



# ART FRONTIER

An International Art Journal /Vol.1, No.2 Apr-Jun., 2023

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**To cite this article:** Yang Yuan, Tao Wenxuan, “Social Thought and Bronze Art in the Western Zhou Dynasty,” *Art Frontier* 1, no.2 (June 2023): 95-101, <https://doi.org/10.64212/CCNY5202>.

**DOI:** 10.64212/CCNY5202

**ISSN:** 2835-5490

**EISSN:** 2836-841X

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This article has undergone double-blind peer review.

**Website:** [www.artfrontier.org](http://www.artfrontier.org)

**Email:** [artfrontier2023@outlook.com](mailto:artfrontier2023@outlook.com)

**Publishing Frequency:** Quarterly (March, June, September, December)



# Social Thought and Bronze Art in the Western Zhou Dynasty

Yang Yuan, Tao Wenxuan

## Abstract

During the Western Zhou Dynasty, based on the Yin rituals, the Zhou people made moderate adjustments to social ideology by introducing the idea of honoring virtues, reorganizing the ritual orders, and adjusting the sacrificial rites, thereby formulating the social thought of “revering the ancestors and respecting virtue” and “respecting heaven and protecting the people”. This social ideology influenced the modelling and decoration of bronze wares. The shape of the bronze focuses more on practical function and formal beauty, the combination of utensils pays more attention to the combination of food vessels, and the decorative art incorporates more geometric patterns with a sense of structure and order. The content of the bronze inscriptions is mostly inscribed with evidence of realistic deeds and achievements, which is the main feature of the modelling and decoration of bronze wares during the Western Zhou period, forming a strong contrast to the Shang Dynasty style of “respecting gods and ghosts”. The formation of this artistic style is the physical embodiment of the social ideology of the Western Zhou period of “revering ancestors and respecting virtue” and “respecting heaven and protecting the people”.

## Key Words

Western Zhou, revere ancestors and respect virtue, respect for heaven and protection the people, bronze

The Western Zhou Dynasty was an important time of change in social thought during China's Pre-Qin period, which was mainly reflected in the adjustment to the Shang Dynasty's idea of “respect for gods and ghosts”. This adjustment was also reflected in the Western Zhou bronzes, and directly influenced the shape and decoration of the bronzes. In the following, we will analyze the main characteristics of this social thought and its specific impact on bronzes, in order to explore the main reasons for the formation of the style of the Bronze Age in the Western Zhou Dynasty and reveal the important impact of the process of ancient social thought on social culture.

## 1. The Formation of the Social Thought of the Western Zhou to Revere Ancestor Virtue and to Respect Heaven and Protect the People

Before and after King Wu of Zhou conquered the Shang Dynasty, the politics and culture of the Shang Dynasty influenced the Zhou Dynasty, and its people were extremely influential. Politically “the laws of the Shang dynasty continued to be applied and the territory was

subject to the feudal system of the Zhou dynasty” ( *Zuozhuan-Dinggongsinian*, 《左傳·定公四年》). In terms of religious thought and culture, “the Zhou was based on the Yin rites” ( *Lunyu-Weizheng*, 《論語·為政》) and “respect for gods and ghosts” was still an effective means of thought control. Therefore, the Zhou Dynasty spared no effort in “serving the ghosts and respecting the gods”, which was mainly manifested in objects and methods of sacrifice. Firstly, in terms of the various objects and sacrifices, the Western Zhou also largely inherited the Yin and Shang traditions.<sup>1</sup> In the sacrificial ceremony, the *Liji-Quli* ( *The Book of Rites-The Rites of Qu*, 《禮記·曲禮》) recorded that “the Son of Heaven offered sacrifices to heaven and earth, to the four sides, to the five sacrifices, and to the five times of the year”. Zheng Xuan ( 鄭玄) noted that “this covers the Yin system”. The Zhou were not inferior to the Shang in terms of sacrificial offerings such as “human sacrifice”; for example, in the book of *Yizhoushu-Shifu* ( 《逸周書·世俘》), it is recorded that when King Wu conquered the Shang, he “sacrificed a hundred prisoners of Yin” on the day of Gui Chou ( 癸醜). Secondly, the Zhou people were

as much in awe of symbolic aversions and forbidden rituals as the Shang. In *Shiji (the Records of the Grand Historian)-Benji of Zhou* (《史記·周本紀》), there are accounts of King Wu's conquest of Zhou, when he "sacrificed at Bi", "a white fish jumped into the king's boat", and "a fire came back down from above to the king's house and flowed into a cave" and so on, all of which showed that the Zhou were equally keen on the blessings of various gods and the suggestions of various signs. Thirdly, the Zhou people still revered the "heaven" or "emperor". The *Shangshi* (《商誓》) records that King Wu's invasion of Yin was "an act of giving God's majestic command and clear punishment", so that the acquisition of dominance was "ordained by heaven" (*Shiji-Benji of Zhou*). The *Shijing-Zhousong* (《詩經·周頌》) also states: "I have always feared the heaven day and night." It also connects heaven to the emperor. The *Shiji-Benji of Zhou* records that "When King Wu arrived at the state of Shang, the people of Shang were waiting in the suburbs. Then King Wu ordered his ministers to tell the Shang people: 'Heaven has blessed you'". Finally, the Zhou attached greater importance to the blessings of their ancestral spirits. The *Liji-Jiyi* (《禮記·祭義》) states that "the throne of the founding of the country, the right state and the left ancestral temple", this ancestral temple is the place to worship ancestors. In 1976, in the village of Fengchu in Qishan of Shaanxi province, the ruins of a Zhou Dynasty temple were discovered.<sup>2</sup> It consisted of a central temple (堂) where the gods were displayed, a court (庭) where the courtiers worshipped and sacrificed, a bed where the ancestors' clothes and crowns were kept, a hut where the gods were served, and a triple gate (皋門、應門、寢門), which is very large in scale and shows that the Zhou probably had a stronger idea of worshipping their ancestors' gods than the Shang people did.

The inheritance of the religious ideas of the Shang people was—according to Guo Moruo, a famous Chinese scholar—"only an inheritance of policy; they regarded religious ideas as a policy of fooling the people."<sup>3</sup> This shows that the ideology of the Shang Dynasty was still influential at the beginning of the Western Zhou Dynasty, but with the development of Zhou society, the "Yin rites", the Zhou people still made moderate adjustments to them. That is, "The Zhou dynasty respected ritual and law, feared the spirits and gods, but did not make this an element of indoctrination; they were loyal and understanding, and rewarded and punished in an orderly manner, so that their policies were approachable but not authoritative", recorded by *The Liji-Biaoji* (《禮記·表記》), and which is mainly manifested in the following aspects.

Firstly, the introduction of the ideas of "respect for the heavens and protection of the people" and "revere ancestors and respect virtue" transformed the Shang concept of a single god into the concept of separation and cooperation between the ancestors and the Emperor of Heaven. The Shang and Zhou had a fundamentally different understandings and appreciations of the Mandate of Heaven. Unlike the Shang, who took God as the master of everything on earth, the Zhou did not passively accept the arrangements of Heaven, but linked and separated Heaven's destiny from human affairs, which was no longer merely a subjective will of God and needed to be determined by reference to human affairs. As the saying goes: "Heaven will obey the wishes of the people." In the Zhou's view, man's fate was not entirely determined by the heavens, but by man to a certain extent, forming the idea of "respecting heaven and protecting the people".<sup>4</sup> The Zhou people also introduced the idea of "respecting virtue"; the Zhou people used virtue as a means to match God and divided the land and people among their clans, as recorded in the *Shangshu-Kanggao* (《尚書·康誥》): "King Wen was able to teach virtue and be careful with punishment, and the heavens waited and blessed the people." There are many other similar records in the *ShangShu*, and it was this idea of "respecting virtue" that found a "reasonable" explanation for the Zhou's dominance, which is why *Shangshu-Zhaogao* (《尚書·召誥》) says: "I cannot help but draw on the history of the Xia and Yin, and I may not know how long the Yin and Shang could have accepted the Mandate of Heaven, but because they were not prudent in their virtuous administration, the country fell early."

Secondly, there was the reorganization of the ritual order. The Western Zhou had a complete set of institutions and laws to regulate human behavior. One was the system of feudalism and the other was the ritual system. The system of feudalism involved the sons of the Zhou emperor in various places. Although the ritual system is documented in several places as being the work of the emperor of Zhou, this is unrealistic. The fact is that the maturation and systematization of the ritual system were the result of a large-scale collation, transformation and standardization of the primitive rituals that had existed before the Western Zhou Dynasty, beginning with the emperor of Zhou. It was through this transformation and standardization that a set of rules, regulations, and rituals were established, which became the Zhou rites that have had a profound influence on traditional Chinese culture and religious thought. The rituals, which consisted of "wealth, resignation, food, rites of passage, marriage and funerals,

archery, horsemanship, meeting the emperor, etc”. (*Liji-Liyun*, 《禮記·禮運》), covered all aspects of social life, but the core of the rituals was the regulation of social relations, including the worship of the ancestors of heaven and earth and the regulation of relations between the various classes on earth. To regulate the social order of the world is to establish the ethics of country and family through a series of etiquette regulations; that is, “treat relatives well, respect elders, and distinguish men from women” (*Liji-Sangfuxiaoji*, 《禮記·喪服小記》). This established the same order between lineage and hierarchy. Although the Zhou also practiced rituals, they differed from the Yin and Shang rituals, which were based on the concept of respecting ghosts and gods before rituals, making the Zhou rites a more rational, ethical and strictly hierarchical form of ritual. This effectively curbed the religious fervor of the Shang Dynasty, making the rituals orderly, proportionate, and gradually rational.

Thirdly, adjustments were also made to the worship of ancestral deities. The Zhou people injected more of a practical and rational spiritual dimension into the idea of ancestor worship. The Zhou people’s glorification of the divinity of their ancestors was increasingly indifferent, and the worship of their ancestors focused more on their hard work, benevolence and great achievements in agricultural production and building their homes. Some scholars have concluded from *The Shijing* that the Zhou moved their agricultural way of life into the concept of ancestor worship, and even saw in the worship of the ancestors the totemic emblems of the Zhou people, which were given a more rational interpretation. For example, the description of Qi’s expertise in agricultural cultivation, the settlement of the tribes and the laying down of agricultural production methods are all reflections of the real-life concept of the Zhou people through religious forms, only this reflection is subconscious, which is why it is better preserved through the religious concepts. In terms of rituals, the “Zhou revered aroma” as opposed to the “Yin revered sound”, and the content of prayers changed, with sermons on prudence and diligence is the main content.<sup>5</sup> The change in the Zhou’s conception of ancestor worship also reflects a gradual change in social thought from the Shang’s mystical feeling and subservience to the ghosts and gods of the ancestors of heaven and earth to a rational interpretation of the Mandate of Heaven and the idea of respectful succession to the ancestors.

The ideology of the Zhou people developed based on the religious consciousness of the Yin and Shang dynasties, forming dual worship of the emperor and the ancestors, and in the worship of the emperor, as the

ancestral deities were separated, heaven was suspended higher and further away from people, and the appearance of virtue and the formulation of the Zhou rites gave a rational dimension to Zhou religious thought, showing a significant departure from the mystical and bizarre overtones of the Shang. In short, during the Western Zhou Dynasty, under the constraints of the ritual system, reverence for the ancestors and respect for virtue and respect for heaven and protection of the people became the main features of social thought at the time, and this ideology had an important influence on the modelling and decorative art of Western Zhou bronzes, forming a unique style for the period.

## 2. The Influence of the Ideas of Revering the Ancestors and Respecting Virtue, Respecting Heaven and Protecting the People on the Modelling of Western Zhou Bronzes

In the early Western Zhou Dynasty, especially in the early years of the Dynasty, the types and forms of bronze wares were inherited from the late Shang period, which is a reflection of the Zhou’s cultural and artistic philosophy of Yin rites. For example, in terms of vessel types, Ding (鼎), Li (鬲), Yan (甗), and Gui (簋) are still the main food vessels, the wine vessels still included Gu (觚), Jue (爵), Jia (斝), Zun (尊), Lei (罍), You (卣), Hu (壺) and so on, and the water vessels still mainly consisted of Pan (盤) and Yu (盂). In terms of shape, many of the vessels also followed the style of the Shang Dynasty, and some of the important ritual vessels also display the same sacred and solemn beauty as their Shang counterparts. For example, the Folded Gong (折觥) excavated from the No. 1 cellar of Zhuangbai in Fufeng<sup>6</sup> is not significantly different from the Circling-foot Gong (圈足觥) of the Shang Dynasty in its stylistic style and decorative techniques; its circumference is decorated with motifs, with the long horns of the animal head on the lid of the Gong and the several rugged ribs outlining a lively and graceful contour line for the solemn shape. The shape of the Folded Gong is undoubtedly successful, but in terms of artistic style, it is not a creation of the Zhou themselves. The style of the Gui, Square Ding (方鼎), Round Ding (圓鼎), Li and You from this period are all examples of the pursuit of this magnificent and mysterious artistic style. However, while inheriting the types of wares from previous generations, some new changes gradually emerged, mainly in the stylistic art of some wares. For example, the lower bellies of the Dings are flared, forming a pendulous belly. The feet of the Dings (especially the

four feet of the square Ding) are raised, transitioning from a columnar foot to a hoof-shaped foot. The Gui appears in the form of a square base with a continuous body, and the double ear develops into a four-ear form. The You is also pendulous, with upturned, angular decoration on either side of the lid, adding to the stability of the object. The Zun is mostly unshouldered and square with rounded mouths. It is also common for wares to be covered, in contrast to the individual lids of the Shang Dynasty. These stylistic changes, while pursuing the same solemnity and heaviness of ceremonial vessels as the Shang Dynasty, reflect a sense of design for functional purposes, such as the pendulous belly to increase the capacity of the vessel, and the addition of a lid apparently for and shortening the heating time, reflecting not only the differences in the lifestyle of the Shang and Zhou dynasties but also the gradual blending of the aesthetic sensibilities of the Zhou.

In the mid-and-late Western Zhou Dynasty, the style of bronze wares changed significantly, reflecting the Zhou's artistic pursuits, with particular attention paid to the practicality of bronze wares, reflecting the idea of protecting the people with the people in mind. In terms of individual vessel shapes, the Square Ding is largely absent from the food vessel group, with the hemispherical-bellied Round Ding popular, and with more animal hoof-shaped feet. The Li is mostly seen with a wide horizontal body and animal feet, and the Yan has a square shape. The Gui, which appears in large numbers, is the most varied, with a variety of ear and foot designs, and has a large number of lids, reflecting the artist's constant pursuit of formal beauty and innovation. The Fu ( 鬲 ) and the Xu ( 盂 ) are new food vessels, both of rectangular geometric forms. Among the wine vessels, the Gong, Jue, Jia and Zhi ( 觶 ) that were previously prevalent are largely absent or rare, and where they do appear their shapes are rather simplified and crude, but the He ( 盃 ) and Hu are extremely popular, with the He being particularly distinctive for its flat body and pot shape, and the Hu is popular for its thin-necked, pendant belly and square body. Among the water vessels, the Pan has a shallow belly, attached ears, and a rimmed or branched foot. A new half-gourd-shaped Yi ( 匜 ) appears, which has a decorative front and carrying handle at the back and high hoof feet. Most of these wares are shaped from a sense of design for practical function, such as the symmetrical and stable shapes of the Fu and the Xu. The lid, like the vessel form, can be used as two vessels when placed on its back, and the design of the lid highlights the function of holding objects on its back. These changes make

the Western Zhou bronze shape stand out from the mysterious and solemn style of the Shang Dynasty and tend towards elegance, beauty, and harmony. Some of the circularly carved animal-form vessels also tend to be plain and realistic in their presentation and no longer mysterious in nature, such as the sheep, colt, rabbit and tiger Zun of the Western Zhou Dynasty, all of which are vividly simple in their images; their bodies are mostly plain and unmarked, so that the mystery that shrouded the animal-form ritual vessels of the Shang Dynasty disappears and is replaced by a rational, plain, elegant and realistic style.

From the combination of wares, it can be seen that after the early Western Zhou Dynasty, wine vessels such as the Gu, Jue, Jia, Gong, You and Zhi gradually disappeared, while food vessels gradually increased, especially Ding and Gui, which emerged in large numbers, changing the combination of wares from the Shang Dynasty, which was wine oriented, to a food-oriented combination with Ding and Gui as the core. This reflects the main features of the Western Zhou social ideology of respect for heaven and protection of the people. The Lie Ding ( 列鼎 ) system was a neat, standardized, organized and orderly form of shaping that emerged from the ideological and cultural background of the time. In addition, a new combination of the Pan and the Yi appeared in the water vessel, and the ladle shape design of the Pan is more about the efficiency and convenience of their water intake; in modern rural areas the Piao ( 瓢 ) is still the main water intake device. The combination of the Piao and Pan also became the fixed form of future lavatories, obviously because of their practical functions.

As can be seen from the above, the late Western Zhou Dynasty saw a significant change in the of bronze wares, especially in the focus on practical functions, the law of combining wares that were focused on food, and the pursuit of the formal beauty of wares, making us feel that their spiritual connotation had changed significantly, from devotion to the gods without supremacy to the food, the focus on the people, the gradual return from the world of the gods to the world of man, and the increasing rationalism in its aesthetic conception. These changes were the figurative expression of the ruler's re-integration and ordering of previous religious ideas and rituals after the establishment of the Western Zhou Dynasty, and thus allow us to see Zhou-style bronzes throughout China, and their styles, craftsmanship and technology are strikingly consistent.

### 3. The Influence of the Ideology of Revering the Ancestors and Respecting Virtue, Respecting Heaven and Protecting the People on the Decoration of Western Zhou Bronzes

In terms of decorative motifs, the bronze vessels of the early Western Zhou Dynasty inherited the traditions of the late Shang Dynasty, but as society developed, a new style gradually emerged from the mid-period onwards, with decorative forms dominated by geometric motifs with a sense of order, a tendency towards solemnity and elegance, a gradual dilution of mystery, and an increasingly distinctive ritualistic character, reflecting the aesthetic tendencies of the new era.

Firstly, there is a gradual increase in the rationalist component of decorative motifs. From the perspective of the subject matter of the patterns, both the divine animal motifs and the mimetic animal motifs were gradually declining, while the number of structured, geometric motifs was gradually increasing. In the early Western Zhou Dynasty, the divine animal motif was still relatively common, and the phoenix and bird motif were still popular for a time, but the composition of their motifs underwent important changes and took on an artistic style different from that of the Shang Dynasty, mainly because of a new understanding of the connotations of various motifs during the Western Zhou Dynasty. Although the animal-face motifs still occupy a certain position, their design is gradually being simplified and becoming more decorative. For example, the torso and paws of some of the conjoined animal-face motifs of the late Shang Dynasty gradually disintegrated and developed into abstract decorative motifs during the Western Zhou, the images lost the majesty and mystery of their predecessors and turned into negative, ugly images, and their decorative parts also shifted into secondary positions. As for the main reasons for these changes, analysis by some scholars is that “the change of the Yin’s dominance and the needs of early Zhou’s political thought was reflected in bronze art, which showed a transformation of the status of the Taotie (饕餮) and the intimidating meaning of cannibalism into a sense of caution, its spearhead changed from pointing at the slaves and the ruled to targeting some members within the slave-owning ruling class”.<sup>7</sup> This is an insightful view; in other words, the secularization of the bestial motifs on bronze vessels and their association with treacherous and evil figures on earth was caused by the perceived cautionary and educational role of these motifs in the Western Zhou, so the pictorial image as a discernment became increasingly associated with political ethics as divine power declined, factors that ulti-

mately changed the style of the bestial motifs.

The style of dragon motifs also changed in the mid-Western Zhou period, with the Kui Dragons (夔龍紋) taking on a rich and varied form and gradually becoming more abstract, appearing in the form of Jiao Dragons (蛟龍) and Climbing Dragons (攀龍). The appearance of any change in these images may be related to the Zhou people’s perception of dragons, which in their ideology may have been a kind of deity, as recorded in texts such as the *Guoyu* (《國語》), the *Chuci* (《楚辭》) and the *Guanzi* (《管子》). For example, the *Guanzi* says: “The dragon is born in water and swims with five colors, so it is divine. If it wishes to be small, it becomes like a caterpillar; if it wishes to be large, it is hidden in the world; if it wishes to be high, it is above the clouds; if it wishes to be low, it is in a deep spring; it changes without a day, and goes up and down without a time, so it is called a god.” This type of record should reflect the Zhou people’s general understanding of the dragon. Many scholars have pointed out that the Zhou people’s preference for large bird motifs was probably related to the legends of the phoenix during the rise of the Western Zhou Dynasty, such as the “phoenix singing on Qishan (鳳鳴岐山)” and the “phoenix holding imperial decree (鳳凰銜書)”. The phoenix is therefore of auspicious significance in the ideology of the Western Zhou. In this sense, the multiplicity of phoenix and bird motifs is the result of the Zhou people’s different perceptions of the image of the phoenix. The people of Western Zhou had a rational understanding of these divine animal motifs that differed from the blind worship of the Shang Dynasty, thus changing the mysterious and bizarre style of such motifs from the Shang Dynasty.

At the same time the fantastic animal motifs tended to move from figurative to abstract representations, the representational approach of the lifelike animal motifs and figures in artworks gradually became more prosaic and realistic. For example, the cow pattern on Fuding You (父丁卣), the deer pattern on Hezi You (貉子卣), and the rabbit pattern on Ge Zhi (戈觚) are no longer mysterious, but rather representations of real animals in the artist’s life. Another example is the figure image on the Pu He (匍盃), which is different from the real figure size, but is also portrayed in proportion. The proportion of each part is appropriate, and it is also a portrayal of the maid on earth.

In the late Western Zhou period, these motifs gradually disappeared or took a backseat to the emergence of geometric motifs, such as the Qiequ Pattern (竊曲紋), the Ring-Band Pattern (環帶紋), the Multi-ring Pattern (重環紋) and the Tile Pattern (瓦紋). These geometric motifs are simple, generous patterns

made up of squares, circles, and lines, and are thought by some scholars to be derived from the simplified abstraction of animal motifs. Whether or not this is the case, their appearance and widespread use completely changed the previous decorative motifs, which were dominated by divine animal motifs, as well as the uniform pattern of the Shang Dynasty, in which the corners of the motifs were mostly squared and folded, and became the decorative style of late Western Zhou bronzes, harmonizing with the shape of the objects and forming a new style of elegance, beauty and harmony.

In terms of how the pattern is organized, the motifs mostly make use of a Bipartite-Continuous-Band Pattern (二方連續帶狀紋). This order is indirectly linked to the requirements of the ritual system of the Zhou Dynasty, and it is under the constraints of the ritual system that the decorative motifs reflect a sense of strict order. How this pattern is organized also reflects the formal laws of ancient graphic art, which were used to appropriately express ideology.

From the decorative technique of the pattern, the bronze decoration of the Western Zhou Dynasty also moved from the flamboyance of the Shang Dynasty to simplicity and elegance, with the pattern only decorating the main part of the vessel and generally not using the ground pattern, breaking with the linear character of the Shang Dynasty and adopting the expression technique of mainly curved lines, supplemented by straight lines, reflecting the new style of simplicity and elegance as beauty.

As can be seen, whether from the changes in the subject matter of the motifs, or from the way they are organized and decorated, the bronze motifs of the Western Zhou were developing towards simplification and abstraction, and by the late Western Zhou, the style had completely shifted away from the mysterious and bizarre style of the Shang Dynasty to one of clear simplicity, elegance and harmony, an aesthetic orientation that is the physical embodiment of the change in the ideology of the Western Zhou.

Secondly, in the case of some sculptural decoration, it also shows a tendency to pursue a realistic style. In addition to the realistic style pursued by the round carving of the animal descriptions, the annexed decoration in high relief also uses the prominent parts of the animal form as a source of modelling, deepening the degree of realism, and the mysterious and majestic aura no longer exists. For example, the double-eared elephant-nose form of Shiju Square Yi (師遽方彝), and the four-eared relief bull's head form of Zhifangtou (紙坊頭) in Baoji are easily reminiscent of the elephant and bull in life without the mysterious and bizarre feeling

of similar patterns from the Shang Dynasty, with only a sense of awe at the superb artistic expression of the Western Zhou artists.

Furthermore, although the inscriptions on the bronze vessels are decorative, the content of the inscriptions has changed from the religious cult of the Shang Dynasty, such as clan emblems and temple numbers for ancestors, to the inscription of realistic evidence of merit, a direct reflection of the idea of revering the ancestors and respecting virtues. The inscriptions on Western Zhou bronze vessels had a clear utilitarian purpose, namely revering the ancestors and respecting virtues, as stated in the *Liji-Jiyi*: "The inscriptions are used to record the virtues, merits, rewards and fame of their ancestors, and are listed in the world, and are used as a sacrificial vessel to form their name, to worship their ancestors." The inscriptions of the Western Zhou Dynasty are mostly in pursuit of the beauty of the form and meaning of the lines, and many of them show different aesthetic interests, either calm and bold, reserved and delicate, or simple and sober, and most of them are quite elaborate in their chapters, as Mr. Zong Baihua (宗白華) has pointed out: "The beauty of the chapters shown in the inscriptions of ancient Chinese Shang and Zhou bronzes makes one believe that Cang Jie (倉頡) has glimpsed the magic of the universe and gained the most profound secret of the most subtle forms of nature. The regular changes in the structure of the strokes, the weight of the dots, and the speed of the strokes are used to express images of the natural world and the social world, as well as inner emotions."<sup>8</sup> It is because the Zhou people had aesthetic feelings towards the beauty of the lines of inscriptions that the artists also used them in the decoration of bronze vessels, not only to achieve the purpose of revering the ancestors and respecting virtues by proclaiming the merits of the deeds, but also to decorate the objects with the beauty of the lines of inscriptions. For example, it is rare to see the aquatic animals of the Pan from the Shang Dynasty in Western Zhou, but rather long, standardized inscriptions in neat, standardized lines, may be related to this aesthetic tendency of the Zhou. The Shiqiang Pan (史牆盤) from the Zhuangbai in Fufeng, Shaanxi,<sup>9</sup> has an inscription of 18 lines and 284 characters on the bottom of the belly, which takes up almost all the area of the bottom, and the layout of the inscription is rigorous, the strokes are evenly spaced, the beginning and end are as one, the script is dignified, the strokes are soft and rounded, and it is extremely decorative. The first section is dedicated to the achievements of the six kings: Wen, Wu, Cheng, Kang, Zhao and Mu, and to the virtues of the Zhou kings, fully reflecting the idea of revering the ancestors

and respecting virtues.

#### 4. Conclusion

In summary, through changes in modelling and decorative art, the mysterious aura of Shang bronzes gradually dimmed, and Western Zhou bronzes were transformed from content to form in the direction of earthliness, secularization and rationalization, which was the physical embodiment of the idea of revering the ancestors and respecting virtues and respecting heaven and protecting the people during the Western Zhou Dynasty. As some scholars have concluded: “The ideological consciousness of the Zhou people shifted from the Shang people’s respect for the gods to both respect for heaven and protection of the people, and the concept of human beings shifted from treating nature as the subject of the universe to treating human beings themselves as the subject of the universe, gradually beginning a rational human ecology and turning religious concerns into concerns for the human world so that the unconscious ornamentation of bronze carvings,

which was governed by spiritual forces, gradually became rational design.”<sup>10</sup> This kind of design consciousness is the concentrated embodiment of the Zhou people’s increasingly rational thought of revering the ancestors and respecting virtues and respecting heaven and protecting the people, and forms a strong contrast with the Shang people’s concept of respecting gods and ghosts, representing the transformation to a people-oriented social ideology.

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Editor: Gao Pengfei

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## 西周時期的社會思想與青銅器藝術

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**摘要:** 西周時期, 在“因於殷禮”的基礎上, 周人對社會思想做了適度調整, 通過引入敬德思想、重整禮制秩序、調整祭祀風尚等措施, 形成了“崇祖敬德”“敬天保民”的社會思想, 這種社會思想影響到了青銅器的造型和裝飾藝術。青銅器的造型更加注重實用功能和形式美, 器物組合中更加注重食器的組合, 在裝飾藝術上融入了更多的富有條理和秩序感的幾何紋樣, 青銅器銘文的內容也多為銘刻現實事功的書約之劑, 這是西周時期青銅器造型和裝飾的主要特點, 和商代“尊神重鬼”的風格形成了強烈的反差, 這種藝術風格的形成是西周時期“崇祖敬德”“敬天保民”社會思想的物化體現。

**關鍵詞:** 西周; 崇祖敬德; 敬天保民; 青銅器