

A New Territory to Chart in History: On the Production of a Cultural History of Imagery in China: A Hundred-Volume Work

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Abstract

The cognitive paradigm of the “homology between writing and imagery” has long existed in China. Such a cultural mode of “homology between writing and imagery” or even “homogeneity between writing and imagery” led to the creation of the grand system of Chinese civilization. Prior to the invention of characters, the civilization of imagery single-handedly undertook the task of recording history and symbolizing the external world. After the maturation of the writing system, it harmoniously coexisted with and complemented the writings. “Imagery is (defined by) its terseness,” while “writing (boasts of) its broadness.” Hence, the rich history and tradition of “images on the left and historical records on the right” came into being in Chinese culture. Only in the modern times did imagery’s social function decline. At present, studies on Chinese cultural history by focusing on writings have abounded. By comparison, those focusing on imagery as the vehicle of Chinese culture are still lacking. I have not seen works on culture of imagery in China with detailed materials and complete structure. There are few research articles in this regard, too. “As (one) intends to know the great Way, (one) must work on history first.” In the process of bringing about a great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, it is vital to revive Chinese culture first to present the whole world an unbroken system of civilization with tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of years. Such a visual or graphical historical heritage and cultural mode are different from the phonetic system in Euro-American countries, because they transcend the linguistic cognitive mode and logic and thus contributed to the making of the unique civilizational form, wisdom, and a distinctive cultural lineage of imagery in China.

Keywords: A cultural history of imagery in china; Chinese imagery; History of imagery

Introduction

The history of imagery is a grand history of human being’s evolution. A rich treasure of visual materials was accumulated in process of development and advancement that lasted for hundreds of thousands of years. It was not merely an unmediated record of humans’ past, but an artistic refinement and emotive sublimation in spiritual aesthetics. More significant, it was a set of cognitive or even value system with visuality being the criterion. It contained a series of operative rules ranging from subjective cognition to social control, which became an indispensable system of visual practice and production for humanity [1].

Obviously, it is not enough to explore culture of imagery only in terms of artistic aesthetics or the circumstance of art in social ecology. It has been a central topic of history of imagery to investigate how to transcend the horizon of art history under the traditional discourse on aesthetics and how to further understand the mode of social control and operative norm of culture beneath the veneer of aesthetics and spiritual emotions, which also constitute a fundamental task of practicing history of imagery. The visual representation and writing in A Cultural History of Imagery in China, a hundred-volume work, are a new experiment.

Historical Origin and Cultural Tradition of Imagery History in China

There are two ways for human beings to record history, symbolize the world, and disseminate civilizations: first, a lineal, temporal, and logical way of recording and disseminating by resorting to texts (speeches, languages, witting systems, and explanatory symbols, etc.); second, a planar, synchronic, and perceptual way of depicting and

disseminating with imagery (graphs, pictures, photos, and structural symbols, etc.) being the main vehicle. The textual way of recording has been the mainstream for five millennia as it undergoes full development and gain absolute respect. However, the graphic way, which preserves a great deal of original information for tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of years, remains unattended and unstudied in a scientific way that it deserves. The logical and causal relationship between image and text has yet to be effectively explored. In reality, this is a common problem faced shared by both Eastern and Western cultures.

China’s civilizational system of symbols, which was established based on the mode of the “homology between writing and imagery,” puts a special emphasis on “graph” and “image”—namely, the visualization of writing. This system both features the visual logic and rationality that are inherent in it and carries out the historical tradition of “images on the left and historical records on the right.” Texts and images harmoniously coexist and complement with each other.

Because of the historical continuity in “images on the left and historical records on the right,” ancient Chinese laid an emphasis on

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Received June 18, 2017; Accepted August 26, 2017; Published September 03, 2017

Citation: Congyao H (2017) A New Territory to Chart in History: On the Production of a Cultural History of Imagery in China: A Hundred-Volume Work. J Archit Eng Tech 6: 208. doi: [10.4172/2168-9717.1000208](https://doi.org/10.4172/2168-9717.1000208)

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imagery as much as on text. Zheng Qiao of the Song Dynasty made a brilliant analysis in his *Tongzhi lue* (Brief Great Annals), "Seeing the writings but not the graphs (is like) hearing the sound without seeing its shape; seeing the graphs but not the writings (is like) seeing the person without hearing his/her speeches. Imagery is (defined by) its terseness, while writing (boasts of) its broadness. Resorting to imagery (is) to find an easy way, whereas resorting the writings (is) to find a difficult way. In the ancient times, scholars had a great way of studying by positioning images on the left and books on the right. Thus, it was easy for people to study, and it was easy for (those who) studied to excel. They proceeded to (study) with complete certainty (as if they) were holding the contracts. Scholars of later generations abandoned graphs and resorted exclusively to writings to prioritize words and speeches. Therefore, it was hard for people to study, and it was hard for (those who) studied to excel. Even though (one) had countless volumes of books bearing in his/her mind, (s/he) would be at a loss when doing things in the real world [2]." He particularly pointed, "If (one) wants to fulfill all task in the world, (s/he) can't do without imagery."

Mr. Xu Kang also mentions the historical age in ancient China when writings and images coexisted in *Qianchen mengying lu* (Account of the Past and the Shadow of the Dream), "I argue that ancient people put an equal emphasis on imagery and text. All writings were accompanied by images. "Yiwen zhi - Lunyu jia" (Chronicle of Arts and Literature-School of the Analects) in *Hanshu* (Book of Han) had two volumes of "Kongzi turen tufa" (Images of Confucius's Disciples), which was about portraits of Confucius' students. The stone inscriptions of seventy-two disciples are generally the offshoot of this tradition. *Bingshu lue* (Brief Books of War) contained books of war of different schools with illustrations. ... Tao Qian of the Jin Dynasty composed a poem entitled "Liuguan Shanhai tu" (Browsing Pictures of Mountains and Oceans). Therefore, all ancient books were attached with pictures [3]." A large quantity of materials indicate that China was among the earliest countries where the dissemination of images rose to prominence. Moreover, China laid the same emphasis on graphic dissemination as that on the textual one. Cultural phenomenon is an outgrowth of multiple interplay of creations of a nation as a whole, accumulation of history, transcultural exchange, and economic situations. This is particularly true to culture of imagery, which depended heavily on the advancement of material technologies. The uniqueness of Chinese culture, as Rao Zongyi, master of national scholarship and professor at Hong Kong University, has indicated in his preface to *Zhonghua tuxiang wenhua shi* (History of Culture of Image in China), "Such visual and imagery historical heritage and civilizational form are different from the phonetic cultural system in western countries in Europe and the U. S. It is a visual cognitive mode and logic that transcend languages. It contributes to the construction of the peculiar civilizational form and wisdom of Chinese culture, and it was never interrupted [4]." A unique cultural phenomenon of "imagery in China" hence comes into existence. Images and culture of imagery in China have long had their roots in daily life, productive labor, and spiritual work. Although they gained momentum and declined alternately, they were not disrupted. Their theoretical system gradually perfected so as to affect the establishment of the system of cognitive thoughts in the world. For example, ancient Chinese scientists constructed the theories of culture of imagery, which were so consistent and scientific that no scientists in other places in the world had accomplished. For instance, the theory of optical imaging proposed by Mozi of the Warring States

in his *Mojing* (Classic of Mo)¹ was akin to theoretical iconography and laid a foundation to modern-day optics and digital imaging. Mengxi bitan (Dream Pool Essays)² of Shen Kuo of the Song Dynasty was like "social iconography" to illustrate imagery and imaging in a wider social context. Zheng Qiao's "Tupu lue-suoxiang" (Brief Collections of Illustrations-Searching for Images)³ was similar to "applied iconography" with clear and thorough interpretations. Its analyses of the application were eye-opening and enlightening. *Jingjing lingchi* (Humble Opinions on the Reflection of the Object on the Mirror)⁴ of Zheng Fuguang was of particular practical use and an exemplary work of engineering. The nation with such profound heritage of culture of imagery is matchless and peerless in the whole world.

Culture of "imagery in China" has been an integral part of Chinese culture and an indispensable element in China's history of civilization. It enriches and complements China's cultural and intellectual history. It constitutes solid evidence of the diversity of cultural forms and simplicity of ideology in China. In reality, "Studying China's cultural history of imagery is like assembling a cultural facial makeup of Chinese culture to restore lifestyles with a history of tens of thousands of years and to revive mental experiences, conception, and life forms that last tens of thousands of years. It sheds light on rich humanism, emotion, and spirits inherent in Chinese culture."⁵ It is thus of great academic values in social history, intellectual history, anthropology, and cultural studies.

Presently, studies on China's cultural history with an emphasis on text have been fruitful, but no specialized work about "cultural history of imagery in China" has come out. I have not seen works on culture of imagery in China with detailed materials and complete structures.

¹Mozi's *Classic of Mo*, based on rectilinear propagation of light that human beings had long known, for the first time explored the relationship between light and objects. *Classic of Mo* also introduced imaging of plane mirror and the rules of concave mirror and convex mirror imaging. Mozi not only systematically studied and imparted knowledge of geometrical optics to draw insightful viewpoints and conclusions, but also employed methods such as observation, analysis, and scientific experiment in his study and teaching. Mozi proposed eight theories of optics: "[As] the shadow doesn't move, the result doesn't change," "[When] an object has two shadows, that means two mirrors are being used;" "The size of the shadow results from the distance of light;" "The shadow is reversed [because of] the focus and the shadow when light converges. This is the theory of focus;" "The shadow is what light illuminates a person. If light is reflected, it is straight like an arrow. As it illuminates the low place, it reflects to the high place, and vice versa. Hence, inverted images come into being. [Using] feet to cover light from the low position, the shadow reflected is on the high position. [Using] head to cover light from the high position, the shadow reflected is on the lower position. When a small hole is positioned in near or distant place from an object and light illuminates it, it reflects on the wall, and the inverted image is on the screen." They were the earliest scientific statements about optics in the world.

²Produced approximately between 1086 and 1093, *Dream Pool Essays*, Shen Kuo's sketchbook-style work, gave an account of Shen Kuo's experiences in his whole life. It was an encyclopedic work with rich academic and historical values. It was particularly famous for its values of science and technology. One third of its entries were related to natural science, including astronomy, mathematics, geology, geography, meteorology, physics, chemistry, biology, agronomy, pharmacy, printing, mechanics, irrigation, architecture, mining, and so forth. Scientific accomplishments recorded in this book represented the highest level in the world of the day.

³Zheng Qiao in *Brief General Annals-Brief Collections of Illustrations-Searching for Images* illustrated the function of the study on imagery on understanding things. Zheng Qiao's analyses were a summary of the function of imagery as the knowledge in ancient China. Zheng Qiao's theory of imagery and knowledge laid a foundation for the emergence of graphic scientific works in late generations.

⁴*Humble Opinions on the Reflection of the Object on the Mirror* written by Zheng Fuguang was a work of optics in the first of nineteenth century in China. It was also a relatively complete work of optics. It had rich and systematic contents, making it a significant work to study scientific thoughts on imagery in the late imperial times.

⁵Rao Zongyi, "Xu."

There are few research articles in this regard, too. For a long time, an absence of understanding of the academic, historical, cultural, and ideological values of Chinese culture of imagery in academia and the lack of interest of the state and concerned institutions in investing in its studies lead to the scattering of some research materials of utmost academic values in society or their outflow to foreign countries. More are buried into heaps of old books and archives. As a consequence, systematical and representative researches are still lacking until now.

The Current Situation and Topics of Studies on Culture Imagery in China

In China, “history of imagery” is obviously a new concept, compared with traditional historical studies. As a newly fashioned method of studying history, the academia in China knows little about this discipline, and research materials are inadequate in number and narrow in scope. As a new sub-discipline of history, the academia has little information about its nature, objects of study, scope and tasks of study, and particularly the research method of iconography. It is weak in theoretical foundation and methodology.

China boasts of a long and rich history of textual archives. The traditional historical studies based on textual archives have fully developed. Because of textual archives’ manifest character of “shaping and molding culture,” specialists of traditional historical studies dominate today’s academia, and therefore textual archives excise the hegemony to monopolize the academic circle. This is particularly true to universities and research institutions with time-honored programs of traditional disciplines. On the one hand, specialists and scholars of traditional disciplines possess a sense of superiority, self-pride, and sense of achievement. On the other hand, new disciplines are doubted and suppressed. New research methods come under critical scrutiny or undergo harsh criticism. Such situations recur both in old times and at present, both in China and abroad. That is happening today, and will be happening in the future.

Therefore, it is no easy to propose “history of imagery,” not to speak of having it accepted. It is thus conceivable how difficult it is to conduct researches into cultural studies on imagery on its basis. We grope our way in writing *A Cultural History of Imagery in China* with much difficulty, because of both the immaturity and weakness of theories of imagery and exclusion and rejection it suffers in such a hostile academic atmosphere. Some authoritative figures of traditional historical studies particularly lack an understanding of the study on history of imagery and fail to locate their appropriate identities and positions in academia. More seriously, they lack self-discipline so that they discriminate against and treat unfairly studies on history of imagery and the disciplinary paradigm of history of imagery. Hence, the road of studies on history of imagery is excruciatingly winding, and the process is especially painful. In light of this, some open-minded scholars have called for fairness and tolerance of history researchers whose focus is textual archives and respect to works of history researchers concentrating on history of imagery. Thus, scholars of traditional historical studies could clarify their own identities, understand their appropriate academic positions, and enable the gradual development of history of imagery to tolerate and forgive confusions and mistakes created by imagery historians in the process of experiments and constructing a new theoretical system.

Beyond China, there exist a large number of works on studies on imagery, such as Erwin Panofsky’s *Studies in Iconology and Meaning in the Visual Arts*, E. H. Gombrich’s *The Image and the Eye and The Story of Art*, Heinrich Wölfflin’s *Principles of Art History*, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s *Laocoon*, Robert Layton’s *The Anthropology*

of Art, W. J. T. Mitchell’s *Image Science and Picture Theory*, Peter Burke’s *Eyewitnessing*, Martine Joly’s *L’image et les Signes*, Jacques Aumont’s *L’image*, Rudolf Arnheim’s *Art and Visual Perception*, and my *Tuxiang: yizhong hou fuhaoxue de zai faxian (Image: A Post-symbol Rediscovery)*, *Tuxiang chuanbo xue (Study on Dissemination of Images)*, and *Tuxiang: zhuti yu goucheng (Image: Subjects and Constitution)*. Among them, the most influential one is Erwin Panofsky’s *Studies in Iconology*, in which he proposes the widely known three levels of analysis of image—namely, pre-iconography (primary or natural), iconographic analysis (secondary or conventional), and iconological analysis (intrinsic meanings or contents). Compared with Gombrich’s studies on image that are akin to aesthetic analysis of artistic images and Wölfflin’s research that leans toward studies on styles and forms of visual works, Panofsky’s scholarship is closer to the essence of studies on imagery.

The British historian Peter Burke’s *Eyewitnessing* is one of the well-known works to blend studies on imagery and historical research. Peter Burke is a famous new cultural historian of our times. Throughout his life, he devotes himself to the exploration of new realms of cultural history. With his broad vision and clear mind, he makes analysis of visual and media materials including handicraft works, paintings, sculptures, films, television, and print advertisements. His focus is not images per se, but how to interpret them to understand opportunities and crises in history.

In China at present, theories and methods of using images to represent history have not been widely accepted as in Western countries such as Britain and France. History of imagery has not featured as a vital part of the realm of historical studies. Recently, it has become popular inside the circle of historians to study images in history to expand the source of historical materials. In other words, that is a revival of a longstanding tradition of “images on the left and historical records on the right” in China. For example, *Tulu congkan (Collections of Images)*, a high-profile product of historical research of Qing published a few years ago, is devoted to investigating the relationship between history and images. It constitutes a part of the grand project of compiling Qing history that has gained enormous support of the state. The newly compiled Qing history consists of five portions, “general chronicles,” “systems and institutions,” “biographies,” “historical tables,” and “images.” The first dozen collections published under *Collections of Images* included works of painters accompanying the British missions to China, images of commercial documents, geographical images, and old photos, etc. In addition, some other related theses include Professor Yang Nianqun’s discussion of historical meanings of images in his *Xin shixue (New History)* and Professor Chen Zhongdan’s exploration of the relationship between images and history in “*Tuxiang zhengshi gongyong qianyi*” (*A Preliminary Analysis of the Use Images to Support Historical Studies*) and other articles.

Since 2011, the Office of Studies on Cultural History of the Chinese Academy of Social Science edits and publishes the academic series, *Xingxiang shixue yanjiu (Studies on History of Xingxiang)*. Its methods, ways of research, and choice of research materials present a prototype of studying history of imagery. In the preface to this series, Mr. Sun Xiao clarifies what “history of xingxiang” is, what it does, and how it does. He argues, “History of xingxiang is a scholarship to use xing (form) and xiang (symbol) as historical materials to study history,” and “to be more specific, it is a new mode of studying history by using all existing objects such as cave paintings, statues, inscriptions, utensils, calligraphies, paintings, and the attire as the evidence, which could be a new method since Wang Guowei proposed the method of dual evidence

(traditional archives and archeological findings) and the method of triple evidence (oral).” He further explains, “In terms of historical studies, what we call “history of xingxiang” differs from both image analysis in art history that focuses on semiotics and hermeneutics and general works on images in historical studies. In addition, it is different from “using images as historical evidence” that rises to prominence since the 1980s. In other words, it does not take images in history as the sole evidence in historical studies, but makes comprehensive analyses of the realm of production, means of dissemination, and social functions of images, based on which imagery is linked to traditional archives and oral means of transmission to construct a complete chain of evidence to delineate the basic contour of the progress of Chinese culture and shed light on the reality hidden behind imagery in history. Hence, “history of xingxiang” is, on the one hand, not limited to the analysis of imagery itself and its historical significance. On the other hand, it transcends the purview of traditional cultural history. Therefore, it is both inclusive and extensive.”⁶

In the past few years, studies on history in image collections in China bear fruits. Compared with traditional textual historical studies, however, they are still inchoate in their theory and practice. On the basis of “Studies on Journalism History in Images in Modern China (1840-1919),” a project supported by the National Social Science Foundation in 2007, I experiment with exploring history of imagery and studying textual construction by using news images as historical materials. I have published the six-volume *Zhongguo jindai tuxiang xinwenshi: 1840-1919* (History of Images in the Press in Modern China, 1840-1919),⁷ which won the first-rank prize in book of the “Fourth Excellent Publications Award” and the second-rank prize of the “Seventh Award of Scientific Studies in Higher-education Institutions (Humanities and Social Sciences).” “Studies on the History of the Dissemination of News in Image,” a 2011 project funded by the National Social Science Foundation, further positions graphic historical materials at the center to complete the ten-volume *Zhongguo xiandai tuxiang xinwen shi: 1919-1949* (History of Journalism in Image in Modern China: 1919-1949).⁸ The book features case studies of history of imagery and represents the transition of academic discipline from history of image collections (tulu) to that of imagery (tuxiang). Similar to those of traditional textual historical studies, the purposes of history of images or imagery is not only to restore the historical facts for readers to read, but also reconstruct the “original historical milieu” with images for readers to see. Our choice of historical images and textual archives is based on historical realities so that the comprehensive studies on images and texts are compatible with the ecology of “original historical milieu.” Given most researchers’ insufficient trainings in history of imagery at present, it is sometimes hard to make appropriate choices.

Based on my experience in constructing history of imagery, I come up with the contour of the 100-volume *Zhongguo tuxiang wenhua shi* (A Cultural History of Imagery in China). In a sense, of A Cultural History of Imagery in China, an entirely original and scientific work, is made without any reference. I have to respect the history by meticulously work on it and explore the topic as I learn them.

In 2004, I have already begun to write the 100-volume A Cultural

⁶Sun Xiao, “Qianyan” (Preface), in *Xingxiang shixue yanjiu* (Studies on history of xingxiang) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2012).

⁷My *History of Images in the Press in Modern China, 1840-1919* has been published by *Nanjing daxue chubanshe* (the Nanjing University Press) in January 2012. It has been translated by the University of Tokyo Press and will be published soon.

⁸The ten-volume *History of Journalism in Image in Modern China: 1919-1949* will be published by the Nanjing University Press soon.

History of Imagery in China in hopes that the matchless cultural values and charm of images in China could be presented to the world more clearly, vividly, and completely with the collective wisdom and effort of Chinese scholars to further push for the studies on “history in images” in China.

I have invited over one hundred accomplished experts and scholars specialized in images and iconography from mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan to study images in greater China since the time immemorial to 1949 from iconographical angles. On the one hand, we emphasize the autonomy of images by not treating images as the point of departure of language or discussing the relationship between images and languages. Rather, we focus on the descriptions, analyses, and interpretations of images to decode the formative rules of the “meanings” and socializing signification of “images in China” by analyzing their construction. On the other hand, we stress “culture” in the broadest sense to reconsider the value of images from the angle of human beings’ civilizations, rather than revisiting issues regarding technicality, style, and aesthetics raised by history of fine arts and art history or identifying, investigating, and expounding those images under view of studies of literature and arts. A large number of non-artistic images drawn from everyday life in the development history of Chinese nation, which have been wittingly or unwittingly ignored by scholars and researchers of culture, but were extensively used in social life, are in great need of research. They not only demonstrate the expansiveness and profundity of China’s culture of imagery, but also give prominence to their value in cultural history.

Such a novel exploration and practical construction is intended to comprehensively and massively sort out various images produced in the development of Chinese nation. It is also an attempt to, by means of recognizing the visual impression of “imagery in China,” allow for a thorough understanding of complex cultural realms in different historical ages. The method of writing this book is an inter-disciplinary one to make an in-depth analysis of the images’ multiple values and the historical, cultural, economic, political, and social backgrounds of their creation, to probe into their functions in disseminating culture, promoting social progress, civilizing human behaviors, and enhancing scientific modes of thinking, and to seek to build up theories and methods of studying the system of China’s visual civilization and culture of imagery in China.

Apart from “Zonglun” (General Thesis) as an independent volume, A Cultural History of Imagery in China is divided into two parts-history by dynasties and history of genres (topics)-to study images of different time periods, types, topics, and levels (artistic, non-artistic, planar, three-dimensional, static, dynamic, representational, and expressional) between the time immemorial and 1949 (the time limit of images of some genres is postponed) and images’ formative mechanisms, civilization patterns, and cultural meanings. Hence, we can sketch the makeup of China’s national cultural history with clear and simple brush strokes and illustrate the main line of Chinese visual civilization. The part of dynastic history features fifteen volumes, including Volume of the Primitive Period, Volume of the Pre-Qin Times, Volume of Qin and Han, Volume of Wei, Jin, and the Southern and Northern Dynasties, Volume of Sui, Tang, and the Five Dynasties, Volume of Song, Volume of Yuan, Volume of Ming, Volume of Qing, and Volume of Republican China. The part of history of genres (topics) consists of over eighty volumes such as Volume of Cave Painting, Volume of Totem, Volume of Seal Cutting, Volume of Water Ink, Volume of Text, Volume of Buddhist Image, Volume of Daoism, Volume of Fengshui, Volume of Medicine, Volume of

Architecture, Volume of Geography, Volume of Thangka, Volume of Puppet, Volume of Porcelain Painting, Volume of Illustration, Volume of Photograph, Volume of Motion Picture, Volume of Garden, Volume of Confucianism, Volume of Gentry, Volume of Capital City, Volume of Mountain and River, Volume of Bronze Mirror, Volume of Ancient Que-Tower, Volume of Wood Block Printing, Volume of New Year Painting, Volume of Lacquer Painting, Volume of Cartoon, Volume of Decorative Pattern, Volume of Pictorial, Volume of Inscription, Volume of Costume, Volume of Jade Ware, Volume of Clay Sculpture, Volume of Eaves Tile, Volume of Screen, Volume of Filial Piety, Volume of Dragon and Phoenix, Volume of Grotto, Volume of Mural Painting, Volume of Painting and Dyeing, Volume of Graphic Design, Volume of Women's Image, Volume of Furniture, Volume of Beijing Opera Face Makeup, Volume of Bas-relief in Han Stone Tombs, and Volume of Graphic Science, with which we attempt to address and cover the boundaries and realms of imagery in China in a more complete and multi-layered way.

The foci of analyses of images in different historical periods shift. For example, those of primitive society are caving painting, murals in caves, patterns on pottery wares, and inscribed symbols on turtle shells and animal bones; those of pre-Qin society are inscribed texts and images on metal utensils; those of Qin, Han, Wei, Jin, the Southern and Northern Dynasties, Sui, Tang, the Five Dynasties, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing are paintings, sculptures, architecture, calligraphy, handicrafts, daily-use wares, and so forth; those of late Qing and the Republican times are foreign-style paintings and photography, which were graphic means and technologies of communication introduced from abroad. On the basis of such researches, we also study the field of history, such as living environments (relics), articles used in day-to-day life, means of production, utensils that remain to this day, totem patterns, fragmented documents in relics, religious rituals, architectural paradigms, inscriptions for keeping records of events, hand-drawn patterns, pictograms, paintings of utensils, images of fine arts, photographic images, and digitized images, in various periods in China.

Such a type of writing in a visual and graphic way has borne fruit. At present, the first part of A Cultural History of Imagery in China with forty volumes has been published in Beijing. This series are highlighted as the key publishing project in the twelfth five-year plan of the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television. The publications of its second and third phases are being scheduled.

Conclusion

In his "Preface" to A Cultural History of Imagery in China, Professor Rao Zongyi states, "In a speech I delivered a decade ago at Peking University, I predicted that the twenty-first century must be an era of cultural revival in China. Now, a lot of friends are talking about the Chinese Dream. For decades, I also have a dream, which is the one of reviving Chinese culture. With a dream, one has an ideal. As we make our effort to achieve our dreams, human beings will be making progress."⁹

In the midst of intense competitions of cultures in the world and in a time of a globalized economy and regional cultural diversification, "it is of vital importance to solve such problems as: from what angles to understand culture, with what attitude to treat culture, and at what direction to pursue the prosperity of culture." (Quoted from Yun Shan)

If a nation's culture homeland is lost, the nation's spirit would become homeless. If a nation's culture homeland is broken, the nation would become dispirited. Although China cherishes a long history of imagery and boasts of a broad and profound culture of imagery, we do not have a lot to present to the whole world and ourselves. The world and we ourselves do not know much about them. The writing and research about A Cultural History of Imagery in China are of enormous significance both in theory and in practice. We may even recognize such a work as a "salvage" research project to genuinely rebuild the culture homeland (Figure 1).

As we all know, the study on history of imagery should transcend the mere textual descriptions and records. It is imperative to represent and analyze the "original" images and to clarify the relationship between space and society by restoring the multi-layered and all-directional historical "context." This is a new realm of research in dire need of exploration. The scope of this project is beyond imagination. Yet, we deeply understand that the great resurgence of Chinese culture is, first of all, predicated upon the awakening, self-strengthening, and self-confidence of our national culture. Second, it entails every bit of effort made by scholars of culture, and we are obliged make silent contributions and adopt down-to-earth approaches to scientifically organize and represent the broad, profound, and time-honored Chinese culture. Therefore, we intellectuals should have a self-consciousness of culture and a sense of responsibility-namely, dream, will to act, and courage. We need to have the courage and commitment to "establishing the heart for Heaven and Earth, pursuing livelihood for the people, resuming the sage's lost scholarship, and ensuring peace and security for generations to come."

As its editor-in-chief, I could neither blow my own horn, nor inappropriately devalue the quality of A Cultural History of Imagery in China, because it is a collective accomplishment of an academic body of over one hundred specialists. It is up to readers to make comments. Readers are the god, who passes right judgements.

Here, it is of necessity to share Mr. Rao Zongyi's expectation. Mr. Rao says, "This series constitute the first attempt made by Chinese scholars to comprehensively and massively organize and clarify various images in the history of Chinese nation. A recognition of the visual impression of "imagery in China" allows for a keen understanding of complex cultural realms in different historical ages. They adopt interdisciplinary approaches to make in-depth analyses of the multiple values of images and the historical, social, and political contexts, in which they were produced. They analyze significant functions of images to disseminate culture and facilitate social progress. They

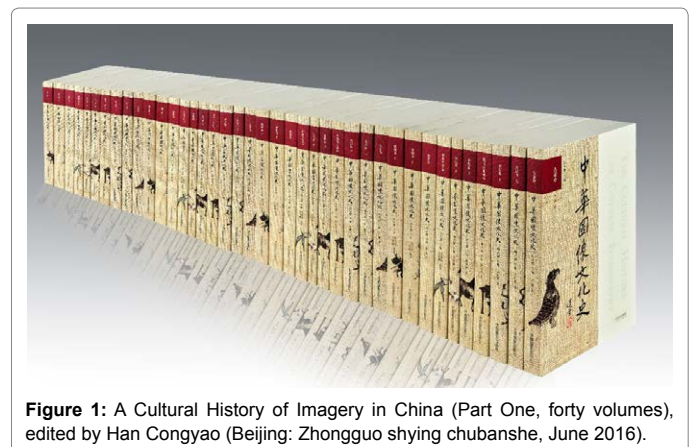


Figure 1: A Cultural History of Imagery in China (Part One, forty volumes), edited by Han Congyao (Beijing: Zhongguo shying chubanshe, June 2016).

⁹Rao Zongyi, "Xu."

also explore and establish theories and methods of studying China's visual civilizational system and culture of imagery in China." Mr. Rao wishes "This book may take on the same significance as that of Joseph Needham's Science and Civilisation in China.

Thus, as the editor-in-chief of the hundred-volume A Cultural History of Imagery in China, I am feeling the mounting pressure.

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