

## Rituals Hidden in Utensils

### -- Analysis of the Application of Utensils in Moral Construction Nowadays

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**Abstract:** As a special way of ideological education in China, “Rituals hidden in utensils” has existed for thousands of years. It refers to the externalization of specific political and moral ideas to specific utensils, and then the utensils are used individually to perform similar education usage to “people teach others”. As a way of education, “Rituals hidden in utensils” has obvious advantages as well as obvious limitations. How to promote the modernity of “Rituals hidden in utensils” based on the principle of “sublation”, and to assist in the current moral construction is a topic worthy of study.

### 1. Introduction

There have always been many problems in the field of morality in our country, such as lack of integrity, indifference, malicious bad reviews, etc. To this day, apart from legal intervention, there is no good way to solve these problems. How to solve current moral problems with moral methods is a subject that ethics researchers must face. Traditional Chinese society advocates “ruling the country by virtue” and has its own unique way of moral construction. It can be tried to seek wisdom from the ancients. As a unique educational method of “teaching people with objects” that has existed for thousands of years, “Rituals hidden in utensils” is the crystallization of the wisdom of the ancients in moral construction. How does it specifically operate? What are the requirements? How and can it be applied to the current moral construction? This is the main issue to be addressed in this paper.

### 2. The Concept and Analysis of Advantages and Disadvantages of “Rituals Hidden in Utensils”

#### 2.1 Concept

The term “Rituals hidden in utensils” comes from *Zuo Zhuan*, which refers to the externalization of specific moral or political thoughts, that is, “rituals” into bronze ritual vessels and jade ritual vessels through clever design. These ritual instruments are used to remind and warn people to pay attention to their own status and to keep themselves safe in order to maintain the rule of the emperor and the noble class. Although “ritual” can be understood as etiquette, these etiquettes initially showed obvious political inclination, stipulating that noble of different levels can only use specific ritual vessels and life utensils. The “utensil” is mainly bronze ware, which “becomes an important material symbol of the social hierarchy system” when it came out firstly [1]. Therefore, the original “Rituals hidden in utensils” was mainly a way of supplementing political rule. However, with the changes of society, the content and form have changed. The types of “utensils” are increasing day by day, including jade, gold and silverware, lacquerware, sedan clothes, and even some ordinary daily necessities. In addition to political thoughts, “rituals” also have a large number of moral thoughts, religious thoughts, and outlook on life. In addition to the existing inscriptions, volume, and quantity, the method of “hiding” also includes the colors, materials, patterns, and specific shapes of the utensils [4].

#### 2.2 Advantages and Limitations

As a way of education, “Rituals hidden in utensils” started in the Shang and Zhou Dynasties and has continued till now, which shows that it has advantages in existence, but it has been an auxiliary way of education all the time. However, it cannot

cannot replace “teaching others by others”, which shows that it has obvious limitations.

The main advantages of “Rituals hidden in utensils” include: First, it saves a lot of manpower and material resources; second, it is more effective than “people teach others” on specific occasions; third, it guides people to self-reflection and cultivates people's self-discipline ability [2]. Saving manpower and material resources means that once a certain kind of utensils is fixedly carrying a certain kind of thought, it will continue to function for a long time without human intervention. In certain occasions and situations, some utensils have better educational effects on the audience than “people teach others”. For example, a kind of fairness cup was popular on the wine table in the Qing Dynasty. If the drinker wants to pour more, the wine will flow out quickly. This reminds the drinker to be fair and not to cheat. The effect is far greater than directly reminding the drinker [3]. Guiding people to reflect means that because the utensils can't speak, people must take the initiative to perceive the truth, and the truth that this actively perceives is more recognized by the people than the truth directly preached by others, and it is easier to form moral consciousness and self-discipline. Because of the above-mentioned advantages, as a special way of education, the “Rituals hidden in utensils” can continue to this day.

But its limitations are also very obvious: First, not all “rituals” can be hidden in the utensils; second, there are certain requirements for the object; third, it is inflexible. Thoughts externalized in utensils are generally stable, well-known and suitable for externalized ideas, such as some important political ideas, moral ideas, religious ideas, etc. In fact, the utensil itself does not produce any new thoughts. It only awakens the existing thoughts in people's hearts. This determines that not all thoughts can “hide rituals in the utensils”. Therefore, the thoughts that traditional society uses utensils to enlighten are limited. “There are certain requirements for the object” means that one of the conditions of this kind of education is that the object must have relevant knowledge reserves, life experience, etc., otherwise the artifact education may have no effect. “Inflexible” means that because utensils can only function effectively in a specific environment, and the ideas carried by a kind of utensils are often fixed, the “Rituals hidden in utensils” lack flexibility as a way of enlightenment. Due to the above-mentioned limitations, it is impossible to become the mainstream way of enlightenment, let alone replace “humans teach humans”.

### **3. The Modernity Transformation of “Rituals Hidden in Utensils”**

As an indoctrination method that began in Shang and Zhou Dynasties and was originally used to maintain the rule of the monarch, “Rituals hidden in utensils” have a large number of factors that are not suitable for direct application in current moral construction, regardless of content, purpose, form, or types of utensils. It is necessary to carry out modernity transformation and innovative development in accordance with the specific requirements of socialist moral construction, and eliminate its dross and pass on its essence.

#### **3.1 Transformation from Traditional Political Education to Modern Moral Education**

The “Rituals hidden in utensils” is intended to be politically enlightened and has obvious political purpose, mainly serving the rule of the monarch and emperor. If people want to apply “Rituals hidden in utensils” to the current moral construction, it is needful to eliminate the feudal dross and realize the transformation from “traditional political enlightenment” to “modern moral education”.

#### **3.2 The Transformation of Purpose and Content**

The original purpose of “Rituals hidden in utensils” was to maintain the rule of the Emperor Zhou and the nobles by utensils with rituals. Later, the era changed and the political purpose was no longer the only one, but propagating class differences and maintaining class rule were still the main task. Therefore, the traditional society's “Rituals hidden in utensils” has a strong feudal color in its

purpose, but to be applied to the current social construction, it must abandon this purpose and determine specific goals according to specific needs, such as participating in society. The construction of ethics and morality will help the great revival of the Chinese nation [5]. The content also needs to be transformed. It is necessary to transform the political ideology of stratification and the feudal ethics of ethics into the current social development needs, such as ethics, rule awareness, revolutionary spirit, patriotism, and so on.

### **3.3 Types of Utensils and Transformation of “Forms of Hiding”**

As the carrier of “ritual”, the choice of utensils is very important. In the traditional society, the utensils used to carry thoughts mainly include bronze wares, jade ritual wares, gold and silver vessels, ceramics, vehicles and clothing, furniture and architecture, as well as painting and calligraphy works, etc., but many of these utensils are no longer suitable for carrying current moral thoughts. What we need to do is to select the most suitable utensils to carry the current moral thoughts among the various kinds of utensils, and design the utensils specifically when necessary.

In short, with regard to “Rituals hidden in utensils”, our inheritance is mainly a kind of educational ideas and methods, and specific details must be based on the specific educational tasks of the current society to make improvements and innovations that keep pace with the times.

## **4. Conditions for the Practical Application of “Rituals Hidden in Utensils”**

The modernity of traditional society's “Rituals hidden in utensils” needs to solve some specific problems before it can be put into practice. In other words, it must meet certain conditions if it is to be applied to the current social moral construction. The following will discuss the above issues in conjunction with the ongoing Chinese moral construction.

### **4.1 Clarify the Object of Education**

To successfully utensil moral education through utensils, it is necessary to clarify the general situation of the educated object and avoid the embarrassing situation of “cast pearls before swine”. People of different occupations have different moral requirements. People of different ages have different levels of moral cognition. People with different cultural literacy are also different in their sensitivity to the moral thoughts contained in utensils. Therefore, they must pass the utensils. To effectively utensil moral education, we must teach students in accordance with their aptitude. For example, the presupposed educational object is college students, so the selection and design of utensils and the way in which moral thinking is embodied must conform to the cognitive level and cognitive ability of these college students, and cannot be the same standard as those of primary and middle school students.

### **4.2 Choose Moral Thoughts Suitable for Externalization**

To use the method of “Rituals hidden in utensils” to assist moral construction, it is also necessary to determine what kind of current moral thoughts are suitable for externalizing artifacts. First of all, these moral ideas should be as well known to people as possible. If a person has no knowledge of these moral thoughts in his heart, it is difficult for the utensils to play an educational role [6]. For example, when we see a statue of Lei Feng, we generally associate it subconsciously of Lei Feng's deeds of helping others, and then the idea of “learning from Lei Feng”, but it is difficult for an American or British person to have such an association, because their brains There is no relevant cognition in China. Secondly, these moral thoughts can be expressed simply and clearly through utensils. If it is too complicated, it will be difficult. Finally, these moral thoughts must be propagated and expressed through utensils. The current moral decline or moral corruption in China that everyone criticizes does not actually occur in all moral fields. Family morality is generally good, and public morality is generally poor. Relatively speaking, one can try to use “Rituals hidden in utensils” in public moral education. In short, not all moral thoughts are suitable for externalization in utensils, but should be determined according to specific needs and conditions.

### **4.3 Inherit and Innovate the Externalized Form of Moral Thought**

It is very important to find a suitable form of externalization of thought. For example, when some people see the pattern of plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum, they often think of the character of a gentleman. In this case, the character of gentleman was externalized into the pattern of plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum, and this connection still exists between the two to this day. If the moral thoughts we want to propagate have such a perfect form of externalization, then the pressure of moral education will be much reduced. On this issue, we must not only inherit, but also innovate [7]. Inheritance refers to learning and drawing on the externalized forms of thought in the traditional society, such as specific types of utensils, combination of utensils, number and materials of utensils, patterns and characters, etc. In fact, these externalized forms still exist in certain fields. Innovation refers to exploring new forms of externalization based on the needs of social development and moral education. In life, there are many such innovations, such as various themed sculptures and theme parks, various pendants, various placards, and railings of railway stations. Of course, innovation is endless, and the externalized form of moral thinking is by no means limited to this.

#### **4.4 Utensil Design**

There is often a stable relationship between specific utensils and specific moral ideas, so it is not easy for some new moral ideas to attach to existing utensils [8]. This requires us to design utensils based on specific moral thoughts. This design includes the combination of new utensils with existing externalized forms of thought, as well as the combination of new utensils with new externalized forms. For example, the public tableware of some colleges and universities is printed with the words “Eat-It-All Action”. This is the combination of new utensils and traditional forms of externalization, which is intended to remind students to cherish food and not waste it. For another example, in order to prevent people from parking on both sides of the main road, traffic police often put some red and yellow plastic buckets on the side of the road, with no-stop signs on them, to remind the driver that this is a no-stop zone, which is a brand-new design. In short, in order to use “Rituals hidden in utensils” in the current moral construction, we must design some new utensils. When designing, we must not only integrate moral thoughts, but also consider externalized forms, and also take into account the educational objects.

### **5. Specific Case Analysis of the Practical Application of “Rituals Hidden in Utensils”**

“Rituals hidden in utensils” still plays a specific role in many occasions in new forms. The following uses the common “guide railings” in stations to analyze the working principle and effect of “utensils' education”.

Guide railings are utensils that have only appeared in recent years and are used on a large scale. They are often used in station ticket halls and ticket halls. Before this kind of artifacts appeared, the ticket hall of the railway station was very chaotic. Although there were staff commanding them, the phenomenon of queue jumping was still very serious. Similarly, the process of queuing up one by one to get on the bus is also very crowded, and if there is a slight difference, there may be a stampede. During the Spring Festival, this situation will intensify. Guide railings can effectively solve this problem. The left and right space of a guide railing is limited, so it can only go forward in a single line, and it is the only way to the entrance or the ticket gate. If you want to enter the station or buy a ticket, you must go through the guide rails. Because the effect is very obvious, this kind of artifact can be seen in almost all railway stations and bus stations. Analyzed from the perspective of “Rituals hidden in utensils”, the designer has given the following ideas to the guide railings: First, you must queue to buy tickets or get on the bus without jumping in the queue; second, there is only one way to buy tickets or get on the bus. The former is a kind of ideological orientation, and the latter is a rule-enforced combination of soft and hard, which ensures the effectiveness of the guide railing in dealing with uncivilized phenomena such as disorderly boarding and skipping queues to buy tickets. This kind of utensil is better than the on-site guidance of the staff in terms of effect, efficiency and economy, and greatly saves manpower and material resources. In the train station, you can also see a one-way door, which is often set at the exit, and can only go out from the inside,

but not from the outside, so as to avoid the blockage that may be caused by entering and exiting, and at the same time to ensure entry and exit Personnel must pass through the security gate.

Whether it is a guide railing or a one-way door, both embodies the characteristics of “mandatory guidance”, and at the same time conveys a very strong moral concept to passengers, that is, civilized queuing, observing order, etc. Over time, when people get used to this kind of orderly queuing, the moral education utensiled through utensils has achieved the expected goal.

## 6. Conclusion

As a cultural phenomenon that has existed for thousands of years, “Rituals hidden in utensils” is very worthy of attention and study. Scholars must not only summarize and sort relevant historical materials, but also explain them at a theoretical level, and also explore how to “sublate” them for the current ideological and moral construction, and the latter is the core content of this paper. Due to the author's ignorance and knowledge, this paper just serves as a modest spur to induce someone to come forward with his valuable contributions. It is hoped that more researchers will pay attention to the practical application of “Rituals hidden in utensils”.

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