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A Thematic Analysis of *Guya* in Chinese Connoisseurship Literature from the Ming Dynasty

Abstract

This study examines the aesthetic terminology used in placing judgment in Chinese connoisseurship literature from the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644). This literary genre constitutes a collection of texts that served as guides for literati antiquarians, instructing them on how to consume material culture in a way fit for a true connoisseur. In providing instruction, the texts place judgment, both positive and negative, on certain objects and behaviours. While most of the judgment terms employed in the texts have clear, explicit meanings, other terms require further analysis to determine their implicit semantic values. In particular, this study focuses on the use of the erudite term *guya* 古雅 ('[exhibiting] ancient elegance'), which occurs 16 times across two late Ming texts: the *Qing mi cang* 清秘藏 (QMC; *The Pure and Secret Collection*) and the *Zhangwu zhi* 長物志 (ZWZ: *Treatise on Superfluous Things*). In introducing the Chinese connoisseurship genre and one of its predecessors from the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), the article explores the changing socioeconomic backdrop of the Ming dynasty onto which the texts were created. With dissolving societal boundaries between the roles of the literati and merchant classes, the texts served an order-making role, in terms of restoring both a schematic of aesthetic preference and the traditional social hierarchy. Subsequently, the article examines the ways in which judgment is passed onto objects and behaviours in the genre's texts. Particular attention is paid to how approaches to judgment placing changed over time, echoing the growing need for distinction in the late Ming period. The study then examines the aesthetic term *guya*, considering historical contexts and implicit meanings that it accrued over time. To elucidate the implicit meaning of the term in the QMC and ZWZ, a thematic analysis is conducted. In the analysis, a reading of the passages results in a first phase of coding, whereby semantic associations are tabulated based upon the surrounding context of each of the term's instances. The codes are then refined into essence-encompassing themes. Overall, the analysis yields four themes: restraint, craftsmanship, usefulness, and value. Further analysis is then provided of the two most prevalent themes (i.e., restraint and craftsmanship), considering both the socioeconomic context of the late Ming era and the *guya* aesthetic theory of the well-known scholar and poet Wang Guowei 王国维 (1877–1927).

Keywords: Chinese connoisseurship literature, *guya* 古雅, *Zhangwu zhi* 長物志, *Qing mi cang* 清秘藏, thematic analysis, Chinese decorative arts, Chinese aesthetic theory, Wang Guowei 王国维

Introduction

Chinese bronze vessels, jade implements, furniture items, scholars' objects, architectural elements, instruments, and other objects that we now refer to in the West as *objet d'art* or decorative art objects were originally created to serve a functional purpose, and only later, as the subject of *a posteriori* judgment, were celebrated for their aesthetic value. Among the objects, some of the most renown, such as ancient bronze *ding* 鼎 ritual vessels, have been the subject of discourse since ancient times. For example, passages mentioning *ding* vessels in the *Liji* 禮記 (*Classic of Rites*) refer to the importance of ancient ritual bronze vessels through the notion that their possession and proper usage signified a sort of socio-political power.¹ In this sense, their role in historical records highlights, again, their function. Ancient jade carvings assumed a similar role in the pantheon of esteemed objects. The raw stone, nephrite especially, is rare and difficult to mine and carve. The possession of a fine jade carving in ancient times signified one's wealth of resources, whether financial or in terms of accessible labour.²

By the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), written discourses on decorative art objects extended beyond their role in authority-claiming ritual and entered the realm of *a posteriori* judgment. They were no longer only discussed in terms of their charismatic power in determining one's political *puissance* but were seen as objects whose possession and proper consumption could elevate one's status to being a 'true connoisseur' (*jian shangjia* 鉴赏家) of antiquity. Moreover, changing socio-political circumstances of the Ming dynasty, marked by the accumulation of personal wealth among a burgeoning *nouveau riche* merchant class and the simultaneous occupation of the literati in material pursuits, led to both increased collecting among both classes and the conflagration of traditional roles. Against this backdrop, a distinct literary genre emerged in the late Song and early Ming dynasties called Chinese connoisseurship literature, whose texts act as prescriptive guides for the true connoisseur on what elements of material culture to consume and how.

The Chinese connoisseurship literature texts all feature judgment statements regarding the value (whether aesthetic or monetary) of particular objects. In most cases, the meanings of the employed descriptors are relatively straightforward, indicating that an object is, for example, the most expensive (*zui gui* 最貴), the best (*wei shang* 為上), the second best (*zhi ci* 之次), authentic (*zhen*

¹ See: 'Chong ding vessels, guan ding vessels, large jade pendants and tortoise shells are the ceremonial vessels of the Son of Heaven' 崇鼎、賁鼎、大璜、封父龜、天子之器也。(*Liji* 禮記, *Mingtang wei* 明堂位 [The places in the hall of distinction], 21). See also Chang 1983: 1–8, 56–89, 97. Note: all translations in this text are by the author, unless otherwise noted.

² Chang 1983: 97–101.

真), or vulgar (*su* 俗). However, particularly in the late Ming when the connoisseurship texts covered increasingly more objects and sought to create more nuanced distinctions in the face of the increasingly dissolved divisions between traditional societal roles, more erudite terms became employed, whose meanings are not immediately clear. One such term is *guya* 古雅 (lit. ['exhibiting] ancient elegance'). Overall, the aesthetic term exists 16 times in 15 passages between two Chinese connoisseurship texts, which both date to the late Ming, the *Qing mi cang* 清秘藏 (QMC; *The Pure and Secret Collection*) and the *Zhangwu zhi* 長物志 (ZWZ; *Treatise on Superfluous Things*).

This study sheds light on the implicit meanings of *guya* in Chinese connoisseurship literature texts from the Ming dynasty through the employment of a thematic analysis. First, the Chinese connoisseurship literature is introduced, focusing on the two texts that contain *guya*: the QMC and ZWZ. Subsequently, the thematic analysis is presented, which includes a brief overview of the historical context of the *guya*'s usage, and the results are presented, revealing four themes that emerge: craftsmanship, restraint, usefulness, and value. Finally, further analysis is presented on the two most prevalent themes: craftsmanship and restraint.

Chinese connoisseurship literature and its precursors

The scholarly, written discourse on the connoisseurship of Chinese decorative arts dates at earliest to the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), during which the first systematic catalogues of objects emerged. Among the catalogues, the oldest extant is Lü Dalin's 吕大臨 (1044–1091) *Kaogu tu* 考古圖 (KGT; *Investigations of Antiques Illustrated*), which contains illustrations and descriptions of 210 bronze and 13 jade objects that are dated to the Shang dynasty (1600–1046 BCE) through the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE).³ Each of the original work's 10 volumes consists of a series of passages, each dedicated to a single object. Each object is given a name based upon a combination of the object's type, origin, and/or original ancestral relations, which is determined by the characters inscribed on the vessel's bottom. Furthermore, each passage contains an illustration of an object, followed by a combination of a rubbing of its inscription, a bronze script (*jinwen* 金文) version of the inscription, a regular script (*kaishu* 楷書) version of the inscription, a summary of the object's dimensions, informa-

³ The Qianlong-era (r. 1735–1796) *Siku Quanshu* 四庫全書 version of the text indicates that the original version consisted on 10 volumes, with five addition volumes and a commentary later being added.

tion on where the object was found (i.e., its provenance), and a brief comment upon its inscription.

Overall, the KGT is primarily concerned with cataloguing the types, dimensions, and origins of particular ancient bronze ritual vessels, and analysing their inscriptions, all within the framework of a concrete classification system. Moreover, the passages also include illustrations and inscription rubbings to aid readers in better understanding the vessels' appearances. While some inscription analysis passages do include inferences and suppositions, the actual object descriptions, whether in appearance, dimension, or provenance, are entirely devoid of judgment. For example, there is no indication that any particular *ding* vessel is superior to another. No passage indicates that *ding* vessels are historically more important or aesthetically more pleasing than other vessels, such as a *gu* 觚 or *yi* 卣 vessel. There is no comment on the presence of certain types of patination as indicators of authenticity or aesthetic marks. Interestingly, no hierarchy is mentioned at all.

Rather, instead of placing any form of explicit judgment on the objects depicted therein, the catalogue serves as a neutral guide on identifying particular bronze vessels based upon objective parameters. In KGT's original introduction, Lü Dalin himself confirms this role of the text as a sort of accurate reference material for future scholars:

Using thought to reconstruct the intent [of the ancients], or to explore the origins of their craftsmanship, supplementing the gaps in classical texts, I correct the errors of Confucian scholars. For future generations of scholars who have an interest in antiquity, this book will serve as a reference.

以意逆志，或探其制作之原，以補經傳之闕亡，正諸儒之謬誤。天下後世之君子有意於古者，亦將有考焉。⁴

Overall, Lü Dalin states that at that time, there were gaps in classical texts⁵ and thus errors in further works by Confucian scholars that obscured any complete, clear understanding of the classification of ancient bronze ritual vessels. Up until a Northern Song transformation⁶ in scholarship led by literati such as Lü Dalin, the knowledge of ancient bronze ritual vessels, including of their names and functions, was based upon descriptions of rituals and associated objects in the *San li* 三禮 (*Three Ritual Classics*)⁷ and its later, informed scholarship, most

⁴ KGT, *Ji Lü Dalin* 記呂大臨 (Preface by Lü Dalin).

⁵ This is likely referring to the *San li* 三禮 (*Three Ritual Classics*).

⁶ For more information on this transformation, See Moser 2023.

⁷ *San li* 三禮 (*Three Ritual Classics*) collectively refers to three Zhou dynasty-era texts: *Yili* 儀禮 (*Book of Etiquette and Rites*), *Zhouli* 周禮 (*Rites of Zhou*), and *Liji* 禮記 (*Book of Rites*).

significantly Zheng Xuan's 鄭玄 (127–200 CE) *Sanli zhu* 三禮注⁸ (*Commentary on the Three Ritual Classics*) from the Eastern Han (25–220 CE). Extant research⁹ indicates Nie Chongyi's 聶崇義 (d. 962) Northern Song-era *Sanli tu* 三禮圖 as being influenced and informed by Zheng Xuan's scholarship and points to the *Sanli tu* as an albeit err-ridden work that had played a significant, authoritative role in the early Northern Song court's understanding of court rituals and their related paraphernalia. In fact, the text's images were copied onto the walls at the imperial court, and many prefectural schools proliferated the study of the text's illustrations.¹⁰ For the purpose of this study, the *Sanli tu* plays an important role in demonstrating the change in the discourse on decorative arts objects over time in early modern China.

By the late Song dynasty, with the ritual traditions of ancient times restored and the naming and classification schema of ritual bronze vessels revitalised, the discourse on decorative arts experienced a major shift. At that time, a distinct genre of literature emerged that would continue to create texts until the end of the Ming dynasty. Van Gulik was the first to identify the genre of 'Chinese connoisseurship literature', stating that its texts read as 'compilations meant as guide-books for the scholar of elegant taste'.¹¹ Indeed, the genre's texts do contain explicit prescriptions on collecting and consumption behaviours that one should follow in order to be considered 'a scholar of elegant taste' or a 'true connoisseur' (as opposed to a 'would-be aficionados' [*hao shi zhe* 好事者]¹²), such as which types of objects to collect, which to avoid, how to determine forgeries, how to arrange spaces, and even how to behave in situations both in and out of the home. Another important feature of the genre is that many of its texts strongly resemble one another, 'borrowing freely from each other, quoting *verbatim* entire passages'.¹³ This phenomenon of text reuse¹⁴ within the

The term *Sanli* was coined by Eastern Han scholar Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 CE) in his commentary on the three texts, titled *Sanli zhu* 三禮注 (*Commentary on the Three Ritual Classics*).

⁸ Zheng Xuan's *Sanli zhu* was used as the paradigm and reference material for scholarly works on ritual objects through the early Northern Song dynasty, when transformations in scholarly work on ancient bronze ritual vessels revealed many errors in the text. Nevertheless, the text was significant as the first substantial collection of illustrations of ritual objects, including of 'hundreds of different robes, hats, vessels, and vehicles named in the ritual classics' (Moser 2023: 3).

⁹ See Ebrey 2008 and Moser 2023.

¹⁰ Ebrey 2008: 158; Moser 2023: 26.

¹¹ Van Gulik 1958: 51.

¹² Li 2022: 116.

¹³ Van Gulik 1958: 51.

¹⁴ Clough et al. (2001) define text reuse as 'the reuse of existing written sources in the creation of a next text' (p. 152). For more information on text reuse in Chinese literature, see Sturgeon (2017, 2018), Gelein (2019), de Weerd (2020).

genre is beneficial when comparing and contrasting the texts to determine the changes that occurred across the texts over time, in the sense that it is not difficult to isolate differences between the texts when so much of their content is shared. Along these lines, even a cursory analysis of the connoisseurship texts reveals a trend of general discourse entropy, with the latter texts built upon the skeletons of the former but covering a greater breadth of decorative arts objects, connoisseurship behaviours, and terms used to describe and judge the objects and behaviours.

Scholars have analysed the Chinese connoisseurship literature texts from several perspectives. Clunas¹⁵ has extensively researched the genre from the lens of an art historian, in detail examining the texts, in particular the ZWZ, in the context of the concept that in the mid-to-late Ming, ‘the relationship between the manufactured goods and the social order of the power-holding elite was of particular concern to them’.¹⁶ As such, he pays attention to subtle insights that can be gleaned by considering the context in which the text was produced, including the contemporary changes in consumption habits, socio-economic structure, and individuality; the nuanced use of complementary opposites¹⁷ to describe certain objects and behaviours; and contemporary European texts and social phenomena.

Overall, Clunas identifies 17 different texts that fit within van Gulik’s definition of the Chinese connoisseurship literature.¹⁸ Among them are two other texts, besides the QMC and ZWZ, whose analysis helps inform this study. The first is the genre’s earliest text, *Dongtian qinglu* 洞天清錄 (DTQL; *Records of Pure Blissfulness in the Cavern Heaven*), written by Zhao Xigu 趙希鵠 (1170–1242) in the early 13th century. While few secondary sources exist that examine this text, its analysis is important for better understanding the texts of the late Ming dynasty, due to the fact that all subsequent extant texts from the genre are built upon the DTQL’s base. Moreover, the DTQL’s judgements are comparably more straightforward than those of the QMC and ZWZ, which helps shed light on the implicit meanings of latter employed more erudite qualifiers, such as *guya*. The second text is the *Gegu yaolun* 格古要論 (GGYL; *The Essential Criteria of Antiquities*), written by Cao Zhao 曹昭 (fl. late 14th c.) and dated to 1388, two decades after the establishment of the Ming dynasty. The GGYL underwent extensive scholarly work by Sir Percival David in the mid-

¹⁵ Clunas 1991.

¹⁶ Brook 1999: 181.

¹⁷ Clunas 1991: 82. In particular, he focuses on the *ya* 雅 vs *su* 俗. For further information on this complementary opposite pair and its relation to aesthetic thought in Chinese connoisseurship literature, see Li 2022.

¹⁸ Clunas 1991: 34–37.

20th century, with his full, annotated translation into English being published posthumously in 1978.¹⁹ His translation and annotations help guide researchers who focus on later Chinese connoisseurship literature texts, providing valuable insights into how to digest otherwise terse passages.

Of the two late Ming Chinese connoisseurship literature texts that contain *guya* and are thus the focus of this study, only the ZWZ has undergone significant analysis. Chen Zhi's 陈植 posthumously published *Zhangwu zhi jiaozhu* 长物志校注 (Annotated *Zhangwu zhi*) provides a version of the ZWZ with highly detailed annotations in modern Chinese.²⁰ The author's philological approach entails references to other relevant documents both to describe the meanings of otherwise terse, arcane terminology and to reveal discrepancies between various versions of the ZWZ in order to set the record straight. Chen, a scholar at Nanjing Forestry University, was particularly concerned with Ming dynasty garden design and ancient Chinese gardening literature and accordingly states:

Zhangwu zhi is among ancient China's most famous pieces of gardening literature, besides *Yuan ye* 园冶.²¹ In consideration of the book's integrity, it was decided that the subject of the annotated translation is the whole book, not just the parts concerned with gardening, to preserve the whole picture of the book.

《长物志》为我国古代造园文献中《园冶》而外之有数名著，为考虑该书整体性起见，校注内容，决定以全书为对象，而不仅限于有关造园部分，以存书之全貌。²²

Despite Chen's preoccupation with landscaping, his annotations to all of the ZWZ's sections are thorough, including those of the portion of text upon which this thesis specifically focuses, in order to maintain the text's integrity. However, it is clear that Chen sees the value of the ZWZ in contributing to the knowledge on garden design in the late Ming. It is also important to note that beyond a brief introduction and the annotative notes, Chen does not provide a translation of the original text into modern Chinese, nor does he employ exegetical methods to provide a commentary on or an analysis of the original text. Thus, Chen's contribution well serves the purpose of a bibliographical reference material, and

¹⁹ David 1978.

²⁰ Chen 1984.

²¹ This title is translated as *The Craft of Gardens* but literally means 'garden forge'. The 1631 text by Jia Cheng 计成 (1582–c. 1642) is the first known monograph on the art of gardening. Xiao and Xue 2014: 2–11 and Paolillo 2003: 210–235.

²² Chen 1984: 8.

indeed it has been utilised by other scholars, including Clunas²³ and Li Ruihao 李瑞豪.²⁴

Wei²⁵ in turn acknowledges and depends upon the work of Clunas to provide a novel reading of the ZWZ as a text that contributes to the field of leisure research, especially to the burgeoning movement in Chinese academia to attach importance to ancient leisure wisdom.²⁶ More specifically, Wei argues that the leisure activities of the Chinese literati are difficult to understand in a modern context due to the strong influence and restrictions of Confucianism and Daoism on one's conduct, including on the leisure activities in which they engaged, and aims to elucidate these connections so that more scholars can understand Chinese leisure thought of the past and present.²⁷

A recent, comprehensive exegetical contribution to the literature on the ZWZ is Li,²⁸ which is an annotated translation of the original text into modern Chinese that also includes additional contextual notes for each subchapter. In the preface to the study, Li posits that the ZWZ not only expresses the interests of the literati but is a manifestation of their situation of the time. Their situation, according to Li, is that of 'a great hermit living in the city',²⁹ a topic that Clunas addresses in his description of 'absentee landlordism' as

a significant feature in the increase of social distance between the top and the bottom of society, with the rich being more and more based in the walled cities or their immediate suburbs, which offered them more stimulating arenas for social interaction with their peers, better access to luxury manufactures and protection from any potential social violence directed at them by a peasantry for whom the old forms of patriarchal authority had less and less meaning.³⁰

²³ Clunas 1991: 184.

²⁴ Li 2012: 8–9.

²⁵ Wei 2019: 1–7.

²⁶ Wei (2019: 2) adds, '*Zhang Wu Zhi* plays an important role in the evolution of leisure culture in ancient Chinese scholar-bureaucrats'. It is unclear to what time period he refers with 'ancient'. In the modern Chinese language, *gudai* 古代 ('ancient times') refers to the time before 1840 (coinciding with the beginning of the First Opium War). However, in English and the West, 'ancient' loosely refers to the time preceding the Middle Ages, which began at the 6th century CE or even earlier. If Wei intends the latter sense, then perhaps he refers to *Zhangwu zhi*'s value in providing insights into leisure culture exclusively during the dynasties that roughly correlate with those that preceded the Sui (581–618 CE). Otherwise, he likely refers to what *Treatise* contributes to understanding of leisure during the Ming and Qing.

²⁷ Wei 2019: 5.

²⁸ Li 2012.

²⁹ Li 2012 5. See original text: '*Da yinyin yu shi* 大隱隱于市'.

³⁰ Clunas 1991: 160.

Clunas highlights that the traditional forms of authority that once had a hold on the peasantry were losing their acumen, while Li argues that such breaks from tradition were the greatest temptation for (and thus threat to) the literati, and were to be avoided. In addition to its analytical preface, Li presents thorough, footnoted annotations to the ZWZ, utilising Chen's previous work as well as his own research. Each of the original text's subsections includes a *tijie* 题解 ('topic explanation') in which the author provides additional contextual information with which the reader can further understand the text's meaning. These *tijie* are primarily thematic and strategically match the subject-driven division of the text. Overall, Li contributes the most thorough exegetical analysis of the ZWZ to date and acts as an invaluable reference material in understanding both the literal and implicit meanings of the ZWZ and its passages.

Overall, the extant literature on the Chinese connoisseurship literature genre provides substantial information on the socioeconomic backdrop of collecting decorative arts objects during the Ming dynasty. Such analyses provide further insight into the motivations behind the texts' authors to create their treatises. In addition, annotated translations of the texts, both into modern Chinese and English, aid subsequent scholars in their readings of the texts by explaining historical references to clarify passages' explicit meanings. Regarding the implicit meanings of obscure aesthetic terms and how they are employed in the genre, however, few studies exist. In particular, there is a lack of research on how judgment is placed in the genre's texts and on the semantic weight of such judgment terms, whether explicit or implicit.

Placing judgment

As discussed above, the Northern Song catalogues described the parameters, inscriptions, provenance, and ritual purposes of ancient objects. While there is an inherent implication that the objects in the catalogues are worth of inclusion, they do not include any language to indicate that any one type of object was superior to another, nor that any type of design or style was preferred. Conversely, providing such value statements is at the core of the connoisseurship literature texts.

In the texts, value is placed in various ways, with some judgment terms used in similar ways throughout all of the texts, but ultimately in a way reflecting the respective text's goal. To list all of judgment terms that exist across all of the connoisseurship texts would be exhaustive, but below are several of the most commonly occurring: *shang* 上 ('top, best'), 为上 *weishang* ('as the top, best'), *shan* 善 ('good, excellent'), *miao* 秒 ('ideal, wonderful'), *zhichi* 之次 ('second-

ary'), *yi* 宜 ('suitable'), *jia* 佳 ('excellent, fine'), *qihao* 奇好 ('wondrous and excellent'), *qi* 奇 ('extraordinary'), *mei* 美 ('beautiful'), *jing* 精 ('fine'), *ya* 雅 ('elegant'), *gui* 貴 ('expensive'), *liang* 良 ('skilled'), *nande* 難得 ('difficult to obtain'), *ke'ai* 可愛 ('appealing'),³¹ *xiu* 秀 ('elegant'), *xi* 細 ('fine'), *zhen* 真 ('authentic'), *zhen* 珍 ('cherished'), *bao* 寶 ('treasured'), *chao* 超 ('surpassing'), *fengyun* 風韻 ('charming and elegant'), and *you* 優 ('excellent [quality]').

The modes and frequencies with which judgment is placed upon objects varies between the above-introduced texts, in ways that relate to the different goals assigned to the texts in their introductions. For example, the DTQL, primarily concerned with identifying and describing objects suitable for a true antiquarian to possess, often begins its passages with extensive description and contextual information before passing any judgment. This is evident in its passages on *duanxi* stones (used for inkstones).³² The passage begins by describing the appearance of the raw stone in the lower pits of *duanxi*, before explaining techniques for extracting the stones from water. It then proceeds to providing historical reference to a Tang dynasty text that may have misidentified *duanxi* stones as another type due to the colour of the raw material. The text suggests that the two stones might be the same, because they produce almost no sound when struck or grinded. Only then does the text provide a judgment statement:

Both of these superior types of stone improve with prolonged use—their sharpness remains intact, they do not become dull, and they require no artificial polishing.

已上二品石，久用鋒芒愈出，不退鈍，不假磨礪。³³

The two types of *duanxi* stones from the lower pits (or perhaps, as the text suggests, the one type of stone) are the superior type for inkstones, because their carvings endure and they do not require additional polishing after their initial production.

In its passages about *duanxi* stones, the GGYL takes a similar approach as the DTQL but with greater brevity. It begins by providing much of the same contextual information but omitting certain parts, including the information on extraction techniques, the contemplative historical text reference, and much of

³¹ This generally indicates that something is attractive but not worthwhile. See: '[Regarding *Jurong* ware] many of them bear the monograms of supervising officials, which are thin, light, dark black, and fine. Although they are appealing, they do not exhibit *guya*' 故其上多有監官花押，其輕薄、漆黑、歛細，雖可愛然要非古器，歲久亦有微青色者。DTQL, *Gu zhong ding* 古鐘鼎 (Ancient bells and tripods), 羿器辨 *Yi qi bian* (Discerning ritual vessels), 句容器 *Jurong qi* (*Jurong* ware).

³² DTQL, *Gu yan bian* 古硯辨 (Discerning ancient inkstones).

³³ *Ibid.*

the description of the raw material. When it comes time to place judgment, the GGYL states

These two types of stone are the most valuable.

二種石最貴。³⁴

In the GGYL's introduction, Cao explains that he had developed a deep intimacy with and knowledge of antiquities from a young age. He may take contextual information for granted, finding it of secondary importance to help scholars identify what qualifies as a worthwhile object and what does not. Instead, he focuses more on identifying among the extant worthwhile objects which are true and, in this case, valuable, by describing their appearance and helping one determine its authenticity. In this vein, he passes judgment.

In its discourse on *duanxi* stones, the ZWZ takes a different approach. The ZWZ's argument that further differentiation needed to be made among worthwhile objects indicates that a more nuanced critique was required in assessing objects due to an oversaturation of collectors with the means to accrue antiquities, which had led to a deterioration of the scholar's aesthetic. In this way, in the *duanxi* passage, and elsewhere throughout the text, the ZWZ begins with a poignant judgment statement and then proceeds to dive more deeply into the object's genre to identify the best subcategories. The passage begins with the straightforward statement:

For inkstones, those made from Duanxi are considered the best.

研以端溪為上。³⁵

To dispel any doubt, it is clarified that regarding materials for making inkstones, *duanxi* is the best (*weishang* 為上). The passage then continues by ranking types of *duanxi* stones by appearance.

The best stones have a deep purple colour, feel smooth and moist to the touch, and produce a clear, resonant sound when tapped. Those with layered halos or small greenish-blue 'parrot's eye' patterns are the most prized. The next best variety is reddish in colour, which becomes more lustrous when breathed upon. Stones with slow, broad patterns belong to the Xikeng (Western Pit) variety, which is less valuable.

³⁴ GGYL, *Juan zhong* 卷中 (Middle chapter), *Duanxi xiayan jiukang shi* 端溪下畝舊坑石 (Stones from the old pit at the Duanxi lower cliff).

³⁵ ZWZ. 7.

石色深紫，襯手而潤，叩之清遠，有重暈、青綠、小鸚鵡眼者為貴。其次色赤，呵之乃潤。更有紋慢而大者，乃西坑石，不甚貴也。³⁶

This type of systematic critique of subtypes, from best to worst, is typical of the ZWZ. It resonates with its concern to further divide worthwhile antiquities into a hierarchy to separate the true purveyors of classical taste from the would-be aficionados. This passage features another element that is prevalent throughout the ZWZ. Not only does the text often state what is valuable, but it often identifies what is *invaluable*. The passage continues by listing other types of similar inkstones. While it describes some that are also highly prized, it also describes some whose ‘craftsmanship is exceptionally vulgar’,³⁷ whose forms are ‘slightly vulgar’,³⁸ whose manufacture demonstrates ‘an abominable practice’,³⁹ and whose styles are ‘all vulgar and should not be employed’.⁴⁰

Guya 古雅

The majority of qualifiers used to describe objects in the ZWZ have clear, explicit meanings. The text’s interest in creating hierarchies is evident in its commonly employed judgments of *weishang* or *shang* to denote that a particular type or subtype of object is the most worthwhile of its kind. *Weishang* exists 22 times in the ZWZ describing a variety of objects, including *chensu* 沉速 (‘incense’), coral-coloured lacquerware from the Song dynasty, *duanxi* inkstones, the blue colour of patination on bronze, red *jun* ware (鈞窯), a special type of begonia from Xifu 西府, and dwellings near mountains and water. As the ZWZ sought to provide a wider, more nuanced hierarchy of worthiness, the related nomenclature also expanded. The terms *e* 惡 (‘evil’ or ‘inferior’) is included 12 times in the ZWZ, often in the phrase *e dao* 惡道 (lit. evil path; path of inferiority),⁴¹ to reinforce a particular object’s subjugated position. The phrase *you shen* 尤甚 (‘especially bad’) is also used to express an object’s bottom rank. At the same time, *gui* 貴 (‘expensive’) is used in the ZWZ more than twice as many times as it exists in any of the other connoisseurship texts examined in this research. While these terms have clear, explicit meanings, denoting obvious placements

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ ‘Its manufacture is exceptionally vulgar’ 其製最俗. ZWZ, 7; Translation by Blishen 2019: 110.

³⁸ ‘Gourd-shaped inkstones are rather vulgar’ 葫蘆樣稍俗. *Ibid.*

³⁹ ‘It is an abominable practice’ 皆入惡道. *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ ‘As for red sandalwood, ebony, and carved red lacquer, these are all vulgar and should not be employed’ 至如紫檀，烏木及雕紅彩漆，俱俗不可用. ZWZ, 7; Translation by author.

⁴¹ Blishen (2019) translates it as ‘an abominable practice’ (p. 110).

on the worthiness spectrum, the meanings of other, more erudite terms are not so immediately clear.

A noteworthy example is the term *guya* 古雅 ('ancient elegance'), which exists 11 times in the ZWZ and five times in the QMC. Examples of the terms in passages from the two texts can be found below.

The jades produced during the three dynasties, the Qin, and the Han display ancient elegance.

三代、秦、漢人製玉古雅。⁴²

Some antique versions [of couches, *ta* 榻] showcase ancient craquelure patterns or Yuan dynasty mother-of-pearl inlays, exuding a natural and ancient elegance.

有古斷紋者，有元螺鈿者，其製自然古雅。⁴³

From these two examples, it is clear that *guya* is a positive term, especially by the fact that it is used to qualify jade implements from the Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin, and Han dynasties, which mark a period of high antiquity. However, beyond the obvious positive connotation, what *guya* denotes is not clear. Is it an aesthetic marker? Does it relate to monetary value, form, craftsmanship, or a combination of these elements? Below, a thematic analysis of the term and an accompanying overview of its use in historical contexts aim to shed light on its implicit meanings in the Chinese connoisseurship literature texts.

Guya in historical contexts

Overall, it is necessary to understand the historical context of the use of the term *guya* to understand its implicit meanings in the Chinese connoisseurship literature texts. Modern Chinese dictionaries and research variably define *guya* as 'of elegant beauty and in elegant taste',⁴⁴ 'ancient elegance',⁴⁵ and 'wonted elegance'.⁴⁶ The meaning of the term's first character, *gu* 古, carries little semantic variance, referring rather explicitly to 'old' or 'ancient'.⁴⁷ The meaning of the term's second character, *ya*, has carried more semantic variance over time. The Kangxi Dictionary (*Kangxi zidian* 康熙字典) points to instances in classical

⁴² QMC, *shang* 上 ('Upper').

⁴³ ZWZ. 6.5.

⁴⁴ <https://www.zdic.net/hans/古雅>.

⁴⁵ Clunas 1991.

⁴⁶ Li 2022.

⁴⁷ *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, *gu* 古.

texts in which *ya* carries a meaning of ‘correct’ (*zheng* 正). In particular, it refers to the following passage from the *Lunyu* 論語 (Analects):

What the master used correct pronunciation for: the *Odes*, the *Book of History* and the performance of the rites. In all these cases he used the correct pronunciation.

子所雅言，詩、書、執禮，皆雅言也。⁴⁸

Here, the *Lunyu* indicates that only can the meaning of the classical texts be complete if one’s enunciation is correct.⁴⁹ In analysing historical usages of *ya*, Li states that in addition to the phrase *yayan* 雅言 (‘correct speech’), as used in the *Lunyu*, there are also instances of the phrases *yayue* 雅樂 and *yasheng* 雅聲 to refer to the music that was linked to the foundational Zhou ritual and political order.⁵⁰ In this sense, from at least the Zhou, *ya* carried some meaning of a type of correctness that embodies an ancient spirit whose possession has some order-making quality.

The use of *yayan* in a Western Han text, *Jiaoshi yilin* 焦氏易林, which contains poems for each of the 64 hexagrams describes in the Confucian classic *Yijing* 易經 (*Book of Changes*), reinforces this notion. The passage on Hexagram 12 (*pi* 否 ䷋) states:

Qi and Lu sought to govern their states by upholding benevolence and virtue, supporting morality, promoting propriety and correct speech, and bringing stability to Duke Ding’s rule.

齊魯求國，仁聖輔德，進禮雅言，定公以安。⁵¹

Here, *yayan* is placed alongside other traditional Confucian values, *ren* 仁 (‘humaneness’) and *de* 德 (‘virtue’), and when they are practiced together, political stability can be achieved. Another passage from the *Xunzi*’s 荀子 section on royal regulations (*wangzhi* 王制) also addresses *yayan*’s role in helping create order, but with a slightly nuanced additions.

As for music, all sounds that are not considered refined are abolished. Regarding ornamentation, all patterns that deviate from the ancient designs are discontinued. As for implements, all tools not based on ancient forms are destroyed. This is called ‘returning to antiquity’, which is the foundation of a true king’s system.

⁴⁸ Translation: (D.C. Lau [1979]: 88). Original *Lunyu*, *shu er* 述而 (Transmission), 18. See: *Kangxi zidian* 康熙字典, *zhuibu* 隹部 (*Zhui* radical), *si* 四 (Four).

⁴⁹ Li 2022: 92–94.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Jiaoshi yilin* 焦氏易林, *kanzhi* 坎之 (Chapter of *kan* changing).

聲、則非雅聲者舉廢，色、則凡非舊文者舉息，械用，則凡非舊器者舉毀，夫是之謂復古，是王者之制也。⁵²

In the passage, *ya* is again connected to *sheng* (music), but the *ya* attribute of music is also mentioned in parallel to patterns (or colours) that follow ancient designs and implements that follow ancient forms. Overall, following these established standards is called *fugu* 復古, returning to antiquity, and doing so is the core of establishing a stable kingdom. In conjuring past patterns to contemporary purposes, the passage suggests that *ya* also carries an implicit meaning of ‘precedented’. Not only are *ya* forms old and elegant, they embrace a type of established ideal that can be transmitted, received, employed, and, apparently, deviated from.

From about the 3rd century CE onwards, Li argues that *ya* became ‘associated with high principles, learning, and cultivation. The moral valence of *ya* runs through literary and aesthetic thought as notions of order, balance, restraint, and filiation with the canonical classics’.⁵³ The moral quality of *ya* is apparent in the 5th century text *Shi shuo xin yu* 世說新語 (*A New Account of the Tales of the World*), attributed to Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403–444):

[He] Jiao, was elegant and correct, despised [Xun] Xu for his flattery and sycophancy.

嶠性雅正，常疾勸諂諛。⁵⁴

In the text, He Jiao possesses *ya* and *zheng*, elegance and correctness, which in this case are clearly moral attributes related to principle and restraint based upon established patterns of behaviour that a gentleman should exhibit. His moral character is juxtaposed to that of Xun Xu, who, unable to control his desire for self-gain, practices flattery and sycophancy. This type of moral attribute of *ya* relates to the social dilemmas presented in the introduction of the ZWZ. According to the text, by the late Ming, there were an increasing number of people who had access to the consumption of material culture that was originally the domain of the principled scholar-gentleman. The improper appreciation for antiquity, or perhaps the wrong motivation to collect certain objects and engage in certain behaviours, expressed a sense of moral degradation, conflating a once-noble pursuit with self-gain and material wealth.

⁵² *Xunzi* 荀子, *wangzhi* 王制 (Royal regulations), 14.

⁵³ Li 2022: 93.

⁵⁴ *Shi shuo xinyu* 世說新語, *fangzheng* 方正 (Upright and correct [character]), 14.

In the Tang dynasty, the disyllabic *guya* first enters the aesthetic discourse to describe poetry and music. One passage from the late 8th/early 9th century *Tangdian* 唐典 (*Comprehensive Institutions*) states:

Zhang Hua submitted a memorial with a poem on elegant music, stating: ‘The Wei dynasty’s Shangshou and Shiju poems, as well as those used by the Han dynasty, have uneven lengths in their lines and do not align with ancient elegance’.

張華上雅樂詩表云：「魏上壽、食舉詩及漢氏所施用，其文句長短不齊，皆未合於古雅。」⁵⁵

Here, the text suggests that certain poems from the Wei and Han dynasties feature uneven line lengths, and this attribute renders them inharmonious with *guya*. Evidently, an ideal precedent had been set by poems from other dynasties that featured even lines. Because the poems mentioned in the passage did not conform with these established norms, they were deemed improper.

Finally, by the Song dynasty, *guya* is used to describe visual art in the form of calligraphy. A passage from the late 10th century *Taiping Yulan* 太平御覽 (*Readings of the Taiping Era*) states:

His regular script was brilliant and exquisite, surpassing his teachers. It combined strength and flexibility, and within the strokes and dots, there was often unique charm. Although it lacked complete divine perfection, it could be described as profound and boundless, with an abundance of ancient elegance.

真書光妙，乃過於師。剛柔備矣，點畫之間，多有異趣。雖神明不備，可謂幽深無際，而古雅有餘。⁵⁶

The text praises the calligraphic style of Zhong Yao 鍾繇 (151–230) as nearly completely perfect. That his style possessed an abundance of *guya* is determined by the fact that was strong yet flexible with a unique charm. It surpassed the style of his teachers’, which suggests that it followed an established stylistic precedent that was transmitted to Zhong. Again, the emphasis here is on an ancient ideal that can be observed, learned, and practiced.

Overall, this brief exploration of the historical context of *ya* and *guya* reveals several enduring associations with this particular type of elegance. It is related to a correct, standard form that has been transmitted from the distant past. Exhibiting such elegance is order-creating, in that it harkens back to the forms

⁵⁵ *Tangdian* 唐典, *yueqi* 樂七 (Music, section 7), *sanchao shangshou youyue yi* 三朝上壽有樂議 (Discussion on the three court rituals for longevity felicitations).

⁵⁶ *Taiping Yulan* 太平御覽, *Gongyi buwu* 工藝部五 (Crafts, part five), *shuzong* 書中 (Writing, middle section).

of the ancients who are revered for the stability that they created, both politically and socially. Regarding the latter, maintaining social order also relates to one's moral character. Elegant speech and music are required in certain contexts to express one's superior moral standing. Such decorum is juxtaposed to pursuits of extravagance and self-gain, but at the same time proper behaviour can help rein them in. In other words, *ya* or *guya* can be lost or obscured, but returning to antiquity by following *ya*'s precedented forms can help restore one's own moral standing and general social order.

Thematic analysis

A thematic analysis is a 'method for systematically describing and interpreting the meaning of qualitative data by assigning codes to the data and reducing the codes into themes, followed by an analysis and presentation of these themes'.⁵⁷ Such analyses are used in various disciplines that deal with qualitative data, such as in social science where a thematic analysis might be used to understand the explicit and implicit messages of transcribed interviews, or in literature studies, where researchers aim to understand the underlying themes that exist in a text or across a whole corpus. In the case of literature studies, as texts are read, researchers assign 'essence-capturing' descriptive codes to units of text that sufficiently represent the units' implicit or explicit meanings. After that, codes are refined and combined into themes that encapsulate the meanings of the examined textual units. Finally, the themes are analysed to understand how they represent the informing texts, or in the case of historical sociopragmatics, intertextuality analysis, or further content analysis, to understand how the themes might reflect contemporary cultural patterns⁵⁸ or how they relate to the given social text.⁵⁹

In a study of thematic analyses on the *Laozi* 老子, Csikszentmihalyi examined seminal studies on the text that had taken part in the 19th and 20th centuries to reveal important concepts in the primary source.⁶⁰ Overall, his research yielded two families of themes: *in vivo* themes (those that focus on certain terms found in the *Laozi* [e.g., *dao* 道]) and descriptive themes (those that relate to larger categories [e.g., politics]).⁶¹ In his analysis, Csikszentmihalyi presents and analyses the following themes in light of further etymological, historical,

⁵⁷ Waeraas 2022: 153.

⁵⁸ Neuendorf 2019.

⁵⁹ Allen 2000.

⁶⁰ Csikszentmihalyi 2015. Waeraas 2022.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

and cultural context: *dao* 道, *de* 德, *ziran* 自然, *wuwei* 無為, mysticism, politics, gender, and science and ecology. Subsequently, he analyses each theme to determine how each one relates to the *Laozi*’s meaning and the relevant social texts. The analysis requires knowledge and further examination of the primary source and its contexts in order to suss out insight.

As stated above, the meaning of *guya* in the Chinese connoisseurship literature is not immediately obvious. In order to gain insight into its meaning, a thematic analysis was carried out of the passages in which *guya* is used to describe an object. Overall, the term appears 16 times across two texts, including five times in the *QMC* and 11 times in the *ZWZ*. All five mentions in the *QMC* are used to described scholars’ objects.

Text	Location (chapter)	Object
QMC	6 (x2)	Ancient jade
QMC	31	Longquan 龍泉 porcelain
QMC	50	Ancient swords
QMC	76	Jingchuan 荆川 paper

Table 1: Instances of *guya* in *QMC*

As show in Table 1, the objects in whose description *guya* appears are ancient jades, Longquan 龍泉 porcelains, ancient swords, and Jingchuan荆川 paper. The passage from the *QMC* on ancient jade effectively demonstrates how the context surrounding the occurrence of *guya* helps inform its particular meaning.

The jade craftsmanship of the Three Dynasties [Xia, Shang, Zhou], Qin, and Han eras is characterised by an ancient elegance. They are neither overly intricate nor intentionally shaped to resemble specific forms, yet they inherently possess a natural and refined charm.

三代、秦、汉，人制玉古雅，不煩，无意肖形，而物趣自具。⁶²

For jade carvings from the Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin, and Han dynasties, the text praises the craftsmanship of the pieces produced during that time as exhibiting *guya*. The second sentence provides extra information into what elements of the craftsmanship might be of particular importance. In this case, the patterns and shapes of the *guya* objects are evidently simple and restrained and do not resemble specific forms from nature. Their abstraction in pattern and form aid in their exhibition of a natural and refined charm.

⁶² QMC, 6.

Codes were created for the passages containing *guya* in the QMC to encapsulate the nuanced meanings of the term in its specific contexts.

Text	Location (chapter)	Object	Context clues	Parallel	Codes	Themes
QMC	6 (x2)	Ancient jade	制，不煩，无意肖形	—	Craftsmanship, not complex, pattern, without realistic depictions	Craftsmanship
QMC	31	Longquan 龍泉 porcelain	稍拙制法	—	Slightly crude craftsmanship	Craftsmanship
QMC	50	Ancient swords	鋒，制	—	The blade's craftsmanship (sharpness)	Craftsmanship
QMC	76	Jingchuan 荆川 paper	细花	—	Fine patterns	Craftsmanship

Table 2: Codes and themes of *guya* passages in QMC

The codes for each passages were created based upon the surrounding context in which the term *guya* and the object to which it is assigned exist. For example, the passage on ancient jade implements contains the phrases *zhi* 制 ('craftsmanship'), *bufan* 不煩 ('not complex'), and *wuyi xiaoxing* 无意肖形 ('without realistic depictions'). These codes are used to capture the essence of *guya*'s implicit meaning in the specific context of describing ancient jade objects. As stated above, there is a certain emphasis on the objects' craftsmanship, specifically on the patterns and forms with which they were made. The passage on Longquan porcelains reveals a prevalent yet lesser common mode in which *guya* is used in the connoisseurship literature: in the negative. Specifically, the passage includes the following phrase:

Slightly crude in craftsmanship, they do not particularly exhibit ancient elegance.

稍拙制法，不甚古雅。⁶³

⁶³ QMC, 31.

Earlier in the passage, the text admits that although some Longquan porcelain vessels are excellent and may rival those of the imperial kilns, they lack craquelure patterns, are not well coloured, and, particularly important, are too thick. While there may be good examples of Longquan ware, they do not abide by the aesthetic ideals of the imperial kiln pieces, which *do* exhibit *guya*, and thus their judgment of *not* being *guya* relates to these elements of poor craftsmanship. The code assigned to the Longquan passage reflects this sentiment.

After the codes were assigned, the passages were again analysed to create codes that synthesise the assigned codes. All of the codes of the passages containing *guya* in the QMC related to either patterns, forms, styles, or overall how an object was designed and created. While the ZWZ contains passages on flora, such as flower and trees, or peculiar rocks, none of the objects described as *guya* in the QMC are naturally formed. They were all consciously designed and crafted from selected materials following a certain pattern or standard. In some cases, such as in that of jades, swords, and Jingchuan paper, using particular materials and following established, precedented standards of craftsmanship resulted in an object that exhibits *guya*. On the other hand, in the case of Longquan ware, they were created in a way that strayed from the ideal patterns of other types of porcelain ware that *do* exhibit *guya*. As a result, based upon these context clues, all of the passages in the QMC were assigned the theme of craftsmanship.

The thematic analysis of passages containing *guya* in the ZWZ yielded a wider range of codes and themes assigned to a wider range of objects and decorative elements. While four passages describe scholars' objects, five describe furniture items, one describes an architectural element, and one describes houseware. Below, Table 3 presents an overview of the objects that are described as *guya* in the ZWZ.

Text	Location (chapter)	Object
ZWZ	1	Dwellings, roof beams
ZWZ	6	Tables and couches
ZWZ	6	Couch-beds
ZWZ	6	Platform tables
ZWZ	6	Buddhist cabinets and tables
ZWZ	6	Chests
ZWZ	7	Paperweights
ZWZ	7	Inkstones
ZWZ	7	Jades
ZWZ	7	Longquan porcelain
ZWZ	11	Tableware

Table 3: Instances of *guya* in ZWZ

The ZWZ's expansion of items in whose descriptions *guya* exists reflects the overall discourse entropy described above regarding material culture by the late Ming. In its introduction, the ZWZ states that one of its goal is to expel the excessive through providing more nuanced judgments on what is appropriate and what is not for the true antiquarian to distinguish themselves from the would-be aficionados. Overall, *guya*'s presence expanded from beyond the discourse on scholars' objects, as seen in the QMC, into more quotidian realms, such as furniture, architectural elements, and tableware. These elements exist outside of the scholar's studio and into realms that would be witnessed by a greater audience. The passage on dwellings and roof beams states:

Swastika patterns are suitable for inner [women's] chambers but do not particularly exhibit ancient elegance.

卍字者，宜閨合中，不甚古雅。⁶⁴

Again, *guya* appears in the negative. In this case, a particular pattern (i.e., a swastika pattern) on the edifice of roof beams is described as not being suitable for the exterior of a dwellings. In fact, its presence on the façade is considered *bu shen guya* 不甚古雅 ('not particularly exhibiting ancient elegance'). However, such a pattern could be appropriate for inner chambers.

The passage on platform tables states:

Platform tables crafted by the Japanese come in various sizes and styles, all exhibiting exceptional ancient elegance and exquisiteness... However, designs like those with red lacquer, narrow dimensions, or triangular shapes should not be used.

倭人所制，種類大小不一，俱極古雅精麗... 若紅漆，狹小，三角諸式，俱不可用。⁶⁵

Again, this passage takes the aesthetic discourse out of the studio and into the other various spaces of a scholar's residence, where a platform table may be placed. The passage argues that those platform tables crafted by Japanese, in their various sizes and styles, all exhibit *guya*. Like the passages presented above, here the text again refers to a certain established style of platform table that had precedent in the genre. However, the passage presents two new phenomena.

First, the text contains a type of parallel structure that exists in six other passages of the ZWZ that use the term *guya*. The parallel structures all appear later

⁶⁴ ZWZ, 1.

⁶⁵ ZWZ, 6.

in the passages, after the judgment of *guya* is placed, and provide information on subtypes or variations of the object that *do not* exhibit ancient elegance. These parallel structures are particularly insightful, because they provide further context clues that help in the code-making stage of the thematic analysis in the overall understanding of *guya*'s meaning in the given context. For example, in the passage on platform tables, after establishing that those examples crafted by Japanese exhibit *guya*, the text states that 'designs like those with red lacquer, narrow dimensions, or triangular shapes should not be used'. This information is revealing for two reasons. First, it informs the reader of how Japanese platform tables *do not* appear, providing information on how the reader may be able to discern between what is Japanese (and thus *guya* worthy) and what is not. Secondly, this information also highlights what parameters are the most important to consider. That a platform table actually originates from Japan or that it is made from a certain type of wood is not the most important consideration. Rather, it is that the craftsmanship of the table follows certain established patterns.

Moreover, four of the parallel structure refer directly to contemporary deviations from the precedented *guya* designs. For example, a passage containing *guya* on Buddhist cabinets, after stating that examples with imperial carved patterns or ancient craquelure lacquer patterns and cabinet made in Japan exhibit *guya*, adds:

In recent times, there are objects pieced together from crackle-patterned materials; if crafted without vulgarity, they can also be considered suitable. However, items with new lacquer finishes, octagonal or rounded-corner designs, or incorporating Jian kiln Buddha statues are entirely inappropriate and should not be used.

近有以斷紋器湊成者，若製作不俗，亦自可用。若新漆八角委角及建窯佛像，斷不可用也。⁶⁶

From this parallel structure, it can be surmised that at the time of ZWZ's writing, during the late Ming, there were Buddhist cabinets that featured certain finishes, designs, and ornamentation that rendered them inappropriate for use. That these new cabinet examples went against the standardised forms made them unworthy of *guya* designation. It is possible that built into this context is an argument for restraint against new styles that were inappropriate and gaudy. Such restraint is evident in the other parallel examples that explicitly address new preferences that emerged during the late Ming. For example, the passage on jades cautions against a certain colour of translucent emerald-green jade (*cuisse tongming* 翠色通明) that is in fact not actually jade,⁶⁷ and the passage on tables and couches

⁶⁶ ZWZ, 6.

⁶⁷ It refers to jadeite. In modern times, jadeite and nephrite are considered two types of jade (*yu*

admonishes readers to avoid modern creations that merely emphasise elaborate carvings and embellishments that serve to please the eye, which have been embraced at the abandonment of the ancient styles.⁶⁸ Overall, these passages suggest that at the time there was a sort of rampant deviation from established *guya* styles that the ZWZ sought to combat by promoting restraint against new, extravagant forms.

The second noteworthy concept that this passage presents is that objects of Japanese style can also exhibit *guya*. In the QMC, only scholars' objects, with a deep connection to Chinese literati culture, receive the designation. In the ZWZ, however, objects unlinked to the ancient Chinese aesthetic tradition can also be considered to exhibit ancient elegance that is in sync with traditionally ideal forms. Such an instance also exists in a passage on another type of furniture item, *tan* 榻 couch-beds.

There are Yuan dynasty mother-of-pearl inlays that exude a natural and ancient elegance.

有元螺鈿者，其製自然古雅。⁶⁹

The text states that some examples of *tan* couch-beds from the Yuan dynasty that feature mother-of-pearl inlays exude *guya*. While it is not known for certain, it is possible that the designs of such items could have also received influence from outside of the traditional Chinese aesthetic sphere. Still, the surrounding context clues point to the notion that it is the following of an established, accepted pattern that drives the *guya* designation, regardless of that pattern's origin.

From the relatively rich contextual information read from the ZWZ's passages containing *guya*, a thematic analysis yielded a wider range of codes compared to in the QMC. Likewise, in the synthesis phase, a wider range of themes emerged.

玉). During the late Ming dynasty, however, only nephrite was considered to be jade, while jadeite was given a different, lesser designation.

⁶⁸ 'Modern craftsmen in this productions merely pursue carved and painted decoration, in order to please a vulgar eye, and ancient standards are abandoned' 今人製作，徒取雕繪文飾，以悅俗眼，而古制蕩然。ZWZ, 6.

⁶⁹ ZWZ, 6.

Text	Location (chapter)	Object	Context clues	Parallel	Code	Theme
ZWZ	1	Dwellings, roof beams	卍字，不	—	Meander (swastika) patterns not <i>guya</i>	Crafts- manship
ZWZ	6	Tables and couches	製，可愛 ，無不便 適，用	今人製作 徒取雕繪 文飾，俗	Crafts- manship, charming, conve- nient and appropriate, useful	Crafts- manship, restraint, usefulness
ZWZ	6	Couch- beds	古斷紋， 元螺鈿， 製，自然	近 ...大非 雅器，長 大諸式...俗	Craquelure design and mother-of- pearl inlays, natural, craftsman- ship	Crafts- manship
ZWZ	6	Platform tables	制，精麗 ，貴	若紅漆、狹 小、三角諸 式 (uncon- ventional forms)，俱 不可用	Craftsman- ship, exqui- siteness, expensive	Crafts- manship, value
ZWZ	6	Buddhist cabinets and tables	朱黑漆， 極華整， 而無脂粉 氣，花， 紋，製， 自然	近 ...不可 用也	Certain patterns, without excess, crafted, natural	Crafts- manship, restraint
ZWZ	6	Chests	奇巧，絕 倫，式， 用，不俗	—	Exquisitely crafted, unparal- leled, patterns, useful, not vulgar	Crafts- manship, useful- ness, restraint

ZWZ	7	Paper-weights	古，玉兔、玉牛[等]	其瑪瑙、水晶、官、哥、定窯，非雅器	Certain patterns and materials	Craftsmanship ⁷⁰
ZWZ	7	Ink-stones	宣和舊研，製，樣，式	葫蘆(等)樣...俗，other designs...皆入惡道	Certain patterns and shapes	Craftsmanship, restraint
ZWZ	7	Jades	製，不煩即，細	今所尚翠色...非玉也	Craftsmanship is not commonplace, fine details	Craftsmanship
ZWZ	7	Long-quan porcelain	厚，第工匠稍拙，不甚古雅	—	Thick, crude craftsmanship	Craftsmanship
ZWZ	11	Table-ware	精，潔，毫涉市販屠沽氣	—	Exquisite, pure	Restraint

Table 4: Codes and themes of *guya* passages in ZWZ

Overall, the analysis yielded four themes: craftsmanship, restraint, usefulness, and value. Table 5 below shows the total division of the themes between the QMC and ZWZ, indicating the passages in which they occur, and reveals that the two most prevalent themes are craftsmanship (15 occurrences) and restraint (five occurrences).

Theme	QMC	ZWZ	Total
Craftsmanship	6, 6, 31, 50, 76	1, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 7, 7, 7, 7	15
Restraint	—	6, 6, 6, 7, 11	5
Usefulness	—	6, 6	2
Value	—	6	1

Table 5: Themes and their locations and totals in QMC and ZWZ

⁷⁰ ‘The double-outline engraving technique, smooth, flowing, and delicate, exhibits hair-thin precision’ 雙鉤礪法宛轉流動細入毫髮涉. ZWZ, 7.119.

Restraint

As a theme, restraint refers to restraint against embracing that which is gaudy and vulgar. By the late Ming, an increasing number of individuals had become engaged in the consumption of material culture that had in earlier centuries been an erudite pursuit of a limited number of antiquarian scholars possessing the knowledge of what objects embodied *guya*. Those engaging in collecting not only included an increasing number of literati but also merchants who had been able to accrue personal wealth.

Writing about changes in the socioeconomic makeup of China during the late Ming dynasty, Brook states that ‘Huizhou merchants were keen to see the boundary between them and the gentry dissolve’.⁷¹ Ownership of land and particular objects was no longer an indication of one’s social standing. At the same time, Brook also writes about the ‘gentry-yet-merchants’, those of the literati who had themselves become increasingly engaged in economic and material gain, originally the domain of the merchant class. As a result of this increased wealth and the dissolving boundaries, ‘extravagance became excessive and distinctions were confused’.⁷² Such distinctions in a sense *do* refer to distinctions within the social hierarchy. Li refers to ‘mountain-recluse literati’ who sought to withdraw from their official duties in the name of purely aesthetic pursuits and the ‘Confucian merchant’ who sought recluse in activities out of their traditional domain.

However, by extension the distinctions also relate to those between approaches towards traditionally scholarly behaviours, such as accumulating and engaging with certain objects. Evidently, there was a predominant trend to engage with extravagance in the face of elegant standards. In order to demonstrate one’s fight against the gaudy, Li suggests that motivation is key.⁷³ In other words, one’s intention, motivation, and mode of appreciation are what create distinctions between ‘true connoisseurs’ and ‘would-be aficionados’. The introduction of the ZWZ and its language suggest that by informing the worthy on correct distinctions between objects and behaviours it aims to re-establish traditional hierarchical distinctions. This refers back to the allusion of *ya* as an order-making attribute. By properly exhibiting *ya* through prescriptive behaviours, a threatened social order could be re-established.

⁷¹ Brook 1999: 157.

⁷² Clunas 1991: 155.

⁷³ Li 2022.

Such a notion is suggested in ZWZ's passage on tableware:

Furthermore, drinking vessels and tableware must embody elegance and cleanliness, avoiding any association with crude commercial or butchering atmospheres.

又如酒槍皿合，皆須古雅精潔，不可毫涉市販屠沽氣。⁷⁴

Even by simply employing appropriate tableware can a true scholarly antiquarian combat the extravagance associated with the *nouveau riche* merchant class and the gentry-yet-merchants focused on material wealth.

Other passages that refer to restraint employ a parallel structure to indicate both that which is appropriate and should be embraced and often specific examples of against what true connoisseurs should restrain themselves. The passage on Buddhist cabinets exemplifies this mode of distinction. First the author presents suitable standards for Buddhist cabinets (i.e., those which exhibit imperial carved patterns or ancient craquelure lacquer patterns and cabinets made in Japan), then he explicitly presents specific contemporary examples (i.e., those with new lacquer finishes, octagonal or rounded-corner designs, or incorporating Jian kiln Buddha statues) that are vulgar. Due to their mention in the text, it is reasonable to assume that such examples existed and were collected during the late Ming. In this context, they were likely the gaudy domain of the *nouveau riche* and thus were to be avoided by true connoisseurs. It is proliferation of restraint against the attraction to embrace such gaudiness that is a main goal of the ZWZ, and seemingly doing so possesses a certain power of restoration, first on the level of aesthetic conservatism and then on a greater scale of social hierarchy.

The theme of restraint is also palpable in the text's introduction, particularly in the passage below.

'My fear is that as time passes and, as you said, the people of Wu⁷⁵ change in mind and artistry, then the knowledge of the source of these leisured pursuits and superfluous things will be lost to later generations. I make this compilation as a precaution against that'. True indeed! The phrase 'excise the elaborate, expel the extravagant' could well suffice as a foreword to this book.⁷⁶

The text indicates that at the time of the ZWZ's writing, a sociopolitical change was occurring among the literati in Suzhou. The landed literati class had become exceedingly engaged in leisured pursuits, such as collecting and appreciating

⁷⁴ ZWZ, 11.3.

⁷⁵ This refers to the literati class of Suzhou.

⁷⁶ Blishen 2019: 17.

decorative objects, which had obscured both the original intention of such pursuits and shared knowledge of what was actually worth pursuing. It indicates a rising tension between those purveyors of the original antiquity-collecting tradition and those who collected to the point of excess, thus rendering long-esteemed objects superfluous. Seemingly, the latter had become the majority, and the ZWZ's author saw it as his goal to push against such extravagance to restore the original tradition. The passage ends with a particularly concise aim of the text: 'excise the elaborate, expel the extravagant'. In this vein, the ZWZ pays particular attention to clarifying not just what is worthwhile to collect and pursue but also what is gaudy and should be avoided.

Craftsmanship

As a theme, craftsmanship combines codes that relate to object's patterns, dimensions, styles, shapes, and decorations and the methods with which an object is made. Across these codes, there is an underlying theme that they all follow certain aesthetic precedents that craftsmen follow in order to create an object that exhibits *guya*, whether based upon ancient Chinese traditions or following a later, established style. For example, the passage on platform table refers to a particular standardised style that is appropriate and examples of designs and shapes that are vulgar. In such passages, it is the object's following a proven model that is celebrated, not an artisan's attempt at establishing new norms. In fact, the latter practice is to vehemently be avoided.

However, in one particular passage from the ZWZ an actual craftsmanship technique is mentioned as yielding *guya*-worthy jade carvings.

The double-outline engraving technique, smooth, flowing, and delicate, exhibits hair-thin precision.

雙鉤碾法宛轉流動細入毫髮涉。⁷⁷

That the text is not clear regarding to which exact carving method the text refers is insignificant.⁷⁸ Noteworthy is that again there is an emphasis on established, precedented craftsmanship.

⁷⁷ ZWZ, 7.

⁷⁸ For more information on Shang, Zhou, and Han jade carving techniques, see Sax et al. 2004: 1414–1418.

An understanding of craftsmanship as a determining factor of *guya* can be glimpsed through Wang Guowei's⁷⁹ 王国维 (1877–1927) late 19th/early 20th century *guya shuo* 古雅說 aesthetic theory. Overall, Wang's theory aims to understand the aesthetic elements of traditional Chinese painting, poetry, and decorative arts objects.⁸⁰ He juxtaposes *guya shuo* (the refined) to *jingjie shuo* (the poetic state), with the former being used to qualify objects and the latter to qualify poetry and painting, arguing that traditional Chinese poetry and visual art aim to elicit two senses: *youmei* 優美 ('beauty') and *zhuangmei* 壯美 ('the sublime'). *Youmei* is exhibited through precise, realistic, smaller depictions of nature in fine detail, whereas *zhuangmei* is exhibited on a more macro scale, through slower pace and grandiose scenes. Overall, the two senses aim to express true feelings (*zhen ganqing* 真感情) through the depiction of true scenery or objects (*zhen jing wu* 真景物).

Conversely, Wang argues that *guya* is an aesthetic value independent of *youmei* and *zhuangmei*. Objects that exhibit *guya* do not express true feelings and do not depict true scenery or objects from nature. In fact, its value, unlike beauty and the sublime, cannot be found in nature. Rather, its value is contained within an established form. The object itself, not its motifs or patterns alone, represents the target of aesthetic appreciation. In his research on Wang Guowei's theory, Wang Keping further delineates five traits of *guya* as an aesthetic form.

1. It is an artistic creation by a learned person
2. Its production depends on personal effort rather than natural talent
3. Its appeal is not rooted in nature (in contrast to landscape painting or poetry)
4. It does not possess *youmei* or *zhuangmei*,
5. It is the subject of a posteriori judgment.⁸¹

The first two traits explicitly relate to craftsmanship. They suggest that it is an artisan's ability to study and learn a craft in order to transmit an established form that is important. In other words, *guya* cannot be expressed through an artisan's creation of a new style or pattern. This sense also relates to restraint, in that novel designs that deviate from established patterns should be avoided. The last trait is also relevant in the case of the objects described as *guya* in the

⁷⁹ Wang Guowei 王国维 was a well-known poet, scholar, and philosopher active in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He was a pioneer in 'introducing Western philosophy to China and is regarded as the founder of Chinese ideas about philosophical and literary-aesthetic modernity' (He 2014: 61).

⁸⁰ See Wang 2002: 38–56, Shi Wei 史伟 2024: 126–135.

⁸¹ Based upon Wang 2002: 51–53.

Chinese connoisseurship literature. Following accepted forms established in the past, they exhibit aesthetic value that is established after the fact. In contrast to a painting or piece of poetry (or an object following a new style created explicitly to please its eventual patron), which its creator intentionally produces for aesthetic value, the objects described as *guya* in the QMC and ZWZ are decorative arts objects, which were originally created for a functional purpose. This is particularly evident in Shang dynasty bronze vessels, which were made for ritual purposes, or scholarly objects such as inkstones or paper, which were created as implements for calligraphy writing.

Conclusions

Overall, this study aimed to elucidate the implicit meanings of the term *guya* in Chinese connoisseurship literature texts from the late Ming dynasty. In addition to background information on the genre's texts and its Northern Song predecessors, the methods with which judgment is placed in the treatises was also discussed.

The thematic analysis yielded two main themes: restraint and craftsmanship. Restraint relates to the goals of the late Ming dynasty connoisseurship texts to aid true connoisseurs in distinguishing themselves from the *nouveau riche* would-be aficionados of the time, who had become increasingly concerned with the consumption of vulgar material objects and behaviours. Such restraint not only aimed to help restore a precedented aesthetic tradition but also dissolving social boundaries. The theme of craftsmanship also relates to precedent, in that a certain set of existing patterns, colours, and designs, and the methods that yielded them, were worthy of *guya*. Along these lines, it was not the artist who crafted novelties with the intention to create an object of aesthetic value who was celebrated but rather the artisan, who in following established ways, simply purveyed an existing tradition. In this sense, objects that exhibit *guya* are the objects of a posteriori judgment in that they are only exalted after the fact, which relates to the Western tradition of decorative art appreciation.

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