign, Xinyuan Ping 新垣平, a necromancer honored with royal rank, announced that the tripods would be found in Fenyn 汾陰. He reasoned that because the Yellow River had overflowed and run into the River Si in the past decades, the objects in the River Si must have been pushed towards the west to the River Fen 汾 (Fig 10). He also emphasized that nothing would ever come unless some action was taken in response to meet such an omen. The Emperor Wen therefore sent envoys to build a temple at Fenyn, hoping to entice the tripods out of water by sincerely offering sacrifice. However, the Emperor Wen never had his wish fulfilled. We are told that Xinyuan was even executed for concocting all the supernatural occurrences.

In 116 B.C., during the reign of the Emperor Wu 武帝 (r. 140-87 B.C.), just at the same place, Fenyn, a shaman noticed a hook-like object sticking out of the ground at the side of the altar when he performed a sacrifice to the Earth Lord. Digging up the soil around it, he unearthed a tripod with an incised pattern which was much larger than any ordinary tripod. The news was known to the Emperor Wu. Having found no evidence of fraud, the Emperor had his envoy sacrificed with ceremony at the altar and carried the tripod back to the Palace Ganquan 甘泉宮 at the Mount Ganquan in the north of the capital Chang’an 長安, where he worshiped the spirits of Heaven. The Emperor probably joined the later part of the journey from the capital Chang’an. We are told that when the team

52 Li Daoyuan 郭道元 (? - 527), 水經注 Annotations on Shui jing (Revised edition by Wang family in Changsha), 25: 18b-19a.

marched to Zhongshan, yellow clouds came and covered the tripod; just then, a large deer passed by, which the Emperor shot down in person and used as a sacrifice (Fig 10). 54

After the imperial party returned to Chang’an, the ministers and high officials all requested that due honor should be shown to the precious tripod. In the course of suggesting why and how respect should be paid to the tripod, we see a contest between Confucians and necromancers, two major groups at the court. Confucians, enumerating those who had cast tripods including Fu Xi 伏羲, Yellow Emperor 黄帝 and Great Yu, argued that "Only when a sage ruler appeared on the throne were these tripods made." From their viewpoint, therefore, when the virtue of the Zhou rulers declined, the tripods sank accordingly into the waters and disappeared from sight. Now that a tripod was discovered and came with a cover descended from yellow and white clouds and an omen in the form of an auspicious deer appeared, they concluded, "Only an emperor who has received the mandate of Heaven can understand the meaning of these signs, and he alone possesses the virtue needed to answer them." They thus expressed their wish that the tripod should be presented in the ancestral temple and stored in the imperial court to accord with these bright omens. 55

The necromancers, however, gave the appearance of this tripod a different implication. Their divergence from Confucians at the very beginning depends on which legend was chosen to attach to this newly discovered tripod. 56 The necromancers ignored the myth of the Nine Tripods and linked the unearthed tripod only with the story of the Yellow Emperor, a story which totally differed from what the Confucians told. As the necromancer Gongsun Qing 公孫卿 explained, the Yellow emperor once collected copper from the Mount Shou 首山 and cast a tripod at the foot of Mount Jing 荊山. When the tripod was completed, he was carried towards Heaven by a dragon who had come down from the sky. Gongsun

56 The Confucians’ argument mainly followed the route of the myth of the Nine Tripods. When they mentioned the Yellow Emperor, they emphasized his making three tripods to symbolize heaven, earth and man.
further connected the legend with Emperor Wu by citing a tripod inscription said to be handed down from the Yellow Emperor. The inscription read, "A precious tripod shall appear and he (the sage of the Han) shall commune with the spirits. He shall perform the Feng and Shan sacrifices." Gongsun then encouraged the Emperor Wu to perform the sacrifices because once he had finished them, like the Yellow Emperor, he would become an immortal and would climb up to Heaven.\(^{57}\)

In Shi ji, the Emperor Wu is represented as welcoming both voices. Acquiring this tripod at first made the Emperor reflect on the administrative achievements of his own rule. Because of the overflow of the Yellow River these years, he had journeyed the empire and preformed sacrifices to the Earth Lord, praying for the sake of the common people that the grain might grow well. Although the harvest this year turned out to be plentiful, thinking that he did not yet perform any ritual to return thanks for this blessing, he asked his officials at the court, "Why then should this tripod appear?" This question led to the Confucian voice described above, confirming Heaven's approval of his benevolent rule and requesting his incessant devotion, to which the Emperor gave his consent.\(^{58}\) Later, when he heard the necromancer's voice, the Emperor also sighed and said, "If I could only become like the Yellow Emperor, I would think no more of my wife and children than of a castoff slipper! "\(^{59}\) Obviously, the Emperor was highly satisfied with the twofold symbolism of acquiring this tripod. In the public sphere, of course, he would not mind being a legitimate sage ruler approved by Heaven if the appearance of the tripod was to indicate this. For his own self, he would also not exclude any possibility to seek immortality if the tripod could be a key to it.

In the dialogues among the Emperor, the Confucians and the necromancers, the tripod always served as a vehicle for alluding to the past, no matter what kind of past was selected or even invented. Although these interpretations were cleverly made at the sym-

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bolic level, most people could not help looking for a connection at the physical level between this tripod and the lost tripods since the stories about the First Emperor's efforts to lift the tripods and the Emperor Wen's attempt to entice the tripods still occupied their mind. Therefore, after this tripod had been presented in the ancestral temple and stored in the Palace Ganquan, the officials congratulated the Emperor Wu and said, "Your majesty has acquired one of the tripods of the Zhou." At this time, only the official Shou Wang 搵王 held his opinion that this unearthed tripod was not one of the tripods of the Zhou. Probably suspecting the negation would question his legitimacy, the Emperor demanded that Shou Wang be executed unless he offered his explanation. Shou Wang thus argued from the definition of the term "the Zhou tripods." According to his opinion, it is because Heaven honored the virtue of the Zhou from Gong Liu to the Duke Zhou that the tripods came to light; since the tripods appeared particularly for the Zhou, they were called "the Zhou Tripods." From the first ruler Emperor Gao to the Emperor Wu, the Han followed the model of the Zhou and gradually establish its virtue. The unearthed tripod therefore should be viewed as Heaven's gift to honor the virtue of the Han. Since the appearance of the tripod was especially for the Han, he hence proposed to call it "the Han tripod."60

For the contemporary political identity, the distinction between the Zhou tripods and the Han tripod revealed new confidence of the Han people about their dynasty, which was rare before the reign of the Emperor Wu. The implications of this distinction were varied. Ideologically, they did not go beyond the given discourse of the myth of the Nine Tripods; the virtue of rule and Heaven's mandate were still the main points. However, formally, the distinction somehow announced the death of the Nine Tripods: the First Emperor Qin and the Emperor Wen actively searched in order to acquire the lost tripods; yet an official at Emperor Wu's court could never mention the necessity of seeking the lost tripods and even put the same emphasis on an unearthed tripod! In the mid-Han, people seemed to start to accept the irrevocable lost of the Nine

60 Ban Gu 班固 (32-92), 漢書 Official History of the Former Han (206 B.C. - A.D. 24) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1990), 64a: 2979-78.
Tripods. Later, Wang Chong 王充 (ca. 27-97), a Han scholar, even reasoned that the tripods might have been stolen and melted to make other objects in the midst of chaos when the Zhou was destroyed.61

With the shifting interests from the Nine Tripods to a newly found tripod, it is now for us to review the whole development of the myth of the Nine Tripods. As discussed above, Lévi-Strauss' structural analysis is very useful to highlight the inner logic of a mythical complex. However, in Lévi-Strauss' usage, myth has no location in chronological time, hence he offers no help in understanding the diachronic transformation of myth in history. The theory of "the accumulation of ancient history" proposed by the Chinese historian Gu Jiegang may make up for Lévi-Strauss' insufficiency in this aspect. Essentially, Gu thought that ancient history is accumulated in different periods layer by layer. The later the period, the longer the legends about ancient history become. And the later the period, the more the heroes in legends are exaggerated. Inasmuch as the reality of an event in the past is indeterminate, its earliest or the original state in a legend can be grasped by scholars. For instance, the actual past of the Xia dynasty may not be known to us, but the notion of the history of the Xia in the late Zhou period can more or less be understood.62

Rethinking the legend of the Nine Tripods in the light of Gu's theory, we may draw a different table (Table II). According to the documents about the late Zhou period, the Zhou court claimed the Nine Tripods as a symbol of legitimacy once and again; the rising regional powers accepted this claim and expressed their political ambition by asking for the Nine Tripods. In this period, the myth of the Nine Tripods was well established and sincerely believed. The power following the fall of the Zhou, the Qin, did not inherit the Tripods, and the disillusionment of the myth began to creep in. Yet at the same time, the myth created from the past still influenced the history-making of the following generations. The first Emperor of

61 Huang Hui 黃輝, 論衡校釋 Collation and Annotation on Lun heng (Taipei: Shangwu,1983), 8:371-376.
62 Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, "與錢玄同先生論古史 Discussions of Ancient History with Mr. Qian Xuantong," in 古史辨 Critique of Ancient History, 59-66.
the Qin and the Emperor Wen of the Han made their efforts to search the lost Tripods. As time passed, however, once the impossibility of the existence of the Nine Tripods was recognized, the myth soon became established history. The Emperor Wu was thus content to acquire a big tripod even if it was not one of the Nine Tripods. Shou Wang's distinguishing the Han tripod from the Zhou tripods also showed no touch of anxiety over the lost Nine Tripods. The way Wang Chong interpreted the disappearance of the Tripods that they must have been melted furthered the irrevocability of the losing of the objects and coincidently terminated the life of their myth.

Table II: The Accumulation of the Myth of the Nine Tripods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tripods</th>
<th>Late Zhou</th>
<th>Qin &amp; Early Han</th>
<th>Mid-Han and after</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Myth</td>
<td>Constructing the myth of the Nine Tripods</td>
<td>Disillusioned with the myth of the Nine Tripods</td>
<td>Transforming the myth of the Nine Tripods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth &amp; History</td>
<td>Myth entered history</td>
<td>Myth influenced history</td>
<td>Myth became history</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the development of the myth of the Nine Tripods, acquiring a tripod during the reign of the Emperor Wu played an important role in shifting people's attention from the Nine Tripods to a newly found tripod. And what is more significant, the shift did not break down the connection of the two. Instead, the shift transferred the implication of the Nine Tripods to a tripod that was accidentally found while simultaneously transforming the myth of the Nine Tripods and continuing its influence. For those who did not separate the recently discovered tripod from the Nine Tripods because of their physical resemblance, such as most of the court Confucians, the discovered tripod served as a sign of legitimate power approved by Heaven. Similarly, for those who differentiated the Han tripod from the Zhou tripods, such as Shou Wang, the discovered tripod still bore the connotation of benevolent rule.
Borrowing Peirce's theory of sign, we can clarify the relationship of the references of a discovered tripod and those of the Nine Tripods in the following diagram:

unified territory

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icon

the Nine Tripods

index

ea tripod

legitimate power

symbol

benevolent rule

Heaven's mandate

As introduced above, if there is a direct physical connection between the sign and the thing signified, then the sign is an index; such, for instance, is a bullet-hole in a piece of mould as sign of a shot.\(^{63}\) In the aforementioned context, the newly found tripod actually functioned as an index of the Nine Tripods. By its physical connection with the Nine Tripods, the newly discovered tripod adopted and carried on the iconic and symbolic meanings of the Nine Tripods. Therefore, in the first place, the accidentally found tripod was an index reminding people of the myth of the Nine Tripods. And then, through such an index-linked relation, the accidentally found tripod even served, as did the Nine Tripods, as an icon of unified territory and a symbol of legitimate power with benevolent rule under Heaven's mandate.

In terms of the way historical memory is shaped, Empress Wu's duplicating Nine Tripods to consolidate her position taken through usurpation is re-collection, in which the past is evoked by reconstructing selective images that suit the needs of a present situation. Opposed to this, the Emperor Wu's acquiring a tripod and associating the acquired tripod with the myth of the Nine Tripods is re-modeling. In this case, the meaning of the past, represented by the Nine Tripods, is given by analogizing it with the present context of acquiring a tripod. Thus, like a designer that remolds a room by giving it a different shape, the Emperor Wu and his contemporary remodeled the myth of the Nine Tripods by giving it a

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\(^{63}\) James Hoopes, ed., Peirce on Signs, 239-240.
new turn. Since then, any discovered tripod can be viewed as an index of the Nine Tripods and can therefore become an icon of unification and a symbol of legitimacy. Physically possessing (one of the original Nine Tripods is not the only way to justify legitimacy; accidentally acquiring a tripod could achieve the same result.64 This transition is, as the discussion in the end would show, very crucial for us to understand the modern cult of the Simuwu ding.

Since the Nine Tripods had vanished after the decline of the Zhou, the Emperor Wu's use of a tripod that was accidentally acquired to remodel the myth of the Nine Tripods opened up a new possibility to continue the political tradition in which the ding-shaped bronze vessels were an icon of unification and a symbol of legitimacy. The new precedent set by the Emperor Wu attracted some followers. In the year 266, for instance, the last ruler of the Kingdom Wu 吳, Sun Hao 孫皓 (r. 264-280), acquired a big tripod and soon re-named his reign as bao ding 寶鼎 (precious tripod)63 . He almost repeated the Emperor Wu's action -- in 116 B.C., right after acquiring a tripod, the Emperor Wu changed the title of his reign as yuan ding 元鼎 (great tripod) to celebrate and commemorate this auspicious finding.65 Yet unlike the Emperor Wu's tripod, the tripod acquired during Sun Hao's reign was not a sign confirming the prosperous present; instead, it served as an omen suggesting a promising future.66

Tripods as Collective Memories

The Nine Tripods have never been, in myth or in reality, held in the private sphere. Because the issues the myth of the Nine Tripods invoke are no other than territory and political power, the

65 Ban Gu, 漢書 Official History of the Former Han, 6: 181.
66 For Sun Hao, ruling in the turmoil in the Three Kingdoms period (220-265), how to justify legitimacy and how to reach re-unification were always a ruler’s main concern. Especially after the Kingdom Wei in the north destroyed the Kingdom Shu in the west in 263 and altered the equilibrium among three powers, Sun Hao faced a growing threat from the north. At such a turning point, an accidentally discovered tripod as an icon of unification and a symbol of legitimacy was most welcomed and could be an auspicious omen encouraging people to look forward to better tomorrow.
accidentally acquired tripod and the reproduced Nine Tripods, both intentionally attached to the myth, are likewise exposed in public. Therefore, used in either re-collection or re-modelling, the memories of the Nine Tripods themselves are already collective. Yet "there is no universal memory," as Maurice Halbwachs pointed out, "All collective memory is supported by a group that is limited in space and time." 67 Emphasizing the localization of memories, Halbwachs proposed placing individual memories within various corresponding groups such as families, religious organizations or social classes. 68 With regard to the intentions, interests and perspectives of social groups, tripods as political collective memories can be roughly localized within two frameworks -- the ruling class which creates the symbolic form and the non-ruling class which receives the symbolic display.

Moreover, to articulate the diachronical aspect of collective memory, the modes of historical communication should be considered together with the above frameworks. In his studies of cultural implications of media, Marshall McLuhan touched upon the inter-relationship between ways of thinking and modes of communication. To demonstrate his theory -- "the medium is the message," McLuhan indicated a corresponding reshaping of the framework of knowledge in the move from orality into literacy, from manuscript to print culture and from typographic to electronic culture. 69 Since the modes of communication provide people with the skills of both representing and understanding the past, once they are modified, the perception of the past are also changed. 70 Going one step further, if two groups are forced or choose to use different modes of communication, their shaping of memory will be divergent. Considering the modes of communication, in our case, mainly situated in the typographic culture, the literate and the illiterate further form two significant subdivisions within the framework of the non-ruling class. Tripods as political collective memories can

67 Maurice Halbwachs, On Collective Memory, 75.
68 Ibid., 40, 52-53.
70 Patrick H. Hutton, History as an Art of Memory, xxi-xxii, 13-17.
hence be discussed within the context of the ruling class, of the literate group and of the illiterate group with the particular concern over various modes --literary, oral and visual-- in perceiving the myth of the Nine Tripods.

The term "ruling class," as used here, refers to the ruler who intends to create a sign of his political power and his officers who are responsible for elaborating the form and the content of the sign. In the ruling class, tripods as a political sign can be displayed at two different levels -- the original and the representational. The original state of displaying Tripods as a political sign is always physical. This symbolic tradition at its very beginning put down roots in art objects, starting with the Great Yu's collecting material from nine provinces and casting the Nine Tripods. Then, the importance of physically possessing the Great Yu's Nine Tripods was emphasized again and again over a thousand years from the Three Dynasties till the early Han. In the mid-Han, having accepted the disappearance of the Nine Tripods, the Emperor Wu symbolically replaced but physically associated the Nine Tripods with an acquired tripod. The acquired tripod, though not one of the Nine Tripods, was a concrete substance and able to be displayed in the temple or the palace. Similarly, understanding the power of the physical form, Empress Wu chose to recall the implications of the Nine Tripods through exhibiting their concrete reminders in her newly constructed ritual building.

In addition to the objects themselves, the original display of the political token includes the commemorative activities which allowed more participants and helped to strengthen the significance of the obtaining or the recasting. The Emperor Wu had rituals performed when he presented the acquired tripod in the ancestral temple and when he stored it in the Palace Ganquan. He also ordered the composition of the song entitled "The Precious Tripod 寶鼎歌," which might be performed during the ritual.\footnote{Ban Gu, 漢書 Official History of the Former Han, 22: 1063-64.} The show of Empress Wu's installing her re-cast tripods was even more impressive. The Nine Tripods were pulled by the big oxen and the white elephants escorted by a hundred thousand men who were led by the Grand Ministers and the Royal Princess. Empress Wu
personally wrote the song entitled "Hauling the Tripods 牽鼎歌" and had it sung and responded in the ceremony.  

Despite their grandeur, however, the physical objects and the temporal ritual would one day fade away. The writings about them instead became both the representation and the preservation of those already gone objects and commemorative activities. Such textulized memories are the second state of displaying tripods as a political sign. With regard to their distance to the original state, the related writings can be divided into three groups: the first, the records of the words cast on objects or used in rituals; the second, the records of the events by the court historians who might bear witness to the events or have the accessibility to the closest materials; and the third, the discussions of the objects or events based on other written documents or oral history. The historical value of each documentary group may differ; nevertheless, their contributions to the shaping of tripods as collective memory are almost the same. These writings become the main resources of later recollections. We have been told that on each tripod reconstructed by Empress Wu there were pictures representing the mountains, rivers and natural products of the region the tripod stood for. The design of the exterior decoration must have been inspired by Wangsun Man's description appeared in Zuo zhuan. Interestingly, though Empress Wu chose to renew the collective past of the Great Yu, her follower, the Emperor Xuan 宣宗 (r. 712-755), simply


73 Such as the inscriptions on the recast tripods composed by Empress Wu of the Tang or the song entitled "The Precious Tripod" ordered by the Emperor Wu of the Han.

74 For instance, the depiction of the Emperor Wu's acquiring a tripod in Shi ji and Han shu, or that of Empress Wu's reproducing the Nine Tripods in Jiu tang shu.


76 In Zuo zhuan, the late Zhou minister Wangsun Man said, "In the past when the Xia dynasty was distinguished for its virtue, the distant regions put their things into pictures and the nine provinces sent in copper as tribute. The Tripods were cast to present those things. One hundred different things were presented, so the people could distinguish divine from evil." See Yang Bojun, ed., 春秋左傳注 Annotations on Chun qiu zuo zhuan, Xuanong 3: 669-72; English translation is based on Hung Wu, "The Myth of Nine Tripods and Traditional Chinese Concepts of Monumentality", 5.
renamed Fenyin, the place where a tripod was found in the Han dynasty, as Baoding 寶鼎 (precious tripod) to recall the Emperor Wu’s re-modelling of the myth of the Nine Tripods. Before the Emperor Xuan, as mentioned above, Sun Hao had imitated the Emperor Wu to rename his reign as bao ding to connect his tripod with the Emperor Wu’s. It is obvious that these recollections could not be well formulated without the records in Shi ji or Han shu 漢書.

Before the electronic revolution, as Nathan Wachtel noticed, historical writings seemed to be in command of collective memory. Faced with a multiplicity of individual memories, people tended to believe that the historian is a professional and reliable arbiter of memories since he had at his disposal the method and documents that allowed him to restore memories into a single account and to propose the accurate version of the past. Historical memory constituted in this way was thus “univocal, unitary and unifying.” As Wachtel argued, “it invited all the members of a society, however diverse their situations and respective points of view, to be united in a collective past.” The Great Yu’s casting the Nine Tripods and the Emperor Wu’s acquiring a tripod, two models of using tripods as a political sign, were thus united in the aforementioned historical writings as collective past and transmitted from generation to generation in the ruling class.

The textualized historical memories would have been shared by all the literate even those who had never been at court and had no duty to assist the ruler to articulate his intended political symbol. The literate group under discussion basically refers to those who were educated but far from devoted courtiers, officers or official historians. The out-of-court literati might not have the opportunity to view the displayed objects or to participate the commemorative activities; yet they had the ability to learn the related information, contemporary or historical, from the written texts.

Two significant movements in Chinese cultural history may

79 Ibid., 217.
guarantee most of the literati's acquaintance with the myth of the
Nine Tripods, its re-modeling and its re-collection. The first stage
is the canonization of important ancient writings. *Zuo zhuan*, affili-
ated with *Chun qiu* 春秋 as its commentary, had been recognized as
one of the Classics since the first century and was selected as one of
the Thirteen Classics after the twelfth century.\(^80\) It is the major doc-
ument preserving the myth of the Nine Tripods from the Great Yu
to the late Zhou. *Shi ji* 詩穀 had, likewise, been acknowledged as one of
the Three Standard Histories since the third century.\(^81\) It not only
mentioned the myth of the Nine Tripods but also recorded the
whole event of the Emperor's acquiring a tripod. As the canons of
Chinese culture, *Zuo zhuan* and *Shi ji* would not have been foreign
to most of literati. The classical education was further institutio-
nalized by the second movement, the establishing of the examination
system. From the seventh century down to 1905, since the examina-
tion system firmly functioned as the main avenue to office, the
direction of the examination must have deeply influenced or even
confined the scope of the reading lists for the educated. No matter
how the institution altered, the Confucian classics and the official
histories, as the essence of the official orthodoxy, had never been
excluded by the examination.\(^82\) *Zuo zhuan*, *Shi ji*, *Han shu* were thus
taken in the repertoire of literati's studies. The myth of the Nine
Tripods and its transformation written down in those books hence
entered the literate's mind and became their collective memories.

Opposed to the ruling class, the literate group had no need to
legitimize political power; however, their historical knowledge

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\(^{80}\) The Emperor Guangwu (r. 25-57) established the zuoshi boshi, an official chair for
teaching *Zuo zhuan* at court. See Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌, *隋書經籍志* Dynastic
Bibliographies of *Sui shu* (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1957), 26. As for the canonization of
*Zuo zhuan*, see Jiang Boqian 蒋伯潜, *十三經概論* Introduction to the Thirteen Classics

\(^{81}\) Wang Mingsheng 吳鴻盛 (1722-1798), *十七史商榷* A Critical Study of the Seventeen

\(^{82}\) Deng Siyu 鄧嗣禹, *中國考試制度史* History of Chinese Examination System (Nanjing:
The Examination Yuan, 1936); Miyazaki Ichisada 宮崎市定, *科舉史* History of
Examinations (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1988), 11-68; Franke Wolfgang, *The Reform and
Abolition of the Traditional Chinese Examination System* (Cambridge, Mass.: The
Center for East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1960), 1-15; John W. Chaffee, *The
Thorny Gates of Learning in Sung China: A Social History of Examinations* (Albany:
State University of New York, 1995).
about tripods might have been useful for argument when they wrote articles. Take Su Shi 蘇軾 (1036-1101), an outstanding writer but frustrated officer, for example. In his preface to Han ding ming 漢鼎銘 (Epigraph on the Han Tripod), Su argued that the Nine Tripods were a curse rather than a blessing of the Zhou because they were the very treasure hunted by the most ambitious lords, so that they finally caused the ruin of the Zhou. His motivation to write the epigraph was to utter what Shou Wang did not articulate when he distinguished the Han tripod from the Zhou tripod in front of the Emperor Wu.\textsuperscript{83} Examining the historical evidence he employed in his article, we may be stunned by how close we share with Su the same collective past preserved in the related historical writings.\textsuperscript{84}

Moreover, the knowledge of tripods might satisfy some literati’s antiquarian nostalgia. Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555-1636), an excellent artist and half retired officer, once sailed on the Lake West and found a piece of jade tablet with inscriptions. He immediately recognized that the inscriptions were very similar to the song entitled "The Precious Tripod" celebrating Emperor Wu’s acquiring a tripod during the Han dynasty. Evidently, Dong was very familiar with the records in Shi ji and Han shu. To commemorate the discovery, Dong named his studio as baoding zhai 寶鼎齋 (The Precious-tripod Studio), similar to the Emperor’s altering the title of his reign but without the political connotations. Further, he carved a seal with the characters of bao ding zhai and had it stamped on his art works. Dong finally published the collection of his calligraphy entitled with Bao ding zhai fa tie 寶鼎齋法帖 (The Model Calligraphy of the Precious-tripod Studio).\textsuperscript{85}

Since historical writing was the most dominant force directing the historical communication in the pre-modern China, the illiter-

\textsuperscript{83} Su Shi 蘇軾, "漢鼎銘並引 Epigraph on the Han Tripod," in 蘇軾文集 Collection of Su Shi’s Prose Works, ed. Kong Fanli 孔凡禮 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1992), 556-557.

\textsuperscript{84} The historical evidence Su Shi used includes the Great Yu’s casting the Tripods, the lord of the Chu’s inquiring about the Tripods, the Qi and the Qin’s competing for the Tripods, the First Emperor’s seeking the Tripods and the Emperor Wu’s acquiring a tripod.

\textsuperscript{85} Rong Geng 容庚, ed., 藝帖目 Index of Calligraphy Copybooks (Taipei: Huazheng, 1984), 1222.
ate group might seem necessarily ruled out the tradition. However, being unable to learn about the world and its past through the written texts does not mean the illiterate had no knowledge of them; they could learn through their own oral tradition. Yet indeed, it is not easy to prove how they learned and passed down the information because oral history is always difficult to trace, especially when the range of time under considerations could be more than a thousand years. Here, I will only attempt to trace a small part of oral tradition -- the linguistic sharing between the literate and the illiterate, in which some historical memories might be preserved.

In Chinese language, many idioms are condensed from longer historical accounts and carry the implications of those accounts as their meanings. The idiom wen ding 問鼎 is one of the cases. If translated literally, wen ding means "inquiring about tripods". In most general dictionaries, the definition of wen ding would however be given as "aspiring after the throne". The usage of the idiom is evidently derived, as aforementioned, from the conversation between the lord of the Chu and Wangsun Man in the late Zhou. The Chu lord expressed his ambition for the throne by inquiring about the size and weight of the Nine Tripods. Despite that the Nine Tripods no longer existed after the late Zhou, people in the later periods adopted the political implication of this earlier event and used wen ding to indicate having an ambition for the throne, even though there was in fact no tripod to be inquired about. And amazingly, wen ding still remains a living idiom in modern China. Modern Chinese would use wen ding zhong yuan 問鼎中原 (inquiring about the tripods in the Central Plain) to convey the notion of having an ambition to unify the whole China and to be her sole ruler.

Some idioms are not directly condensed from historical accounts, but the specific combination of their word reveals the influence of historical memory in a more general level. For instance, the idiom of ding yun 鼎運 is a combination of two nouns: separately, ding means "tripod" and yun, "destiny;" together, the lit-

eral meaning of ding yun is "the destiny of the tripod." Unlike wen ding, ding yun has never been literally used. When the idiom of ding yun appears, it must refer to "the destiny of the reign, the dynasty or the empire." Apparently, "tripod" serves as a substitute of "reign", "dynasty" or "empire." It goes without saying that the collective memories of tripods as a political sign make the replacement possible and give birth to such an expression. Although the emergence of the idiom may not be precisely investigated, its early example can be found in the sixth century.\(^7\) In addition to ding yun, there are some synonyms also employing the same symbol under the same composition principle, such as ding ming 鼎命 (the fate of the reign), ding zuo 鼎祚 (the destiny of the reign) and ding ye 鼎業 (the achievement of the reign).\(^8\)

Those idioms which include the image of the tripod and its symbolic meaning might have been first invented by the literate but might not have been monopolized by them. Two modes of oral performance popular in the Chinese society could have made those idioms known to the illiterate group. The first mode is story-telling (shuo shu 說書). As in the Medieval Europe, there were many storytellers roaming from town to country in the pre-modern China. They entertained their audience by fabricating various kinds of stories, including exaggerated historical narratives. They may or may not have told the myth of the Nine Tripods; nonetheless, some idioms relating the tripod were very possibly used as rhetoric in other stories. The second mode of oral performance is drama. In historical drama, similarly, some phrases associating tripods might have been used, and hence would be made familiar to the audience.

Even if the assumption that the literate culture was shared orally with the illiterate is correct, the two groups would have different perceptions of the same material. For the literate, the idioms

were the condensation of historical events or historical knowledge. Once they learned the idioms, even if they did not realize their allusion from history, they were able to trace their origin through other related texts. For the illiterate, in most cases, they could only understand the idioms from their oral contexts. They might not know the myth of the Nine Tripods if they had no chance to hear the oral narration of the myth. However, from the oral usage of certain phrases such as *ding yun*, they would have somehow sensed the connection between the tripod and the political power. That is to say, when the symbolic meaning of tripods was transmitted from the ruling class to the illiterate group, most of the complicated historical details might have been lost; what was left is what the sign-creating basically aimed that the tripod stood for the ruler and the empire.

Although words are the major storage of collective past, images sometimes help to form and disseminate historical memories. In the Han dynasty, the memory of the First Emperor of the Qin’s seeking the lost Tripod seemed to be particular favored, for there were many images describing the story left from this period. The early example is the carved wood unearthed from Tomb no. 1 at Xuyi 西元 in Jiangsu (Fig 11). It depicts the scene of lifting a tripod: the tripod is hung by a rope pulled by three persons at each side of the river bank while chariots pass by the bridge. According to the archaeological report, an animal jumps from the tripod, although the detail is not clear in a photo.

A more elaborate version of lifting the tripod is shown on the carved stone from Wulaowa 五老洼 in Shandong (Fig 12). It describes not only the scene of dredging up the tripod from the river, but also the crucial moment when a dragon suddenly jumps from the tripod, with its mouth open to bite the rope binding the tripod. The carved stone from the Wu family shrines 武氏祠 captures the following moment: right after the rope is cut off by the dragon’s bite, the people holding on the rope fall down to the


The decorated brick from Xinye 新野 in Henan presents the same moment when a dragon severs the rope hanging the tripod; yet instead of jumping from the tripod, the dragon here might descend from the sky or spring from the water (Fig 14). 92

Despite the variety of artistic expressions, these images all show the fruitless effort of the First Emperor of the Qin's seeking the lost Tripod after the jumping dragon cut off the rope. Such a dramatic ending was never mentioned in the contemporary standard history. In Shi ji and Han shu, only the fact that the First Emperor tried but did not find the Tripod(s) was recorded. Compared to the contemporary written documents, the images, however, show the additional details that the First Emperor did locate the lost Tripod and would have acquired it if a dragon severing the rope had not terminated the search. Judging from the popularity of such details in pictorial art, we may assume that the jumping dragon was invented and orally transmitted among Han people, which was then written down in the sixth century. 93 The invention of the jumping dragon is of great significance since it showed the viewpoint of people who commissioned and designed the carving. They let a dragon, an envoy from Heaven, discourage the First Emperor while simultaneously announcing that the First Emperor did not deserve the tripod by Heaven's will. In a way, this narrative maintains the profound implication of the myth of the Nine Tripods.

Scholars suggested that these images were caricatures made by Han people to satirize the First Emperor as a tyrant, the Emperor could not possess the lost Nine Tripods, a symbol of legitimacy and benevolence, from Heaven. 94 Indeed, the process of finding, dragging and losing the Tripod seems to present the rise and decline of the Qin empire in miniature. Nevertheless, the Emperor


92 Nanyang wenwu yanjiusuo 南陽文物研究所, ed., 南陽漢代畫像石 Han Decorated Bricks in Nanyang (Beijing: Wenwu, 1990), 139-43.

93 Li Daoyuan, 水經注 Annotations on Shui jing, 25: 18b-19a.

94 Chang Renxia 常任俠, 漢畫藝術研究 Research on Han Painting (Shanghai: Shanghai Press, 1955), Catalogue entry no. 2.
Wen, the second ruler of the Han empire, also erected a temple to wait for the appearance of the Tripods. Both the First Emperor and the Emperor Wen's seeking the lost Tripods might have been a reflection of their lack of confidence in legitimizing their new empires. On the other hand, the prevalence of the theme of searching for the Tripod in Han art might have revealed either the inner anxiety of Han people about the legitimacy and durability of their dynasty or their resentment of a tyrannical government as well as their expectation for benevolent rule.

Those who commissioned the carving of historical stories were very possibly the local gentry, part of the literate group. To what extent these images were shared by other groups is unclear. The image could have been first designed at court and then spread out through bureaucracy into local areas. In this case, the image of lifting the Tripod might serve as political propaganda emphasizing the tyranny of the previous dynasty. However, the image could also have been solely the creation of the literate group, a means to convey their historical judgement and political expectation. Although the examples introduced above are images from either shrines or tombs, the theme of lifting the Tripod could also have been applied to the decoration of public buildings for government offices or schools during the Han dynasty. In such a case, the image might have been known to the illiterate group. From the visual depiction, perhaps together with some oral fragments, the illiterate might have learned the basic political message that only the benevolent rule can be legitimized by Heaven's mandate.

The Simuwu ding as a Modern Monument

Having discussed how tripods became and worked as a political sign in pre-modern China, let us return to our concern about the modern cult of the Simuwu ding. Jumping to the Simuwu ding from the model set by the Great Yu and its sub-model developed by the


96 Hsing Yi-tian 邏義田, "漢代壁畫的發展和漢代壁畫墓 The Development of Han Murals and Han Tomb Murals," in 秦漢史論稿 *On Qin and Han History* (Taipei: Dongda, 1987), 449-489.
Emperor Wu, one may first wonder at the physical level how we can link the aforementioned tripod(s) with the Simuwu ding, for it is obviously a four-legged vessel. In fact, the Chinese character ding can refer to either a circular tripod with three legs or a square tetrapod with four legs. To be more precise, people would sometimes use the term "fang ding 方鼎" to indicate the tetrapod by adding an adjective fang (square) to the noun ding. The earliest example of such a usage can be traced back to the inscription bao fang ding 資方鼎 (precious square tetrapod) on a tetrapod unearthed at Hejia village in Qishan, dating in the early Western Zhou (10th c. B.C.).

Since ding can name both a tripod and a tetrapod, very naturally, there exits ambiguities in understanding the object signified by the word ding. Take the Nine Tripods as an instance. People have long presumed that the nine bronze vessels cast by Yu were tripods, although no one can know for sure their physical form. However, Mo Di, a Late Zhou scholar, once speculated that these vessels were in tetrapod shape. Such an ambiguity, in turn, imperceptibly bridges the gap between the myth of the Nine Tripods and the Simuwu ding. That is to say, according to the traditional Chinese classification, despite variations, a tripod and a tetrapod are both granted membership in the same "class" -- ding; under the label of ding, a tetrapod, like the Simuwu ding, can hence conveniently share with any member of the class the political implications derived from the myth of the Nine Tripods.

To understand how the historical memories of tripods influence the modern perception of the Simuwu ding, we can start out by examining how people treat the object in their own situations. The first group relating to the Simuwu ding is the local people in Anyang, who excavated and reinterred the vessel in 1939 when the Japanese army had occupied Anyang, and re-excavated it in 1945 when the war just ended. The social status of the local people is unclear. They could be farmers, tomb looters, gentry, or most likely,

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98 Sun Yirang, ed., 黑子問記事 Annotations on Mo zi, 11: 264-66. As mentioned, Mo Di attributed the making of the Nine Tripods to Qi, not Yu.
a joint team. No matter who they were, what is significant is that they all refused to hand over the object to the Japanese occupation troops even though the Japanese quoted a price as high as seven hundred thousand dollars to buy it. It goes without saying that driven by fervent patriotism, no one was willing to succumb to the Japanese handsome offer. Yet we may ponder what on earth makes the local people think that preventing the Japanese from possessing the *Simuwu ding* is showing their patriotism.

One may suggest that the notion of national treasure suffices to explain the local people's attitude toward the *Simuwu ding*. Indeed, the local people might have viewed the extraordinarily gigantic bronze vessel as a national treasure, which can never be easily given up to foreigners, let alone the Japanese, a hateful national enemy. Nevertheless, we may further ask what if the national treasure they discovered is a Buddhist stone sculpture with even more massive size and with even higher artistic and historical value? No one can of course answer such a question, but with regard to the desperate political situation in the enemy occupied area, it will not go too far to assume that compared to a Buddhist sculpture, in addition to the notion of treasure, the *Simuwu ding* could have evoked the historical memories of tripods as a political sign in different ways. For the literate, such as local gentry, confronting the *Simuwu ding* under the Japanese invasion, they might have recalled from their historical knowledge how tripods could serves as an icon of territory and a symbol of legitimate reign in the past. Similarly, through oral tradition or local gentry's explanations, the illiterate, like most farmers, might also have had a general impression that tripods could stand for an empire and right rule. Therefore, gentry or farmers, once their historical memories about tripods were jogged, the local people would have done their utmost to keep the *Simuwu ding* from the Japanese. It seems, by doing so, that they could best the Japanese symbolically even if they were yet unable to defeat the invaders in reality.

The speciality of the *Simuwu ding* in shape, typed as a tetrapod in the class of *ding*, makes it possible to share the accumulated

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99 Tan Danjung, "司母戊大鼎收藏經過及其特徵 Collection Process and Formal Characters of the *Simuwu Ding*."
memories of tripods and to carry the same political messages to the local people. However, it is also because of its rarity in size that the *Simuwu ding* earned its monumental position and makes the local people willingly defy the Japanese. It is said that the local people parried with a smaller tripod to keep out of trouble when the Japanese demanded the *Simuwu ding*.\(^{100}\) If the story were true, for the local people, it seems that not every tripod or tetrapod has the same power in command of political symbols; only the exceptionally huge one, as if the king of all dings, can then represent their beloved nation.

The second group dealing with the *Simuwu ding* is those who were loyal to the Kuomintang (the Chinese National Party) and its leader, Chiang Kai-shek, after the Sino-Japanese war (1937-1945). In 1945, after the *Simuwu ding* had been re-excavated, unable to arbitrate disputes about its ownership, the military government in the Henan Province thereupon confiscated the bronze vessel from the quarrelling local people. In 1946, just when Chiang Kai-shek reached sixty, an age particularly worth celebrating for Chinese, the Henan military government chose to present the most gigantic tetrapod as a congratulatory gift, managing to make it arrive in the capital Nanjing exactly on Chiang’s birthday, October 31 (Fig 15).\(^{101}\) The *Simuwu ding*, untouched by the Japanese during the war, was then involved in the Chinese ruling class, climbing from a provincial government to the national leader. How the Henan military government reached the decision is unclear, but it would not be difficult to understand why the local government preferred to dedicate a national treasure as public property to a person as the national leader. Such gift-offering was partially caused by the traditional complex of emperor-worshiping in China and partially influenced by an international Fascist aura at that time. In fact, just two years ago, Zhu Jiahua 朱家驥 was reported to present newly cast nine tripods as a birthday gift to Chiang, which led to the accusation that the ding-offering must be a preparation for Chiang's

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\(^{100}\) Ibid. Yet Hu Houxuan was not so sure whether the smaller object local people parried with was in the shape of a ding or not. See Hu Houxuan, 豈墟發掘Excavations in the Yin Ruins, 120.

\(^{101}\) Tan Danjung, “司母戊大鼎收藏經過及其中特徵 Collection Process and Formal Characters of the Simuwu Ding.”
becoming an emperor.\footnote{102} Even so, the provincial soldiers and officers in Henan might still have intended to make the best of the symbolic function of a ding by employing the Simuwu ding as a pun that as the tripod(s) embodied both the unified territory and the legitimate ruler, so the Simuwu ding represents both the recovered China and its respectable leader. That is to say, through collective memories of tripods in Chinese political tradition, especially the model established by the Emperor Wu, the Simuwu ding, the most gigantic tetrapod, can hence serve as a vehicle carrying the regional eulogy about the national leader and his achievement in defeating a national enemy. In this way, the Simuwu ding has, unintentionally but symbolically, been transformed from a ritual monument commemorating a Shang king's deceased mother to a political monument commemorating not only Chiang's sixtieth birthday but also his leadership during the war and China's final victory.

However, the rise of the Communist Party after the war smashed Chiang and Kuomintang's political stage in mainland China, meanwhile changing the fate of the Simuwu ding. After Chiang had reviewed the vessel upon its arrival in Nanjing, the Simuwu ding was installed in the National Central Museum. In the end of 1948, due to the irretrievable political situation, the Executive Yuan, the highest administrative organization of the Republic Government, passed the resolution that the national treasures preserved in the National Palace Museum and the National Central Museum should be transported to Taiwan. The Simuwu ding had to be finally excluded only because the equipment for lifting heavy objects at both harbors near Nanjing and Taipei afforded the exceptionally weighty vessel no chance of being moved across the sea.\footnote{103} The loss of the Simuwu ding must have meant something for the exiled government in Taiwan, perhaps for Chiang particularly, since its symbolic meaning had just been so freshly shaped in

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\footnote{102}{Feng Yuxiang 馮玉祥, 我所認識的蔣介石 Chiang Kai-shek as I knew (Hong Kong: Jiushi niandai, 1975), 141-143; Wang Taidong 王泰棟, 陳布雷外史 Anecdotes about Chein Bulei (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi, 1987), 145; Guo Xuyin 郭紹印, ed., 國民黨派系鬥爭史 History of Faction Conflicts in the Kuomintang (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin, 1992), 603.}

\footnote{103}{Tan Danjung, "司母戊大鼎收藏經過及其特徵 Collection Process and Formal Characters of the Simuwu Ding."}
1946. If possessing tripod(s) can signify establishing legitimate rule over an unified country, one can well imagine how regrettable it would be when giving up a significant tetrapod and losing the power and the land happen at the same time. The high school text books used in Taiwan, supposedly a reflection of the official ideology, may provide some information about such regret. In Chinese Cultural History where the bronze civilization was introduced, the Simuwu ding, the most gigantic tetrapod admired by all scholars, was nowhere to be found; the Maogong ding 毛公鼎, a tripod with the longest inscriptions transported to Taiwan, was mentioned instead.\textsuperscript{104} To use a personal example, it is my history teacher in the senior high school who taught me this omitted but monumental bronze vessel and pointed out the possible political reasons for not choosing it as an example.

The third group tackling the Simuwu ding is the Chinese Communist Party after its victory in the Civil War (1945-1949) in 1949. In the Communist China, the Simuwu ding still remains a political monument, but rather than unification and legitimacy, the gigantic bronze vessel now symbolizes the achievements of the ancient laboring peoples. The new interpretation was lucidly and publicly expressed when the tetrapod was moved again to Beijing and re-installed in the Museum of Chinese History. In 1959, it was in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the establishment of new China that the Communist Party re-designed the city of Beijing, particularly the Tiananmen Square. The new buildings -- the Monument to the People's Heroes in the south, the Great Hall of the People in the west and the Museum of Chinese History in the east -- accompanied Tiananmen in the north, and all together, organized an enclosed space which served as a new political symbol of new China (Fig 16).\textsuperscript{105} In this symbolic architectural complex, the Museum of Chinese History served as a showcase, displaying the greatest achievements of Chinese culture under Marx's doctrine on history -- from Primitive Society through Slave Society to Feudal Society. The Simuwu ding, the largest bronze vessel in

\textsuperscript{104} This is based on the version of 1983.

China, was supposed to play an important role in this museum to embody the glorious accomplishment of "the people," especially their "labor," in ancient China.  

Not only the Simuwu ding itself, but also the story of its discovery was used to convey the ideology favored by the Communist Party. The patriotism of the local people in keeping the bronze vessel from the Japanese was perfectly fit into the Communist Party's political scheme by promoting Chinese nationalism to fight its presumed enemy -- the American Imperialism. For instance, in his book on archaeological history in the Yin ruins in Anyang, Duan Zhenmei introduced the discovery of the Simuwu ding right after his harsh critics of the Japanese and the American's hunting Chinese antiques during the war with the section title of "the Imperialists' Robbery." In his narrative, instead of "local people" appeared in earlier records, Duan used "peasants" to refer to those who discovered and protected the vessel. He especially commended these peasants' fighting spirit of "not succumbing to the tempt with money" and of "not yielding to the brute force." The new emphasis of the story makes nationalism and Marxism, the most important two insists of the Chinese Communist Party, find their crossing point -- it is modern "peasants" nationalistic efforts that preserve ancient "labor's" glorious achievement. Around 1990, a TV series about the Simuwu ding shown on CCTVexpressed the same ideology. Due to the charm of the new media, the series might have attracted more spectators and reached more efficient propaganda. And, what is more significant, a new collective memory might have been so shaped through such an electronic communication.

Although the political color the Communist Party adds to the Simuwu ding seems brand-new, the way the bronze vessel serves as
a political monument still bears echoes of its historical roots. As in Republican China, where one can draw an analogy between the Simuwu ding and Chiang, so in Communist China, one can compare the Simuwu ding to "the people." The major difference only rests on that based on old political tradition, the object tripods and tetrapods signified is the ruler standing at the top of society, such as a king, an emperor, a chairman or a president; while guided by Marxist political doctrines, the object the Simuwu ding embodied turns out to be "the people," the newly promoted ruling class located at the bottom of society. Likewise, the linkage between the Simuwu ding and nationalism is not a mere invention. As aforementioned, in the Tang dynasty, in order to balance her excessively using Buddhist sources in establishing a state ideology, Empress Wu had borrowed "the Chineseness" from the allusion of the Nine Tripods by re-casting and installing these tripods in the palace. It is true that one cannot directly attribute the new perception of the Simuwu ding in Communist China to the historical memories accumulated from the myth of the Nine Tripods. Nevertheless, I would argue that without the historical memories that make these bronze vessels in ding shape so distinguishable from all the other artifacts, along with the accumulated values -- iconic, indexical and symbolic -- accrued by other dings of the past, the Simuwu ding could not have been so easily and efficiently transformed into a Communist monument.
Fig. 1 The Simuwu ding. Late Shang. Bronze. Said to be discovered at Wuguan in Anyang, Henan. Chinese History Museum in Beijing. Taken from Wenwu jinghua 3 (1964).

Fig. 2 Plan of the royal cemetery of the Shang Dynasty at Houjiazhuang and Wuguancun in Anyang, Based on K. C. Chang, The Archaeology of Ancient China, Fig. 280.

Fig. 3 Inscription on the Simuwu ding. Ink Rubbing (said to be made by Zeng Zhaoyu in 1948 when the bronze vessel reached the Nanjing Museum). Taken from Gugong wenwu yuekan 4:7 (1986), 32.

Fig. 4 Si (right) and hou (left) as found in Shang writings.

Fig. 5 Illustration of mold assembly for casting the tetrapod, Zuocu ding. W. T. Chase, Ancient Chinese Bronze Art, Fig. 1.
Fig. 6  Illustration of pouring the molten bronze into the casting space between the inner core and the outer molds. W. T. Chase, *Ancient Chinese Bronze Art*, Fig. 2.

Fig. 7  Illustration of the process of casting a *ding* vessel. Song Yingxing, *Tiangong kaiwu*, 21b-22a.

Fig. 8  Map of moving of the Simuwu *ding* in modern China.

Fig. 9  Map of major states during the Warring States Period. M. Loewe and E. L. Shaughnessy ed., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.*, Map 9-1.
Fig. 10 Map of north China in the early Han dynasty, showing the places related to the moving of the acquired ding by the Emperor Wu.

Fig. 11 Lifting the tripod. Carved wood. Western Han. 1st century B.C. - A.D. 1st century. Excavated at Xuyi in Jiangsu. *Kaogu* 5 (1979), Pl. 4-1.

Fig. 12 Lifting the tripod. Ink rubbing of a carved stone. Eastern Han. 1st century. Excavated at Wulaowa in Shandong. (a) Ink rubbing, Zhu Xiul, *Jiaxiang han huaxiang shi*, Fig. 85. (b) Photo. Detail taken from the stone in the Shandong Museum, Jinan.

Fig. 13 Lifting the tripod. Restored by W. Fairbank from the ink rubbing of a carved stone from the Wu family shrines at Jiaxiang in Shandong. Eastern Han. 2nd century. W. Fairbank, *Adventures in Retrieval*, Fig. 1a.
Fig. 14  Lifting the tripod. Decorated brick. Han. 140 B.C. - A.D. 24. *Nanyang handai huaxiang zhuang*, Pl. 63.

Fig. 15  Ch'ang Kai-shek (right) viewed the Simuwu *ding* at the Nanjing Museum in 1948. *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 4.7 (1986), 31.

Fig. 16  Plan of the redesigned Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1959. (2: The Tiananmen. 5: The Great Hall of the People. 6: The Chinese History Museum. 7: The Monument to the People's Heroes.)