**image/象(Xiàng)**

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| Chinese Perspective | SUN Xiangchen | 23 May 2022 |

The Chinese characters “Xiang”（象） has a long history. It is a pictograph and its original and direct meaning is an elephant. *Shuow*en(120 AD), an ancient classic dictionary, says: “Elephant, the long nose and long tusks, the big beast in South China, gives birth once every three years, elephant ears, ivory, and four feet.” But the main meaning of “Xiang” has changed, different from its original meaning，and became the meaning of “image”, which is an extended meaning of “Xiang”. In Western traditions, “image” should be related to vision, actually, this word has nothing to do with vision. Another Chinese character “Xing”(形) related to “Xiang”(image) means more specific and more object-oriented image. Chinese characters are so called pictographs, pictogram is one of the basic way of conformation of Chinese characters. *Shuowen* explain，“pictogram express specific objects in the form of paintings, to make words, and draw different forms according to different objects. For example, the sun and the moon are pictographs.”

Compared with the Western word “image”, this term “Xiang” （image） is rather special. It does not refer to a specific direct image, but a generalized image to some extent, like a sketch. Regarding the word “Xiang”, there is a vivid description in *Han Feizi* (280B.C.-233B.C.): “People rarely see a live elephant, just get the remains of a dead elephant, and then imagine it according to such an image. Therefore, for ordinary people，the imagination of the elephant is called ‘image’. Although the Dao cannot be seen or heard now, the sage takes the power to reveal its shape. Therefore, they say: for Dao, a form without a shape, an image without an object. ”One imagine the real elephant，think of the real thing through this generalized image (Xiang); From this, Han Feizi deduces that although people cannot see the Dao, but through the efforts of the sages, they can still use this kind of image to understand Dao of all things. Laozi (about the 6th century BC) also said: “Dao itself has no image”, because any kind of description is negation, which needs to be implied through a sketch image. Dao is characterized by its change, Zhang Xuecheng(1738-1801), a scholar in the Qing Dynasty, also explained the relationship between image and change, “The Changes is paradigm of heaven and earth, The sages made *the Changes* in order to provide a paradigm of heaven and earth, and so it shows how one can fill in and pull together Dao of Heaven and Earth. When everything goes from static to motion. Their images have already been revealed, although the essence of Dao cannot be seen for a glimpse, and what people see vaguely when they are searching for Dao are all their images.”

The classics that embodies this characteristic of Dao in the Chinese cultural tradition is *The Book of Changes.* “Xiang” (image) is the most important concept to explain *The Book of Changes*, “This is why the Changes as such consist of images. The term image means the making of semblances. ” *The Book of Changes* uses “Xiang”(image) to symbolize the changes of all things. The eight basic trigrams that make up all the sixty-four hexagrams of *The Book of Changes*, which represent heaven, earth, thunder, wind, water, fire, mountains and lakes. Different image represent different trigrams, each hexagram is a combination of two different trigrams, which means two different images. It's a very complex relationship between them, it's ever-changing. The ancient sages were especially concerned about the changing world, they “looked upward and observed the image in heaven, and looked downward and observed the models that the earth provided.” and then they choose the appropriate hexagram to symbolize specific things, “the sages had the means to perceive the mysteries of the world, and drawing comparison to them with analogous things, make images out of those things that seemed appropriate. This is why these are called image (Xiang).” Every hexagrams combine of two different trigrams, which also means two different images, they use it to symbolize the image of all things and deduce the Dao of their changes, so as to understand the reason for the changes of all things, and to know the fortune and misfortune of affairs. Because “Xiang” (image) was originally related to divination, in *Zuo Zhuan·Xi Gong Fifteen Years* (about 4th century B.C.), “turtles shell can show some images; and yarrow can provide different numbers.” Du Yu (222AD-285AD) explained: “Divination by turtle shell is informed by image, divination by yarrow is informed by numbers. Images and numbers are generated from this, and then divination is carried out according to these prompts, and divination is mainly used to know fortune and misfortune.” The cracked pattern on the turtle's shell is the original image (Xiang), which can tell people things good or bad. Western philosophy originated from one’s wonder and went from mythology to philosophy. *The Book of Changes* originated from anxiety and calamity, and from divination to philosophy.

In the Chinese cultural tradition, the way of thinking based on “Xiang” (image) is not only reflected in the philosophy of Changes, according to Zhang Xuecheng, “The way of thinking based on Xiang covers a very wide range, not just *the Book of Changes*, the six classical arts are all compatible with the way of Xiang; It is the essence of Dao that will be revealed but there is still nothing obvious yet.” Therefore “Xiang”(image) is a universal way of thinking, which is reflected in various classical writings. The characteristic of “Xiang” (image) is to show the state that will be revealed and not revealed yet. They are divided into “images formed naturally by heaven and earth” and “images constructed by the human mind”, “about the natural images formed by heaven and earth, such as the ‘Qian’ hexagram, which says the things relative to sky is completely included. The image constructed by the human mind, such as ‘Kui’ hexagram, which says there are ghosts in the cart, or such as ‘Zhongfu’ hexagram, which says that the sound of the cock crowing spreads into the sky, there is nothing that the mind cannot think of, cannot imagine. Originally the mind is empty and functional, man is bound between heaven and earth, and cannot but be affected by the ebb and flow of Yin and Yang; the image constructed by human mind is the result of the influence of emotional changes. In the end, the image imagined by the human mind also comes from the image formed naturally by the heaven and the earth.” People use “Xiang” (image) to express various things whether natural or human. Here, “Xiang” (image) is not a substantive concept, not an object of representation, but a “Xiang” (image) to symbolize and analogize natural and human phenomena. “Xiang” (image) presupposes the metaphysical framework of eternal change, so it is a non-ready-made image, a dynamic image, a process image, and a changing image.

“Xiang” is also closely related to the view of language in Chinese cultural tradition. *The Book of Changes* says, “The Master said, writing does not exhaust words, and words does not exhaust ideas. If this is so, does this mean that the ideas of the sages cannot be discerned? The Master said: The sage established image in order to express their ideas exhaustively, they established the hexagrams in order to treat exhaustively the true innate tendency of things and their countertendencies to spuriousness. They attached phrases to the hexagrams in order to exhaust what they had to say. They let change occur and achieve free flow in order to exhaust the potential of the benefit involved.” According to this view, there is a layer of image between words and ideas, and the image is established to help words to express their meaning better, Wang Bi (226- 249) gave an explanation for this, he said: “Images are the means to express ideas. Words are the means to explain the images. To yield up ideas completely, there is nothing better than the images, and to yield up the meaning of the images, there is nothing better than words. The words are generated by the images, thus one can ponder the words and so observe what the images are. The images are generated by ideas, thus one can ponder the images and so observe what the ideas are. The ideas are yielded up completely by the images, and the images are made explicit by the words. Thus, since the words are the means to explain the images, once one gets the images, he forgets the words, and, since the images are the means to allow us to concentrate on the ideas, once one gets the ideas, he forgets the images. Similarly, the rabbit snare exists for the sake of the rabbit; once one gets the rabbit, he forgets the snare. And the fish trap exists for the sake of fish; one gets the fish, he forgets the trap.” The images is to help one understand ideas, and play an intermediary role in this process. The relationship between words and ideas is not a direct correspondence, but a relationship such as metaphor or analogy. Therefore, the images as an intermediary becomes very important in Chinese cultural tradition, which is very different from the Western view of language.

“Xiang”（image） is also closely related to Chinese artistic tradition. Many concepts of art are related to “Xiang” (image). The characteristics of Chinese art emphasize the fluidity and mutual transformation of “Xiang”(image). In poetry, human emotions need to be expressed through the images created by language. The biggest feature of the images is that it is not so objectified, but creates intermittent and changing pictures. Chinese characters is created by pictograph, calligraphy is also an expression of affection by significant form, which are the endlessly changing images. Sun Guoting (646-691) called it：“When the Yang air is strong, the calligraphy expresses a kind of relaxation, and when the Yin air is strong, the calligraphy expresses a miserable. It is the embodiment of the state of mood of heaven and earth.” Chinese painting also likes to use the image of smoke and clouds to show the landscape, free from the shackles of clear objects, the presence and absence of things, and implies a process and change, which is the characteristic of “Xiang”.

Chinese-style “Xiang” (image) has no corresponding concept in Western philosophy at all. Western philosophy expresses another kind of images. In Plato's philosophy, when he put forward Idea, eidos, which is also some kind of images, it is the essence behind specific sensible things, which can only be seen by the intellectual eye, so it should be a clear and distinct object intellectually. This Idea was later developed into the concept of Form in Aristotle’s philosophy. The characteristic of this kind of image is substantive, objective, and is not processive, changeable.

In some sense, the Chinese-style “Xiang” (image) is similar to that in Christianity. God is invisible, all that can be seen is a certain trace of God. Of course, man has the image of God. Of course, but different theologians have different views on what this image is. The Chinese-style image is related to Dao, Dao is invisible, and one who seek Dao vaguely see its images.

In empiricist philosophy, image is the philosophical concept directly received by the senses, there are simple ideas, and there are also “complex ideas” mixed by various simple ideas. This is the starting point of empiricist philosophy. For empiricism, abstract idea may result in a kind of paradox, which George Berkeley has analyzed in depth. The Chinese-style “Xiang” (image) is neither this direct perceptive idea nor an abstract idea, but the idea in a sketchy sense.