

# THE IMAGE OF AN INSTRUMENT: THE PERCEPTION OF BELLS DURING THE SONG DYNASTY

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*Musical instruments, although primarily known for their sounding properties, not seldom come to symbolise something else. This holds particularly true for bells, which, due to their high value and the refined technical skill that is required to cast them, became signifiers of the wealth and power of monarchs early in Chinese history, and later on became the sounding advertisement of Buddhist and Daoist temples. Tracing the history of the bell is therefore a way of exploring multiple histories: one of craft and music, but also one of power relations and religious culture.*

*This paper discusses how bells were perceived during the Song dynasty (960-1279), a period in which an obsession with ancient music and archaeological findings heavily influenced the musical landscape. The paper is mostly based on approximately 70 texts from the *Quan Song wen* that deal explicitly with bells and bell inscriptions. It shows that there were several ways to engage with the instrument, apart from listening to it, such as composing bell inscriptions and collecting bells. It also examines how ancient bell culture was reconciled with the bell production during the Song dynasty and what role the instrument played in a Buddhist context.*

KEYWORDS: bells, Song dynasty, bell inscriptions, elite culture

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## INTRODUCTION

*In accordance with their great unyielding desire, it was cast in one attempt. [...] Oh how extraordinary, this great instrument!*<sup>2</sup>

合宏誓願，一鑄而成。[...] 猗歟偉哉，是大器也。

(Zheng Dahui 鄭大惠 (1179-1254): *Inscription for a new bell in Qingshan Chan Temple – a preface* 慶善禪寺新鐘銘 – 并序. QSW 341: 7871.159)

*By it the dark and deaf are awakened. It extinguishes crime and dirt. Those who are confused in their Dharma nature follow its sound and gain true insight. Those who have sunk to the netherworlds hear the sound and are liberated. How can its effect be anything but great?*

將以覺昏聾、滅罪垢，迷法性者尋聲而頓悟，沈幽途者聞響而解脫，其功用豈不大哉！

(Li Guang 李光 (1078-1159): *Bell inscription for Dengci Temple* 等慈寺鐘銘. QSW 154: 3317.239)

Musical instruments and other objects with the primary function of producing sound usually do not attract much attention from sinologists. Antique sounding objects prove to be difficult to interpret, as the music or soundscape the instruments were once part of has long since disappeared, and thus sound and music, including their material relics, are often seen as separate, elusive fields. However, studies that have taken musical instruments as their main topic prove that this can be a useful way to approach cultural history (see, e.g., Zecher 2007; Bates 2012. For Chinese instruments, see Falkenhausen 1993; Gulik 1969; Zeitlin 2009).

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Unless noted otherwise, the translations in this article have been made by the author.

In this paper, Song dynasty (960-1279) bells are the main characters. I will discuss images of bells as they are expressed in one literary genre in particular, namely that of bell inscriptions. In the *Quan Song wen* 全宋文 [Complete Collection of Song Prose] - compiled in 2006 and primarily based on Qing (1644-1911) compilations - we find, apart from the thousands of cases in which bells are arbitrarily mentioned, slightly more than 80 texts that concern “bell inscriptions” (*zhongming* 鐘銘, *zhongkuan* 鐘款, or *zhongji* 鐘記). Despite what these names suggest, some of these texts may have been carved into stone (Jiang 2015: 129) or merely drafted on paper (cf. Hansen 1987: 20) rather than displayed on the surface of the bells. The majority of these writings are compositions that were written on the occasion of the casting of a new temple bell. About half of the inscriptions are accompanied by an introduction, which often provides details on the institution or person that had the bell cast, the process of casting, qualities of the bell such as weight or sound, etc. A few recorded inscriptions concern those on excavated ancient bells (*guzhong* 古鐘). The original format of most of these inscriptions remains uncertain, as they have been transmitted as texts only, separated from the object they once decorated. However, regardless of their medium, these texts all take the bell as their main subject and through their content we can investigate the possibility of shared images of bells.

Bells demonstrably played an important role in Song daily life. Their sound was perceived by many ears, both in cities and in more isolated places, from bell towers, imperial orchestras, and temples. By looking at these Song texts that deal extensively with bells, we can obtain a better understanding of their importance during this period. Throughout this paper, it will become clear that bells were simultaneously seen as sounding instruments, expensive objects of conspicuous consumption, masterpieces of technology and skill, expressions of power and wealth, mediums for language, and instruments of religion. I will pay attention to different roles bells played in the lives of the Song elite and how they were perceived. I will argue that bells were appreciated for considerably more than their sounding properties alone and

demonstrate that members of the elite engaged with bells in several ways. I focus on two different - but as we will see, not mutually exclusive - images of bells: the bell as an instrument from the sagely past and the bell as a Buddhist instrument of salvation. First, however, I would like to explain briefly why I think this topic is worthy of academic attention.

## WHY SONG BELLS?

One could argue that bells, among the multitude of sounding objects, are a special case, especially in China. Due to the high value of bronze (the preferred alloy for bell casting) and the large quantities of this material required to cast a bell, bells can only be cast by people or institutions with sufficient means. No other sounding instrument requires so much material of such a high value. Besides these practical restraints, specific knowledge and skill are required to produce a good bell. Knowledge of how the casting technique and the alloy, dimensions, weight, and profile of the bell influence its sound is essential to produce a suitable bell. In the case of tuned bells, which were used in sets in orchestral music in China or in carillons in Europe, the founder also needed to know how these factors would change the pitch of the bell, and how they could influence the overtones (Lehr 1987: 20-21; Williams 1985: 99-100; Falkenhausen 1993: 67-72). Due to their high value and the required knowledge and skill, bells were typically associated with power, either of individual monarchs or of institutions such as the Catholic Church or Buddhist temples. Owning bells also meant wielding the power to dictate time, as in many areas people relied on bells to determine their daily rhythm.

In China, where music was seen as an important tool for the ruler to harmonise his territory and influence his people, tuned bells, which set the pitch standard for the entire ritual orchestra, became a symbol of perfect government. As Von Falkenhausen notes: "More specifically than other instruments, bell-chimes represented the ritual music of the aristocracy during the Shang

and Zhou dynasties, the music of the Former Kings so much regretted by later philosophers” (Falkenhausen 1993: 15; see also Ebrey 2008: 159). The number of sets and patterns in which bell chimes were arranged reflected the power and wealth of the owner (Falkenhausen 1993: 32-39, Lam 1996: 47). Several myths about the origin of the bell further contributed to its special status (see Yu 2004: 19-22). Furthermore, as bells were (and still are) used as mediums for writing, their inscriptions can be studied from a literary point of view, something which is sadly still only incidentally done (Kroll 2001: vii).

Song bells might at first sight not seem a topic worthy of attention. Bell casting has a long history in China, reaching back to the late second millennium B.C. (Falkenhausen 1993: 14). Temple bells were already quite common during the Tang dynasty, when Buddhist temples prospered (Yu 2004: 86-88, 92). By the Song, bells were certainly no longer a novelty. However, during the Song dynasty a renewed interest in China’s ancient past also sparked people’s interest in ancient music, and bells were excavated and studied more intensively than before (See e.g. Ebrey 2010). Archaeological findings encouraged Song scholars in their wish to restore the music of antiquity and influenced the production and design of newly cast instruments. Inscriptions on ancient bells were deciphered and studied. Bells thus became a common scholarly interest, and members of the elite developed a fascination for the objects, their usage, and inscriptions. The combination of the aforementioned aspects makes Song bells unique objects of study.

## THE SAGELY IMAGE OF THE BELL

### *BELLS AS ANTIQUITIES*

During the early Song, an urge to legitimise the new dynasty inspired rulers and the scholars at court to turn to the classics, thereby triggering a renewed interest in the ancient past (Watt

1996: 219), most prominently in its rites and music. This interest led to and was reinforced by archaeological findings, among which ritual bronzes were the most desirable. As officials travelled regularly, this enabled them to collect objects and rubbings from various parts of the empire (Harrist 1995: 239). In their wish to reconstruct the rituals and music of the sages, Song scholars spent much time and effort studying the bronze objects and presented their findings at court. Personal collections also gained importance, and scholars would catalogue objects of the past and their inscriptions in the form of rubbings on a large scale (Harrist 1995: 237; Ebrey 2008: 76).

Much has been written about the study of and the act of collecting bronze ritual vessels (e.g. Watt 1996; Erickson 2001). Although some scholars acknowledge the importance of bells alongside other bronze ritual objects (e.g. Watt 1996: 222-223; Ebrey 2010), scholarly works on bell collecting and the cataloguing of bell inscriptions remain scarce. However, it is clear that antique bells caught the attention of the elite during the Song dynasty, since they were thought to contain the key to the mystery of the lost music of the sages, which Song scholars tried to restore. The famous statesman Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) for instance, mentions how a set of four ancient bells was coincidentally found by monks who were ploughing a field of their monastery, northwest of Huangzhou 黃州, in present-day Hubei 湖北 province. Although only one of the bells was kept by the monastery, and Su Shi describes its sound as that of “an empty cage” (*konglong* 空籠), he still admired the object and listened attentively to the sounds that approached the music of the ancients (QSW 91: 1974.56).

Unfortunately, too few Song-dynasty bells survived to draw any meaningful conclusions about their status as collectables. However, one chime bell that was excavated in 1982 in Sichuan 四川 contributes to the idea that bells were probably treated as collector's items (see plate 1). Although this bell was produced during the Song, the motifs are archaic and the inscription inside the bell states that it was cast during the year 155 of the Eastern Han dynasty. This fake Han bell (Erickson 2001: 426; Li 1985: 70) shows that bells could be collected as antiquities, and that it was



**Plate 1**

*A chime bell from a Song hoard in Guang'an prefecture.*

*Source: Li 1985: 67.*

apparently profitable to trade in fake antique bells. In addition to this meagre material proof, we still have documents in the form of catalogues and other writings showing us that the instruments attracted scholarly attention. The most famous of these is the catalogue of the collection of emperor Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1100-1126), the *Xuanhe bogu tu* 宣和博古圖. This catalogue demonstrates that Huizong collected bells on a large scale. His collection contained over a hundred bells from different periods and therefore presented a wide variety of shapes and designs, which can also be seen from the drawings that accompany the descriptions. This catalogue also pays much attention to the inscriptions that appear on some of these bells. This fascination with inscriptions is characteristic of

the Song, during which catalogues of rubbings, including those of bell inscriptions, were compiled and spread among the elite. Two examples of collections that include bell inscriptions are Xue Shangong's 薛尚功 *Lidai zhong ding yi qi kuanshi fatie* 歷代鐘鼎彝器款識法帖, a collection of calligraphic models compiled in 1144, and Wang Houzhi's 王厚之 (1131-1204) collection of inscriptions *Zhongding kuanzhi* 鐘鼎款識. These works decipher the ancient script and discuss the historical context of the bell, based on its inscription.

As the bell inscriptions caught the most scholarly attention, an inscription certainly enhanced the value of an old bell. The statesman Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) for instance, mentions that when a batch of old bronze that was gathered in order to cast new bells included an old bell which bore an inscription with its name (Baohu bell 寶盬鐘), it was because of this inscription that the casters did not melt it down and that the bell was studied for its musical features (QSW 34: 719.100). Due to the political implications of these findings – music and imperial rule were heavily intertwined – scholars paid much attention to anything that could help them find musicological information that would help them counter their political opponents. Although this interest in bell inscriptions was not limited to ancient court bells, they generally drew the most attention because of their political implications.

The excavation of old bells and other bronze vessels also inspired scholars to design instruments modelled on these ancient artefacts. In the introduction to the *Xuanhe bogu tu* chapters that display the bells, it is stated that:

*Now our collection of ancient bells dates from the Shang and the Zhou dynasties to the Qin and the Han dynasties, meaning that the ancient ways of making music still survive. We thus have been able to explore the tones through the extant bells, and to perform music using these tones. It is truly excellent that the once-lost musics of [the founders of*



*the Shang and Zhou dynasties] Tang and Wu are sounding  
again in our day!*

(Xuanhe bogu tu 22.3b;  
translation in Ebrey 2008: 156-166)

Similarly, a contribution by Huang Bosi 黄伯思 (1079-1118) in the *Quan Song wen* describes how six excavated bells were used as models for the bells that were commissioned for Huizong's Music of Great Brilliance (*Dasheng* 大晟) (QSW 156: 3362.285; see also Ebrey 2008: 159-166). There are, however, also earlier examples of new bells modelled after excavated objects (e.g. Ebrey 2010: 185). Apart from this, there are several texts that treat inscriptions on ancient bells, including one on a temple bell (Huang Bosi 黄伯思 QSW 156: 3361.272; Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) QSW 34: 719.100, 34: 719.108, 34: 724.225).

Bells, when treated as antiquities, were seen as a symbol of perfect rule and as a means to revive the music of the ancients, even though the musical theory behind the music performed on the newly made bells was probably nothing like that of the past to which the scholars aspired. A second difference was that, even though the newly made instruments were modelled on archaeological findings and in some cases look very similar to the ancient ones depicted in the *Xuanhe bogu tu* at a first glance, they have musical features that are characteristic of the Song and reflect the musical and technical standards of that time. For instance, the arrangement of bells in sets of sixteen was not common during the Zhou (Li 2001: 50-51). Also the now-famous two-tone phenomenon of the Zhou bells (Falkenhausen 1993) was largely overlooked by Song scholars and never implemented in new bells, despite the fact that this was testified by inscriptions on the ancient bells (Li 2000: 8). It is mainly due to the text-based approach of musical theorists, that new bells differed in shape and sound from their predecessors (Ebrey 2010: 187). This lack of thorough understanding, however, did not limit people's admiration for these sounding objects of the past.

## THE SAGELY IMAGE IN THE QUAN SONG WEN

In the texts that I studied for my research, many references are made to the sagely image and long history of the bell, even in texts that were composed for new temple bells. Bell founders are often referred to as Mr. Fu (*fushi* 甬氏), the same name that was used for chime bell manufacturers during the Zhou (Falkenhausen 1993: 65), or are described as using these ancient manufacturers' methods. In an inscription by Jiang Qin 江芹 (dates unknown) we find for example:

*The Mr. Fu who had received the order, made a bell from liquid metal.*

*Imitating the old ways of manufacturing, it is decorated with a suspension device in the shape of a wild animal.*

爰命甬氏 · 液金爲鐘。

略仿古制 · 飭以旋蟲。

(QSW 282: 6411.396)

The *xuan* 旋 that occurs in this citation is a bulging ring around the shank, commonly seen in ancient chime bells. The phrase *xuanchong* 旋蟲 refers to the *xuan* and the suspension ring that is attached to it, which is often shaped as a wild animal or reptile. This kind of suspension device is also mentioned in the *Kaogongji* 考工記 [Notes on examining the artisans] section of the *Rites of the Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮) (Falkenhausen 1993: 73-74). It is highly unlikely that this bell really had the kind of suspension device that was typical for chime bells, as this clearly concerns a temple bell, which was supposed to have sounded loudly at morning and dusk (as is mentioned in the same inscription) and would have had a suspension loop rather than a shank. This is probably nothing more than a poetical reference to the sagely past of the instrument, just as the occasional references that are made to the bell's mythical origin at the court of the Yellow Emperor (*huangdi* 黃帝; e.g. Lü E 呂誥 [dates unknown] QSW 16: 331.217). Even though the retrieved old musical bells had a very different – that is, musical – function

than the temple bells, still the composers of the inscriptions liked to relate the new bells for which they composed to those of the ancient past, as happens for instance in a text by Chai Zhen 柴震 (index year 1147):

*Only thanks to bells could there be the ancient music. They were made by the sages.*

鍾乃古樂・制於聖人。

(QSW 101: 2217.371)

In some inscriptions on temple bells, it is lamented how the music of the ancients, in which chime bells played a role, was lost, for example in this fragment from an inscription composed by Wei Liaoweng 魏了翁 (1178-1237):

*Music was wasted, rites were ruined, the sounds declined, the instruments sank away.*

*The palaces of the two families (Buddhism and Daoism) [however], have managed to exist up to the present.*

樂廢禮壞・聲謝器沈。  
二氏之宮・僅存于今。

(QSW 311: 7108.21)

The fact that in texts concerning temple bells references are made to the sagely past and its music is striking, as these bells are very different from the ones that were used in the official ritual orchestras, both in the past and in the contemporary courts. For those who wrote about these objects, they were apparently all considered to belong to one and the same category of objects, and were regarded merely as “bells” (*zhong* 鐘), despite the differences in sound, shape, and symbolic meaning. In some texts, it is even stressed that bells, as ancient indigenous instruments, were meant to become the instruments of the great teaching of Buddhism, for example in this inscription composed by Mu Xiu 穆修 in 1023:

*In the past they made bells, oh, how great their benefit! [...] The Great Music in which they were used had the ability to harmonize yin and yang, affected people and gods and regulated harmony in heaven and on earth. [...] [How] these bells have now become the unique instruments of Śākyamuni, this can also be deduced from [their history]. [...] When the Buddha accomplished the Dharma, he and the [Confucian] sages of the Middle States walked parallel paths in time, so [as for] these so-called instruments of ritual music and military expeditions, how would it have been possible that they would not have entered the temples of Buddha? [...] The [Buddhist temples] searched for an object whose sound was magnificent and far-reaching, and nothing could surpass the bell.*

古之爲鐘，其用大矣 [...] 其用之大樂，可以調陰陽，感人神，導天地之和；[...] 今是鐘也，專爲釋氏之器，亦從可知也。[...] 佛之爲法也，既與中國聖人之道並行于時，則所謂禮樂征伐之器，安得不入于佛之宮哉！[...] 求物聲宏達而及遠者，莫踰于鐘。

(QSW 16: 323.44)

Another example we find in an inscription by Shi Hao 史浩 (1106-1194):

*Mr. Fu made an instrument, its name is bell.  
It harmonised the happiness of all beings, the Royal Ancestral Temple and Imperial School.  
It reached down to the later generations and filled the Buddhist temples.*

晁氏製器，其名曰鐘。  
諧和衆樂，清廟辟雍。  
降及後世，徧滿梵宮。

(QSW 200: 4416.65)

This leads us to the second image of the bell I will discuss: that of a Buddhist instrument of salvation.

## A BUDDHIST INSTRUMENT

Although bells were used in temples of religions other than Buddhism (most notably Daoism), it was in the Buddhist tradition that the bell obtained a distinct status and became a true religious symbol. Therefore, I will now discuss this Buddhist image at some length.

Bells are very important for temples because of their sound, as they are “the chief instrument to make a community aware of a temple” (Price 1983: 10). The first Buddhist bells were cast not long after the introduction of Buddhism in China during the Eastern Han (25-220 AD) (Yu 2004: 86-87). From a technical perspective, these bells are very different from the chime bells discussed in the previous section. Whereas the aim of the tuned chime bells is to produce melodies and perform music, temple bells are mostly used to notify people of their duties at certain times of the day, and are therefore mostly appreciated for their loudness and clearness of sound (Yu 2004: 94). Because of this difference in purpose, casting temple bells usually does not require tuning, their size is often much larger, and the shape of the bell mouth is round, in order to produce a sound that lingers as long as possible.

Bells were also a sign of acknowledgment of the temple by the authorities, as officials were involved at various stages of the casting and a temple needed formal approval in order to cast a new bell. One of the reasons why the government controlled the casting of bells is because of the precious bronze that was involved, which was also the material used to cast coins. Although most texts do not state explicitly that casting a bell required official permission, a few texts prove that, at least in certain time periods, it was necessary to obtain an imperial edict in order to melt the bronze needed to cast the bell. Apart from their contribution to the formal procedure, officials are often mentioned as donors and

as composers of inscriptions.

As bells played such an important and prestigious role in Buddhist communities, it is not surprising that most bell inscriptions in the *Quan Song wen* concern Buddhist temple bells. Bells are sometimes even referred to as “instruments of the Dharma” (*faqi* 法器; e.g. Su Guo 蘇過 [d. 1123] QSW 144: 3103.182). Although by the Song, the presence of bells in temples was rather common, casting a new bell is still frequently described as an exciting event that attracted many spectators, and the bell itself is often presented as an almost magical tool within Buddhist teaching. The casting of a new temple bell was an expensive undertaking, which usually required one or several donors. Whereas rulers during the Bronze Age expressed their power and wealth by the number of bells and arrangement of the sets, temples competed over the size and weight of their bells, which reflected the support of their wealthy donors (Price 1983: 11). Making a donation was supposedly good for one’s karma, but also contributed to one’s prestige within the Buddhist community. Names of contributors frequently appear in the inscriptions.

From the inscriptions that survived, we can deduce that during the Song, it was rather standard to have a new bell inscribed. Although many of the inscriptions were composed by clerics, in the *Quan Song wen* we also find many inscriptions by lay Buddhists, mostly local officials and some prominent contemporary scholars. The form and content of the inscriptions and the fact that they have survived as texts, detached from the object to which they once belonged, shows that they were primarily perceived as literary compositions that could be appreciated on their own (see also Kroll 2001: vii). However, most of these inscriptions deal explicitly with the occasion on which they were composed and refer to the properties of the bell. There do not seem to have been any formal requirements for the inscription, but most inscriptions have been written in some kind of verse.

In the texts that I studied, bells are presented as much more than just sounding objects. From the following introduction to the same temple bell inscription by Mu Xiu we encountered in the previous section, it becomes clear that bells, apart from regulating

daily life at the temple, had another important function, namely to make an end to the suffering of the dead:

*According to the words of Śākyamuni, the sound of the bell, when one strikes it, is able to rise up to the heavens and reach down into the springs of the netherworld, it leads the dead and the spirits of those who are not yet embodied and makes them leave the misery of death in the netherworld. Therefore the family members of those who passed away present clothes and objects of gold and silk to request [the monks] to strike [it] and make it sound. If it is like [Śākyamuni] says, then [its function] is not just to announce evening and morning, fasting, eating and sleeping, but then it also has the power to end suffering [...]. In Buddhist [institutions] a bell cannot be lacking, that is indeed very clear.*

據釋氏言，鐘之聲，扣之可以上極天界，下洞幽泉，導死者冥昧之魂，出地獄沈淪之苦，故死者之家，嘗賂金帛衣物求擊其響。若如其說，則非獨用之節昏曉、戒食寢而已，又復能售極苦之資，[...]鐘不可闕于佛，亦明矣。

(QSW 16: 323.44)

In another inscription by Shi Huihong 釋惠洪, composed in 1114, a story about Emperor Wu of Liang 梁武帝 (464-569) further explains this idea:

*Emperor Wu of Liang used the divine power of Mr. Bao [referring to the famous monk Baozhi 寶誌 (418-524)] to see the netherworld, and asked him how to help them. Mr. Bao answered: "All living beings establish karma, which cannot be promptly extinguished. Only when they hear the sound of a bell their misery suddenly stops." Thereupon emperor Wu proclaimed that all Buddhist temples in the world should strike their bells with an unfolding and dignified sound, because he wanted to stop the suffering.*

梁武帝假寶公神力見地獄，相問何以救之。寶公曰：‘衆生定業，不可即滅。唯聞鐘聲，其苦暫息耳。’武帝於是詔天下佛廟，擊鐘當舒徐其聲，欲以停苦也。

(QSW 140: 3025.294)

Because of this extraordinary power of the sound of the bell, some inscriptions of the newly cast bells describe people casting a bell specifically for a deceased family member (e.g. Ma Tingluan 馬廷鸞 [1229-1289] QSW 140: 3025.294), or, as in the following case, extracted from the same inscription as the previous fragment, to liberate a living family member from her bad karma:

*Li Yuan from Yifeng [a county of present-day Jiangxi province] and his younger brother donated a large bell to the Yanfu temple. They wished that this wealth would prolong their mother's – Mrs. Zhou – life and good luck, and wipe away a long-standing karmic blockage from a former life.*

宜豐李元與弟施延福院大鐘，願資延母夫人周氏壽祺，且雪夙障。

(QSW 140: 3025.294)

In many other inscriptions, this liberating feature of the sound of the bell also comes to the fore, applying to both the dead and the living, as is illustrated by this fragment from an inscription by Su Guo 蘇過 (d. 1123):

*For all living beings, their afflictions are extinguished completely.*

*In both heavens and hells, there is no more ranking in high and low.*

*Those who have a Buddha nature and who do not have a Buddha nature, all accomplish the way of the Buddha.*



一切衆生・煩惱滅盡。  
天宮地獄・等無高下。  
有性無性・齊成佛道。

(QSW 144: 3103.182)

In the same inscription we find another theme that occurs frequently, namely that the sound of the bell can also bring living people to enlightenment:

*It shakes those who are ignorant and makes those who are deaf (for the teaching of Buddhism) aware.  
It awakens those who are misled and brings them back to the correct way.*

警昧悟聾・覺迷歸正。

(QSW 144: 3103.182)

Overall, we can conclude that within the Song Buddhist worldview, bells symbolise awareness and enlightenment, and contribute in many ways to one's karma: when one donates wealth or composes an inscription for a new bell or whenever it sounds and benefits all living and dead beings. The sound of the bell makes people aware on multiple levels: aware of the temple, of the teaching, of their duties, and of the Buddhist tenet of the emptiness of existence.

## CONCLUSION

From the bell inscriptions in the *Quan Song wen*, we can deduce that during the Song dynasty bells were perceived in different - though not mutually exclusive - ways. On the one hand, they were thought to represent the perfect music, and thereby rule, of the ancient sages. On the other hand, bells were seen as Buddhist instruments with the power to liberate both living and dead beings and to lead them to true understanding. Members of the elite engaged with bells in several ways: by collecting them or their

inscriptions, by contributing financially to a new temple bell, or by composing their own bell inscriptions. Bells demonstrably enjoyed a high status and played an important role in Song scholars' and Buddhists' lives.

We can conclude that whenever a bell was excavated, cast, seen, or heard, it evoked different associations, shared by many people. As certain themes, such as references to the Mr. Fu's of the past and the liberating function of the sound of the bell, occur repeatedly, we can see that the bell was a symbol appreciated for more than just its sound.

These inscriptions could obviously tell us a lot more than can be discussed in the present paper. In future research, I hope to present a more complete overview of the different images of the bell and include additional sources, such as anecdotes and monastic codes.

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