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Song Huizong's Dual Ruling Strategy of Confucianism and Taoism: An Interpretation of "Listening to the Guqin"

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Abstract:

Since the establishment of the Northern Song Dynasty, the emperors consistently implemented a ruling policy that emphasized Taoism, with Taoist reverence reaching its zenith during the reign of Emperor Huizong. "Listening to the Guqin" is a typical representative painting from this period. Regardless of the actual author, this artwork reflects Huizong's ideology and implicitly conveys his ruling intentions. This paper interprets the Taoist and Confucian imagery in the painting, supplemented by other contemporaneous works, placing the themes conveyed in "Listening to the Guqin" within the context of the Taoist movement and the political crisis during Huizong's reign. It further considers how Huizong, in his capacity as ruler, leveraged Taoist reverence to consolidate his authority, while also using Confucian ideology – conveyed through paintings – as a medium for political indoctrination. By integrating artistic works with political strategy, this paper offers a new perspective on the political culture of Emperor Huizong's era.

Keywords: Emperor Huizong of the Song dynasty; "Listening to the Guqin"; Taoist Movement; Confucian norms; ruling crisis.

1. Introduction

A review of previous studies on the art and politics of Emperor Huizong reveals that these works often portray him as a ruler who was distracted by trivial pursuits, indulged in Taoism, and was indifferent to political affairs. Some scholars separate Huizong's roles as a patron of the arts from his political responsibilities as a ruler. The reason for this lies in the researchers' tendency to focus on the political turmoil during his reign or his remarkable artistic achievements, while overlooking the ruling strategies he sought to implement as emperor. In fact, Emperor Huizong was not entirely inactive in the governance of the state.

Although the Song Dynasty ended the long-standing division and chaos of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, it still faced various problems after its establishment, such as regional fragmentation, power struggles among rival states, widespread poverty among the people, and stagnation in social and economic development. In response to this pre-

dicament, the rulers of the first three reigns of the Song Dynasty implemented a policy of equal emphasis on Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. They maintained rule by continuing the Confucian tradition, promoting Buddhism, and supporting Taoism, a policy largely followed by subsequent emperors of the Northern Song. Emperor Huizong inherited and enthusiastically promoted the ancestral policy of revering Taoism. He constructed Taoist temples, rewarded Taoist priests, and even deified himself, proclaiming himself as the "Emperor and Divine Leader of Taoism." He once said, "I am the eldest son of the Supreme Deity of Heaven, commanded to lead the world back to the righteous path. The Supreme Deity of Heaven grants my request, allowing my brother, the Lord Qinghua, to hold the authority of my Grand Mansion. I have long been deeply concerned that the teachings I have established are not comprehensive. Therefore, I command you to officially recognize me as the Master of the Teachings, the Dao Emperor" [1]. Moreover, he broke with the previous policy of equal respect for the three religions, advocating for the suppression of Buddhism while vigorously promoting Taoism, and even implementing measures to merge Buddhism into Taoism, thereby facilitating their convergence.

Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty was deeply devoted to Taoism, earning the title of a notable Taoist emperor in Chinese history, while also being a master of calligraphy and painting. During his reign, many valuable artworks were produced, one of which is "Listening to the Guqin." In the painting, beneath the pine and bamboo. In the painting, beneath the pine and bamboo, Huizong is centrally seated on a stone pedestal, dressed in Taoist robes, playing the guqin. On either side of him sit two officials in gauze hats and ceremonial robes—one in a green robe and the other in a red robe—respectfully listening with their heads bowed. To the left, a young boy stands quietly with his arms crossed. To the left of the guqin table is a flower stand with an incense burner on top, from which wisps of smoke rise. At the bottom of the painting, a peculiar rock is depicted, upon which sits a pot of blooming jasmine flowers. At the top of the painting, there is a poem inscribed by the minister Cai Jing. In the lower left corner of the painting is Huizong's seal.

There has been ongoing debate in academic circles regarding the authorship of this painting [2], primarily focusing on whether "Listening to the Guqin" was personally painted by Emperor Huizong or created by court painters. Despite the differing opinions, the personal seal inscribed by Emperor Huizong indicates his endorsement of the painting. Therefore, regardless of the actual author, this artwork reflects Huizong's ideology, which is widely acknowledged in the scholarly community. Artworks can reflect the inner thoughts of their creators; given Emperor Huizong's royal status, "Listening to the Guqin" also implicitly conveys his ruling intentions. Huizong's Taoist attire, along with auspicious objects, reflects his belief in and veneration for Taoism. However, this painting is not merely an illustration of reverence for Taoism and the act of playing the guqin. It implies a hierarchical social order and an educational significance, which embody the ethical principles and moral teachings emphasized in Confucian thought. Moreover, the Taoist and Confucian imagery in the painting is closely related to Huizong's ruling policy of parallelism between Confucianism and Taoism. Considering the context of the Taoist movement and the political crisis during Huizong's reign, "Listening to the Guqin" reflects his intention to strengthen his rule through the promotion of Taoism. On the other hand, it also reflects Huizong's strategy of using artistic works as a medium to implement political indoctrination through Confucian thought.

2. Revering Daoism to Strengthen Rule

The painting "Listening to the Guqin" is permeated with profound Taoist thought. In the painting, he wears a Taoist crown, a white undergarment with a diagonal collar, and a loose brown Taoist robe, the edges of which are trimmed with black fabric, presenting a simple and unadorned appearance. Some scholars have analyzed the features of Emperor Huizong in the painting, suggesting that the Guqin player depicted is a hybrid of the Taoist deity, the Lord of Eternal Life, and Emperor Huizong's true appearance [3]. However, Emperor Huizong's act of playing the guqin while dressed in a Taoist robe reflects not only his reverence for Taoism but also carries deeper significance when analyzed in conjunction with his Taoist policies, which correspond to his efforts to deify himself. During his reign, Emperor Huizong faced a severe governance crisis. Political corruption and the dark situation exacerbated tensions between the government and the populace. Peasant uprisings erupted, while the Jurchens in the northeast grew stronger, establishing the Jin Dynasty, posing a serious threat to the Song Dynasty. The Song regime was caught in a dilemma of internal strife and external threats. Song Huizong believed the Daoist priest Lin Lingsu's claim that he was the reincarnation of the Son of the heaven lord. He signaled to institution of Taoism to confer upon him the title of Daoist deity, thereby becoming the ruler of the heavenly, human, and underworld realms, wielding authority over all matters of right and wrong, as well as auspicious and inauspicious occurrences within the three realms. He attempted to achieve the objectives of suppressing dissent, alleviating social pressures, and disregarding external threats through his own deification,

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which represented Song Huizong's strategy for extricating himself from both internal and external predicaments.

The philosophies and techniques of Taoism derive from ancient primitive religions, folk shamanism, prophetic theology, and Huang-Lao thought [4]. Thus, the origins of Taoist belief are permeated by a faith in the mysterious powers of nature and a veneration for authority, prominently illustrated in the prophetic traditions that flourished during the Han dynasty [5], which were employed to promote religious doctrines and assert the legitimacy and mystique surrounding the rulers. Artistic expressions in palace and tomb decorations, silk paintings, and bronze mirrors from the Qin and Han periods frequently depict themes of immortals and auspicious omens. These themes are closely intertwined with the religious ideals of Taoism, which emphasize the pursuit of immortality and the aspiration to rescue the world. Consequently, auspicious imagery has been imbued with Taoist aesthetic significance, becoming a quintessential symbol of Taoist aesthetics concerning immortals.

The manifestation and performance of auspicious signs have been a persistent feature of ancient political culture. Since the mid-Song dynasty, with the decline of the mystical theories surrounding the "Five Virtues" prophetic traditions, the concepts and texts related to auspicious signs, which have existed since the Han dynasty, have gradually receded under the scrutiny and critique of Song scholars [6]. Nevertheless, auspicious signs continued to be co-opted by imperial power, albeit not through a persistent investigation of their original meanings. Instead, they evolved into political rhetoric that reflects the tacit understanding between monarch and subjects, either serving as testimonials to highlight the emperor's virtuous governance and proclaim the legitimacy of imperial authority, or as bases for flattery and admonition from ministers, reminding the ruler to align with the will of Heaven and the sentiments of the people. Essentially, this remains a form of imperial strategy.

Emperor Huizong of the Song dynasty implemented a vigorous policy of Taoist veneration, leading to the widespread practice of rituals aimed at invoking divine will and honoring celestial mandates throughout the court and society. This pursuit sought the favor of heavenly deities. A significant manifestation of his reverence for divine intent was his extensive collection, embellishment, and depiction of auspicious signs (xiangrui). For instance, he became enamored with the quest for various rare objects and extraordinary flora and stones across the nation, perceiving them as auspicious omens. Some of these were tributes from foreign lands, while the majority were scavenged from the Jiangnan region, a campaign historically referred to as the "Floral and Stone Program" (huashi gang). Moreover, he commissioned artists to create the Xuanhe Ruilan Ce [7], in which auspicious items were illustrated, thereby preserving their imagery for posterity. Emperor Huizong's reverence for auspicious omens profoundly influenced both the imperial court and the general populace. For instance, in the fifth year of the Zhenghe era (1115), while quarrying stones in Xingyang County for the construction of the Ming Hall, a celestial auspicious stone was reportedly discovered. Based on this event, Wang Anzhong presented a memorial titled He Shi Zhong You Ming Zi Biao, reinforcing the concept of "heavenly-human correspondence" as an auspicious sign [8]. Later, during the sacrificial rites held at the Ming Hall, officials such as Cai Jing and Wang Fu reported sightings of flocks of cranes as further auspicious omens [9]. Coincidentally, during the installation of the newly cast Nine Tripod Cauldrons and the associated rituals, phenomena such as the descent of sweet dew, the arrival of flocks of cranes, and the transformation of clouds into multiple colors also occurred as auspicious responses [10].

The painting Listening to the Guqin also presents a clear expression of auspicious omens. At the bottom of the composition, in front of the Guqin player, there is a rock with a shape resembling stacked clouds, upon which rests a ding (cauldron) containing a jasmine plant. Although the textual information within the painting does not explicitly convey the significance of the stone's shape, another work by Emperor Huizong, titled Auspicious Dragon Stone (*Xiang Long Shi Tu*), clearly states in the accompanying inscription that "its form surges and twists like a dragon emerging, representing an auspicious omen." The pot of jasmine placed on the stone was a tribute at the time, introduced to Emperor Huizong's court as an exotic specialty and depicted in the *Xuanhe Ruilan Ce*, both the stone and the jasmine were regarded as auspicious items. Additionally, the pot containing the jasmine is a bronze ding. The ding is closely associated with auspicious thought, as ancient beliefs held that the size and weight of a ding could signify the virtue of the sovereign and the fate of the state. For example, in the third year of Duke Xuan's reign, "The ruler of Chu asked about the size and weight of the ding. The response was: 'It depends on virtue, not on the ding. In ancient times, when the Xia dynasty had virtue, they depicted items from afar, offered tributes of gold and copper, and cast ding to symbolize these items, preparing for all things, so that the people would understand the divine and the deceitful. Thus, when people entered rivers, marshes, and mountains, they encountered none that were not auspicious. The mythic dragons could not be encountered. This was used to harmonize the upper and lower realms and to accept the blessings from heaven'" [11]. The Song Shu: Records of Auspicious Signs also

categorized dings as a type of auspicious item, and various records detail the unearthing of precious dings from different regions.

However, beyond its connotation of auspiciousness, the ding symbolizes supreme authority. Song Huizong not only documented a selection of dings in the Xuanhe Bogu Tu, but also commissioned the casting of the Nine Dings on two occasions. In the third year of the Chongning era (1104), he ordered Wei Hanjin to cast the Nine Dings, personally determining their names, colors, placement, and the timing and manner of ritual sacrifices. Based on Wei Hanjin's suggestion, the Nine Dings were positioned south of the Taiyi Hall and named the Palace of Nine Successes. In the eighth year of the Zhenghe era (1118), Huizong, following the advice of a Daoist priest, cast another set of ritual vessels called the Divine Clouds Nine Dings [12]. This action is closely related to his Daoist beliefs and the concept of auspicious omens, while also reflecting his emphasis on the significance of the ding. By collecting and casting these vessels, which are symbols of authority, he aimed to demonstrate his ruling status and political legitimacy. His commissioning of "auspicious signs" shows that he was not content with traditional auspicious omens merely signifying the mandate of heaven; instead, he endowed these omens with meaning through imperial authority.

In Listening to the Guqin, the dual identity of Song Huizong as both a Daoist divine ruler and an earthly sovereign, along with the appearance of auspicious objects, constantly reminds the viewer of the ruler's authority and status. Auspicious items such as jasmine, strange rocks, and ancient bronze dings appear in the painting, symbolizing that only Huizong, as the Son of Heaven holy, has the right to possess these rare objects from all corners of the world. The rarity of these extraordinary treasures and the symbolic power and authority of the bronze ding reflect Huizong's political ideal of "abundance and grandeur", conveying his intention to embody a Daoist divine ruler governing the realm. By integrating his political aspirations and fantasies into a series of collecting and crafting activities, Huizong sought to stabilize the court, pacify the populace, and navigate the crises of his reign. The arrangement in "Listening to the Guqin" reflects Song Huizong's intention to uphold the legitimacy and authority of his rule.

3. Integrating Confucian Thought into Political Indoctrination

Although scholars like Xie Zhiliu and Xu Bangda believe that Listening to the Guqin was created by painters from the Hanlin Painting Academy [13, 14], it still reflects the characteristic of art serving political purposes during the reign of Emperor Huizong, accurately conveying the meaning of political education. Since the Hanlin Painting Academy was under the strict control of the imperial power of the Song dynasty, the academy's painters could only depict subjects predetermined by the emperor and had no freedom to choose their themes. For instance, during the reign of Emperor Taizong, the academy painter Li Xiong angered the emperor by refusing to paint according to Taizong's prescribed themes [15]. Similarly, during the reign of Emperor Renzong, the landscape painter Chen Yongzhi was unable to create according to his own vision due to the demand of the palace's painting affairs, which led that him to "harbor discontented and eventually fled the court" [15]. This reflects the essential nature of the Hanlin Painting Academy—imperial servitude.

Because of this nature and the inherent propagandistic function of its works, some of the paintings produced by the academy had the additional function of serving political purposes, aligning with the ruling class's need for political education. During the Northern and Southern Song periods, numerous scrolls were produced in the court at the suggestion of officials and under the direction of the emperor. These works celebrated the cultural and military achievements of the era, such as the "Illustrated Tribute of the Four Barbarians" during the Xiangfu reign and the "Jingde Pacification of Rebels" during the Qingli reign [16]. Other paintings, like the "Four Illustrations of Jingde", depicted the virtuous governance of the period and were essentially political propaganda. Records from various texts indicate that there were many scrolls depicting historical events, deities, ritual vessels, imperial processions, and ceremonial systems, many of which included imperial inscriptions or were directly ordered by the emperor himself [17].

During the reign of Huizong, the court painters were increasingly dedicated to "exerting their utmost efforts to fulfill the emperor's intentions" [18]. Huizong closely supervised the content of the artworks; for instance, during the construction of the Taoist temple Qingshigong, he insisted that "all paintings must originate from the painting academy. Huizong would personally visit frequently, and if he found anything unsatisfactory, he would command corrections" [15].

Moreover, Huizong organized large-scale artistic activities involving his officials, using paintings as a medium for political education. According to the records in Song Hui Yao, on March 2nd of the fourth year of the Xuanhe era (1122), Huizong visited the Palace Library to conduct a grand event for viewing and presenting paintings that involved numerous participants [19]. "Viewing paintings" allowed for a shared appreciation among the emperor and

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his ministers, facilitating their understanding of a common political cognition with Huizong. In contrast, "presenting paintings" created a cultural exchange of benevolence between the emperor and his officials through the acts of bestowing and receiving. Through these activities of viewing and presenting paintings, Huizong aimed to politically educate the nobility and government officials of various ranks. Additionally, Huizong often requested his ministers to inscribe poems or notes on the paintings. For instance, the poetry inscribed at the top of Listening to the Guqin is attributed to Cai Jing.

Furthermore, similar inscriptions are found on other significant works such as Qianli Jiangshan Tu, Wenhui Tu, and Yu Ying Tu. Before the ministers penned their verses, they were required to comprehend Huizong's expectations and the themes expressed in the artworks. In this way, the political intentions embedded within the paintings were naturally conveyed to the viewers; such inscriptions served to praise the accomplishments of Huizong and the court, guided by the emperor himself. Therefore, this practice of "viewing" among the emperor and his ministers appears not merely as a means to satisfy Huizong's personal taste for art or to showcase his artistic achievements, but rather as a ritualistic political activity, led by Huizong, aimed at fostering a shared experience to achieve a collective consciousness. By exerting strong control over the presentation of artistic content, Huizong transformed these paintings into an integral component of the Song dynasty's ruling system. Furthermore, through the interaction between the emperor, his ministers, and the artworks, he sought to use these visual pieces as a medium for educating both officials and the populace, thereby shaping the political understanding he desired.

Listening to the Guqin further facilitates the harmony between the emperor and his ministers under Huizong's leadership through the cultural activity of music appreciation, thereby fostering political understanding. The act of playing the guqin depicted in Listening to the Guqin serves as a significant method by which ancient Chinese emperors employed Confucian thought for political education. As a representative of traditional Chinese instruments is imbued with the essence of governing the state and achieving peace in the world. The Records of the Grand Historian states, "When the sounds of the qin are in harmony, the world is in order" [20]. Within the Confucian tradition, it is asserted that "music, indeed, is comparable to political discourse" [21]. The foundation of Confucian musical aesthetics lies in its service to politics, rituals, and laws, bearing an educational purpose. Thus, "listening to the qin" carries a profound connotation of moral instruction within traditional Confucian ideology. In Xunzi: On Music, it states: "Music is what the sages delight in, as it can cultivate the hearts of the people, deeply affecting them and transforming customs. Therefore, the ancient kings guided the people through rites and music, resulting in social harmony" [22]. The Song dynasty perpetuated this Confucian tradition, emphasizing education and moral cultivation, with rites and music embodying these ideals. The emperor's playing of the Guqin disseminates the sounds of moral instruction, while the ministers listen attentively. The purity of the qin's sound symbolizes the integrity of governance, representing an act of respect for the emperor by the ministers. This indeed reflects the emperor's intention to politically educate his subjects, embodying the essence of Confucian thought that emphasizes the ruling mindset of moral education.

Listening to the guqin also has other Confucian imagery that symbolizes a strict hierarchy, an ordered relationship between superiors and subordinates, and emphasizes the system of rites and music, thereby highlighting class distinctions as well as the political ideals and power of the emperor, conveying a distinct political and educational significance. First, it is noteworthy that the guqin played by the musician differs from the common seven-string guqin—this is a nine-string guqin. In ancient China, the guqin was endowed with an orthodox cultural identity and significance that surpassed other musical instruments. Since ancient times, rulers have utilized the addition or subtraction of strings to express their political ideals. For instance, according to the Book of Documents, "Shun played the qin with five strings, and the world was in order. Yao added two strings to represent the bond between ruler and subjects" [23]. Some texts attribute the addition of one string each to King Wen and King Wu of Zhou. These ancient documents reflect the tendency of the guqin to serve as a means of political education.

By the Song dynasty, the guqin had evolved into a significant symbol of scholarly identity and represented courtly elegance in music. A plethora of literature regarding the nine-string guqin emerged during this period, with many attributing its creation to Emperor Taizong and linking it to the court's activities in rites and music. Emperor Taizong had a profound appreciation for the guqin and added two strings to the original seven-string instrument, creating a nine-string guqin. He stated, "The guqin has seven strings; I shall now increase it to nine, naming the strings as follows: Ruler, Subject, Literature, Martial, Rites, Music, Justice, People, and Heart. This way, the nine tones shall harmonize without discord" [24]. Through this astute action of adding two strings to the qin, Emperor Taizong fulfilled his goals of reforming the system of rites and music, articulating his distinct political ideals that carry a profound political and educational significance.

Secondly, aside from the configuration of the nine-string

guqin symbolizing the "governance through rites and music," the arrangement of figures in the painting also reflects a clear hierarchical structure between ruler and subjects. The musician playing the guqin is positioned in the north, facing south, signifying his supreme status, while two officials are situated on either side of him. According to the Song History: Regulations of Clothing and Attire [25], officials of the third rank and above wear purple robes, while the red robes depicted in the painting represent officials of the fourth and fifth ranks, and the green robes denote those of the sixth and seventh ranks, with officials below the eighth rank donning blue robes. The musician occupies the central position facing south, with the official in red to his left and the official in green to his right; together, they listen attentively to the music, embodying the traditional hierarchical order of the emperor seated in the north facing south, with officials arrayed to his south, opposing each other from east to west. The emperor occupies a high position playing the guqin, while the subjects listen submissively, indicating that the statuses of the three individuals are not entirely equal, thus reflecting the class relations between ruler and subjects in ancient Chinese feudal society.

Moreover, the beast fur mat laid on the stone seat in the painting further emphasizes the class status of the depicted figures. The mat is woven from long hair in alternating gold and gray colors, referred to at the time as a "shang seat." It is crafted from the pelts of Sichuan macaques, with dozens of square pieces forming a plush seat, which was quite expensive. The Northern Song court frequently issued prohibitions limiting its use to individuals of higher social ranks [26]. Thus, its intended users could only be members of the royal family or high-ranking court officials. In contrast, the common cushions depicted in Chinese paintings are typically round and patterned like tiger skins, symbolizing the noble aspirations of the figures hidden in the mountains and forests. Conversely, the plush seat accentuates the esteemed status of the figures, serving as a symbol of the upper class. Therefore, although the overall composition of Listening to the Guqin seeks to convey a sense of transcendence and detachment, the details still reveal an emphasis on class distinctions.

In summary, the Daoist and Confucian imagery in Listening to the Guqin reflects Song Huizong's approach of promoting Daoism to strengthen his rule, while also utilizing painting as a medium to implement political education through Confucian thought. However, the Daoist imagery and Confucian ideology are not two intersecting parallel lines; rather, in Listening to the Guqin, there exists a phenomenon that superficially venerates Daoism while still reflecting Confucian norms. For instance, the poem at the top of the painting employs a clear Daoist symbol, namely the "stringless guqin." The phrase "as if listening to the sound of a stringless qin being played" (*si ting wuxian yi nong zhong*) alludes to the concept of the "stringless qin." This allusion originates from Tao Yuanming, who is documented in The Book of Song: Biographies of the Recluses: "He could not understand the sounds of music but possessed a guqin without strings. Whenever he had wine, he would play it to express his feelings" [27]. Tao Yuanming believed that the true essence of music lies beyond the sound itself; playing the qin serves to seek out meanings beyond the strings. Thus, even playing a guqin without strings can convey the joy of playing. This aligns with Laozi described as "the great sound is seldom heard, and the great form is formless" (*da yin xi sheng, da xiang wuxin*g). The player is not bound by specific objects but captures the essence of sound, embodying the notion of a stringless guqin. The use of the "stringless qin" symbolizes the musician's pursuit of transcendence advocated by Daoism.

Nevertheless, the content of the entire poem centers around the qin, subtly illustrating Huizong's exceptional skill in playing and his noble character, while also indicating that the two officials seem to have some understanding, resonating with the music. According to the annotation of the poem, "Minister Cai Jing respectfully inscribes" (*cheng Jing jin ti*), this poem was composed by the minister Cai Jing upon request, and its content closely aligns with the painting. The line "playing the melodies beneath the wooden hall, one wonders if a breeze has entered among the pines" suggests that the player is highly skilled, with their playing evoking a gentle breeze among the pines. The phrase "looking up and down, the emotional listener seems to hear the sound of a stringless guqin being played" conveys that the distant and moving sounds of the qin touched the listener, while implying the difference in status between the performer and the audience. Thus, this "resonance" does not stem from mutual interests between friends; rather, within the strict hierarchical order depicted in the painting, it conveys an unmistakable notion of the superiority of the ruler over the subjects. Combining the poem's content with the traditional hierarchical seating arrangement of the emperor and his officials, the painting conveys an atmosphere wherein Huizong's qin-playing resonates, while the officials attentively listen and appreciate, suggesting a transmission and reception of information under Huizong's control, thereby achieving a harmony between ruler and subjects.

4. Conclusion

This paper interprets Listening to the Guqin by analyzing the Daoist and Confucian imagery embedded within the objects, attire, and spatial arrangements depicted in the

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painting. The appearance and clothing of the qin player, along with the auspicious symbols, point to Song Huizong's reverence for Daoism. Furthermore, the relationships among the figures portrayed in the painting, the use of objects that symbolize reform and authority, and the act of listening to the qin collectively elucidate the underlying Confucian norms and the emperor's authority present in the artwork. Placing this painting within the context of the Daoist movement and the ruling crisis of Huizong's reign reveals that it reflects Huizong's strategy of maintaining control through the promotion of Daoism, while utilizing painting as a medium to implement political education through Confucian thought.

However, the extreme emphasis on Daoism during Huizong's reign led to an increasingly dark political climate, deeper bureaucratic corruption, and a more severe fiscal crisis. The religious and class conflicts became more acute and complex. Ultimately, the intention to uphold his rule through Daoism proved to be an elusive dream, and the reliance on Confucian norms for political education yielded no tangible results. In the end, the decaying Northern Song dynasty, along with its century-long pursuit of immortality and Daoist ideals, was engulfed by the rolling dust of the Jurchen cavalry.

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