

Research article

Mythical Narrative and Mythological History of Jade in Early Chinese Dynasties

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Abstract

This paper takes mythical narratives and mythological history of jade myths in early Chinese dynasties, Xia, Shang, Zhou and Qin dynasties, covering a time span of more than 2000 years, to illustrate the continuation and evolution of jade culture, and to reveal the underlying mythological concepts that dominate the ritual behaviors and narrative expressions, and highlight the prototype function of mythological concepts in the construction of the jade worship and ideology. Once the prototype of jade myth is revealed, the evolvement track of its historical cultural narratives and the operative relations between coding and re-coding will be better understood.

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Key words: Mythical Narrative, Mythological History, Mythological Concepts, Chinese Jade, Cultural Origin

¹**Brief biography:** Dr. Juan Wu mainly engages in the study of English Literature and Literary Theory, Cultural Studies, Comparative Mythology, is a lecturer at School of Foreign Language, Beijing Institute of Technology. She has authored Vladimir Nabokov: "A Rigid Moralist" and numerous articles on academic journals. Recently she focuses on the Retelling of Myth in the Postmodern Sign Economy and Archetypal Criticism of Chinese Jade Mythology.

Max Weber once pointed out that, “The supreme gold of social sciences is not to pursue the construction of new ideas or new concepts, but to make efforts in understanding the cultural meaning of concrete historical links”. (Weber, 1999: 60) Current sciences fail in understanding the future trends of human beings’ behaviors and culture. From the hunting tribes to the agricultural society, the civilized country, and then to the industrial society, it seems that human beings are pushed forward by certain invisible driving forces. To explore the source of every civilization’s concepts, the formation history of its mythological concepts during the pre-historic period or at the beginning of its civilization shall be studied first. This paper hopes to explore this subject on both the theoretic and practical level and make some contribution through integrating the profound heritage of Chinese culture.

1. Mythical Narrative and Mythological Operating Mechanism

It is widely accepted that special cultural traditions determine the general behaviors of this cultural members. To explain why the ancient Egyptian civilization in the North Africa created is the Great Pyramids, what the ancient Indian civilization created is Hinduism and Buddhist monastic life, while, what the Chinese civilization created is the Great Wall and the imperial seal, we need to inspect each culture from the inside perspective to understand its inner cultural rules. Only in this way could our interpretation be more specific and reliable. This also explain why the definition of cultural anthropology turns from the “the science of man” in the early 19th century to “The Interpretation of Cultures” (Geertz, 1973). What it explores changes from the deduction of general pattern of all human cultures’ evolution is to the interpretation of special characteristics and unique features of each culture. The concept of man becomes relatively more concrete instead of being highly abstract. (Ye Shuxian, 2003: 19-39)

Regarding myths, scholars from different fields have different views even on a working definition, with of with more than fifty individualized definitions (Doty, 2000: 28-30) Sarah Allan defines myths more narrowly as “stories of the supernatural” (impossible in natural, not cultural reality) (Allan, 1981: ix). Dunes not only defines myth as “a sacred narrative explaining how the world and man came to be in their present form” (Dundes, 1984: 1), but also extends the scope of myth beyond religion or the supernatural. Birrell views myth as a human experience that must be understood on its own terms and in its own right with its own autonomy.”(Birrell, 1993: 4-5) Mark Lewis believes that there exist no grounds for seeing myths as an autonomous realm, while myths should rather be historicized “within its own culture,” where its “place and meaning” (Lewis, 2009:553-554) may vary over time in accordance with its interest and utility for communities which keeps telling them in one way or another. At the time when mythology is introduced into China at the beginning of the last century, while “the problem of myth for Western philosophers is a problem of interpreting the meaning of myths and explaining the phenomenon of myth-making” as Allan remarks, “the problem of myth for the sinologist is one of finding any myths to interpret and of explaining why there are so few” (Allen, 1991: 19) and “Ancient Chinese literature contains few myths in the traditional sense of stories of the supernatural but much history.” (Allan, 1981: ix).

The western scholars who studied the origin of literature once focused on the ancient Greek literature, later formed the school of Myth and Ritual in the 20th century, which holds that Greek drama originated from religious rites, and the underlying driving force behind performances is god worshipping and religious belief, not aesthetic or entertainment(Harrison, 1987: 67-80).Terms like Dionysian Spirit and Apollo Spirit extends from the field of literature to that of anthropology. And the literary study of mythology gave way to the conceptual

mechanism study of mythology, i.e. the motivations behind ancient people's behaviors through reconstructing their mythological concepts, and then interpreting the dominating rules of the culture as whole, instead of the expression rules of literary texts only. One of the theoretic heritages left by the Myth and Ritual School is the differentiation of the chronological order of myths and rites, i.e. which one came first in the time line. Viewed from the evolution facts that behaviors came before the languages, it seems that rites determined the myths; but viewed from that human beings are conceptual, mental concepts determine actual behaviors, mythic concepts play more fundamental and forceful role in determining and shaping rites. Walter Burkert, an accomplished scholar of cultural anthropology, in his *Homo Necans: the Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* (Burkert, 1983), takes the funeral scene in *The Iliad* to illustrate how literary narration becomes an important medium for anthropologists to interpret funerary rituals, and how the mythological concepts dominated the transformation, transition and substitution of hunting's turning into Greek funerary ritual.

To decode why the ancient Chinese were different from the ancient Egyptian and the Greek, we have to resort to the underlying conceptual structure and unique culture genes against the broad view of global civilization. To figure out the operating mechanism of mythical narrative, we need systematic academic studies and multidisciplinary cooperation, which could effectively reproduce the mental concepts dominating the sublime rulers. As the joint point of literature and cultural anthropology, mythology is attached great importance by both sides. So it has become the most studied field of cultural anthropology. The literature major usually focuses on the literary property of mythology and excel in analyzing the elements of characters, themes, motifs, linguistic rhetoric and style in mythological narrations; while, the anthropology focuses on the mechanism of mythology and rites and its function in specific cultural society. For them, literary narration is the external expressions of mythology, and what determines is the hidden values, driving forces and operating mechanism, as Claude Levi-Strauss puts it, the fundamental difference between anthropology and history is that, history studies what people are aware of, but anthropology explores what people are not aware of. In the 20th century, from Onians' mythological study on the origin of the western thoughts to Walter Burkert's study on the relevance between the ancient Greek rituals and mythological concepts, we can see the unfading efforts of the top scholars in solving the motive of human behavior.

2. "Mythical History" and "Mythical China"

The mythological concepts, as the cultural codes hiding silently underlying historical events and incidents, becomes harder to beware and recognize by later generations. Utilizing Claude Levi Strauss's structuralist theory and methodology in her analysis of the foundation and succession myths of early Chinese dynasties, Allan holds that "history, as it appears in the major texts from the classical period of early China (fifth-first centuries B.C.), has come to function like myth." (Allan, 1981: 10) Referring to this sort of "historical myth or mythical history" (Allan, 1981: 12) as legend", Allan concludes that the legend types in Chinese thought have affected Chinese politics and literature throughout history. Drawing on the notion of "mythistory" from Joseph Mali's *Mythistory: The Making of a Historiography* (2003), some Chinese scholars have vigorously pushed forward the focal point of mythology. In the 1980s, with the highly self-awareness of tool reforms, Ye Shuxian, the leading scholar of Chinese mythology, not only introduces the myth archetype criticism into Chinese literary studies, but also applies the approach to the re-interpretation of Chinese classics. The introduction and practice of myth archetype criticism in literary studies is a breakthrough for the conceptual innovation of "myth". Myth archetype criticism becomes the inter-cultural and interdisciplinary gene of the subsequent development of Chinese mythology

In the *Lao Tzu and Chinese Mythology* (Ye Shuxian, 2005), *Cultural Analysis of Chuang Tzu* (Ye Shuxian, 2005), *Cultural Interpretation of Shijing* (Ye Shuxian, 2005), Ye not only reveals the ideological thoughts of literary texts, but also illustrates the literary expressions of philosophical ideas, which were integrated and incorporated simultaneously by the decoding of “mythological images”. In *The Hero and the Sun* (Ye Shuxian, 2005) and *Chinese Philosophy of Mythology* (Ye Shuxian, 2005), the approach of literature-philosophy mutual interpretation, with the “mythological image” as the core value, extends initiatively to a broader cross-cultural horizon and exhibits the capacity of theoretical innovation. Based on the history-interpreting function of “mythological images”, Ye calls for a “Mythical China” (Ye Shuxian, 2009: 33-38) that contains a holistic understanding of Chinese culture, the code of which encompasses even the structure of religion. *Totem of Bear* (Ye Shuxian, 2007), is a case in point to illustrate the complicated and intimate relationship between myth and history. It is worthwhile to notice that the conceptual innovation of “history” is triggered not only by the post-modern views of history, such as the New Historicism, but also by the prolong debates between Yigu (School of Doubting Antique) and Gushibiao (School of Defending Antique) in Chinese history studies. The leading scholar of Doubting Antique, Gu Jiegang, regards all history recorded by ancient myths as nonsense and what myths record is merely the later generations’ authoritative narration. The Doubting Antiquity School’ denying the historical significance of myths has its ground in the scientific conception of history in China’s modern history studies, which keeps alert for the authoritative narration in history records. However, it fails to realize the dialectical relation between the truth and the false in myths, thus completely denies the myths’ possibility and capability of narrating history. In contrast, the Literary Anthropology School holds a rational and impartial view towards myth, believing that myth enjoys priority in narrating and interpreting history. While “eighty years ago the School of Defending Antique scholars adhering to the tenet of historical positivism, tried to revert ancient Chinese history to myth or false history,” this school rather expects “an anti-movement” that interprets from myths and legends the lost clues of ancient history, or histories with a multitude of marginal narratives.” (Ye Shuxian, 2009: 20-26)

By elucidating the deep connection between myths and philosophical thoughts and historical facts, Ye successfully gets rid of the narrow limitation of myths and consciously regards myths as the common source and archetype of the humanities of modern principles, like literature, history and philosophy. Mythology is redefined as the integrated origin of civilization. By the aid of the totem bear, Ye showed the history and reasonability in myths, which shed light on the dialectics of mythical narratives. By the discovering and consciously adopting the underlying relation between “mythology” and “history”, Ye reveals the dialectics of mythical narratives, which can be seen as the accomplishment of Chinese syllogistic view of history: from believing antiquity to doubting antiquity, then from doubting antiquity to interpreting antiquity. (Ye Shuxian, 2012:5-10)The “literature” and “philosophy” in myths is associated by mythological images, while the reproduction of the authentic history in myths relies on the concept of “mythistory” which is brought up by Ye. Though it has its theoretical support in western mythological research, it is still closely rooted in Chinese native materials. Given mythology is multi-faceted and also the “prototype” that constructs Chinese civilization, Ye even uses the concept “mythological China” to generalize the self-expression of Chinese civilization. Owing to the activation of myths’ multi-interpretation capacity and the penetrating understanding of the relations between mythology and history, “Myth history” offers methodological support for the deep exploration of the origins of Chinese civilization. In the following, jade-king myths of four Chinese early dynasties, Xia, Shang, Zhou and Qin dynasties, covering a time span of more than 2000 years will be analyzed to illustrate the continuation and evolution of jade’s mythological concepts.

3. Mythical Narrative and Mythological History of Xia Dynasty

3.1 Myth of Xia Yu's Tampering Rivers with the Help of Jade He Gained

The first jade myth to be analyzed comes from Shang Shu and *Records of the Grand Historian*, which is a historical myth telling about Yu the Great, who was the first outstanding statesman who founded the nation by taming the rivers. In the Yao and Shun ages, there are historical records of “collecting five jades” and “issuing the jades to tribal leaders”, where jades were regarded as sacrificial articles symbolizing the national power. (Ye, Shuxian, 2012: 2-12) In ancient China, almost all generations of the early countries worshiped jades as holy treasures. Take Xia dynasty as an example, “seen from the documents, the success or failure of the kings of Xia dynasty is determined by whether they owned jades. The ownership of jades was of great importance to the rulers of Xia, according to Shang Shu: Tribute of Yu, ‘Yu gained black jade and successfully became the king. (Shang Shu, 1980:153) In *Records of the Grand Historian: Annals of Xia*, “the Jade Emperor (supreme ruler of Heaven in Taoism) gave Yu black jade to show the world that Yu became the King.” Seen from this, we can say that Yu the Great depended black jade, a mysterious sacrificial jade article to become the king. In *The Mo Zi: No Attack II*, “Yu, holding the black jade given by the Jade Emperor, went to conquer the Youmiao tribe.” Black jade was the jade token from the heaven. In such an era that all rites, music and wars were started by the son of heaven, anyone who had the holy jade from the heaven had the right to rule the world.” (Ye, Shuxian, 2009)

Later, some adaptations of Yu's story appeared and popularized: what Yu got was jade slip or jade letter, or it was from Fuxi Emperor that Yu got the jade letter. Wang Jia of the Jin dynasty wrote in his *Anecdotes of History: Yu of Xia*: “another god appeared, with man's face and snake body. Yu talked to him. Then the god showed the Bagua to Yu...he gave Yu the jade letter, which was 12 cun (0.4m) long. It matched the 12 number, so that it acquire a magic power of measuring the sky and land. Yu, holding this jade letter, conquered the flood waters and soils. The god, with man's face and snake's body, is Fuxi Emperor.” Such adaptation, appearing in later age, still conformed to the narrative mode of hero myth and epic ages: the hero, under the guidance of heaven's messenger, gained a holy treasure; and with the help of this holy treasure, the hero accomplished a cause which couldn't be accomplished by the ordinary people. Just as Aeneas who gained the golden bough with the guidance of the prophet and the dove, Yu of Xia gained the jade letter under the guidance of Fuxi Emperor.

Zhao Hua of Han dynasty had another version about Yu's jade story. In his *History of Wu and Yue States: Anecdotes of King of Yue – Wu Xu*: “in winter, Yu climbed the Yuanwei Mountain. There he discovered a gold book with jade characters, in which he learned the way to tame waters.” In this version, jade article was replaced by the book combining both gold and jade, which was obviously the imagination of people on that day. Since at the beginning of Xia dynasty, there was no gold or characters, the imagination didn't fit the reality, but it matched the concept of “the music of gold and jade” treasure which appeared after the Warring States period, which was more inspiring to the man of letters. For example, in *Tablet Inscription for Gold Hall on the Tongbai Mountain* written by Shen Yue of the Liang dynasty, “writings on gold slips with jade characters were treasure as precious as the black frost and crimson snow, which couldn't be looked at by the ordinary people or overlooked by the intellectuals.” The luster of gold and jade, glittering together, contributed to the imaginative scenery of “Jin Bi Hui Huang”(looking splendid in green and gold, just like gold and jade vied with each other). According to *The Book of the Later Han: Zhang Heng's Bibliography*, “during the Yongyuan Years”(the reign of Liu Zhao, Emperor He of Han) Song Jing of Qinghe County predicated the flood by the referring to the historical records, but pretended to claim that he had peaked at the jade writing. In his annotation to *Dunjia Kaishan Tu*, Li Xian said: “Yu the Great traveled to the East Sea, gained the jade letter which was green in color, 40 centimeters long and as round as the sun or moon. Looking at with naked eyes, people would enter the

spiritual world.”(Wang Xianqian, .1984: 668). Thus, Chinese literature memorizes Yu the Great, the founder of the first dynasty, through a mysterious jade treasure, which Chinese intellectuals took delight in talking about and repeatedly praised.

3.2 Myth of Xia Qi’s Entering Heaven by Gaining a Semi-Circular Jade

Another jade myth is about Qi of Xia, who entered the heaven by gaining a semi-circular jade. As the son of Yu the Great, Qi was the creator of imperial family, i.e. the first who inherited the throne from his father. He also regarded the jade ware as the symbolism of supreme royalty. The difference was, the holy jade ware of Yu the Great is jade tablet, while that of Xia Qi was the semi-circular jade. The *Classic of Mountains and Seas: Classic of Regions beyond the Seas* said: “At Dale Ye, Xia Qi watched the musical dance Jiudai, and drove two dragons, flying beyond the clouds. In his right hand was a canopy, in his left hand a jade ring, and on his waist wore a semi-circular jade(according to Guo Pu’s annotation: “a jade like half the sun”). Another saying goes that this happened to the north of the Dayun Mountain”. (Yuan Ke, 1980:209)

As the royal emperor, Qi of Xia was described as “in his left hand a jade ring, and on his waist wore a semi-circular jade”. Seen from the great tradition of 8000-year-long jade culture, the appearance of jade tablet was much posterior to that of semi-circular jade. In other words, compared with the jade tablet of Yu the Great, Xia Qi’s semi-circular jade bears more historical roots, whose cultural implication was also very rich. In 2007, the tomb No. 23(M23) discovered at Lingjia Tan, Hanshan County, Anhui Province, showed the splendid jade bearings of a tribal leader 5300 years ago: each of his hand wore 10 jade bracelets and on his body more than 300 jade articles, including a large number of semi-circular jades. This indicates that the description of Xia Qi in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* is not purely imagined or created mythological literature at all. The custom of the ruler’s wearing jades 4000 years ago resulted from the prehistoric tradition that tribal rulers’ wearing jades around 5000 to 6000 years ago. What requires for further research is the mythological concepts behind the custom of wearing jades. Compared with the hundreds of jade articles discovered in the high-level tombs of Liangzhe Culture or Lingjia Tan Culture, Yu the Great and Qi of Xia only had one or two symbolical jade articles, as though representing the situation after the peak of jade culture or showing that jade culture tended to decline after the peak. The reason was that, with rise of state powers in the Central Plains, a new holy ironware (the bronze ware) appeared and gradually became popular. The great tradition of jade’s domination transferred to the little tradition of co-existence of gold and jade.

The mythological concept behind the custom of rulers’ wearing jades is mainly connected with the wizards’ or priests’ professional demand of access to the deities or heaven. In annotations to *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, there are other versions about Xia Qi’s entering the heaven by driving dragons. For example, Guo Pu explained: “according to Guizang: *The Classic of Zhengmu*, ‘Qi of Xia rode the flying dragons to the heaven, which was auspicious’. Obviously, Qi was a deity too”. Guo thought that Qi of Xia, who could go to heaven, enjoys privilege identity of becoming god. This was an interpretation of Xia Qi’s entering heaven from the Taoist belief of West Jin dynasty. To the Qing dynasty, Hao Anxing cited another piece of information in his annotation: the 82nd volume of *Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era* cited *Records of the Grand Historian* that, “Qi of Xia once rode dragons to heaven. He asked Gao Yao to practice divination for him. Gao Yao said, ‘it was auspicious to go there and communicate with the deities; and you will be the emperor ruling over the world’”.

The former three materials all talked about the special power of Xia Qi’s riding dragons or entering the heaven by driving two dragons. The last material also told us about the purpose of going to the heaven, or communicate with the deities. Besides dragon driving, *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* also mentioned the jade articles: in his left hand a jade ring, and on his waist wore a semi-circular jade. The narration here had the meaning of origin: the source and holder of rites, music, songs and dances was Qi of Xia, the rider of two dragons. Since he

could ride dragon, the text did not explain the reason why did he still held the jade ring in his hand and wore the semi-circular jade on his waist. Referring to another narration in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, we can know that jade ring and semi-circular jade functioned as the media between man and god: according to *Classic of the Great Wilderness: West*, “beyond the Southwest Sea, to the south of Chi River, and to the west of Drifting Sand, a man wore two green snake-sized jades and rode two dragons. The man was named Xia Qi. He three times visited the heaven, and went back down with Jiubian and Jiuge”. (Yuan Ke, 1980: 414). The rites, music, songs and dances of the human world were thought to be brought down from the heaven by Xia Qi’s three visits to the heaven. And the tool he used was still the dragons. When we put together the two mythological texts, we can summarize the basic formula of mythological concept of man-and-god combination which has to threeinteractive themes: the heaven visitor – riding dragons – wearing semi-circular jade (or holding jade ring).

In *Painting Eulogies to The Classic of Mountains and Seas* written by Guo Pu of Jin dynasty, these three themes were emphasized again: “What he drove was the flying dragons, and got the Jiudai dance. What he held was clouds. What he wore was jade. His imperial virtues were spread and his powers came from the celestial and covered all the nation.” Why jade ware was combined with the theme of humans’ communication with the deities or heaven? Bamboo Annals (Zhu Shu Ji Nian) also mentioned that, the special place where Qi of Xia holding rites was a dais decorated by jades: “in the winter of 841 BC, Emperor Qi ascended the throne...he feted the dunkes at Xuan Tai”. Xuan Tian equals Zao Tai or Xuan Tai. Both Xuan and Zao refer to beautiful jades. So the emperor’s power of access to the deities has something to do with his mysterious jade articles. In his *Wen Xuan*(Selections of Refined Literature), Wang Yuanchang said in Poem Preface to Qu River: “Qi of Xia rode the two dragons on the Xuan Tai(jade dais).” In his annotation to The Book of Changes, Li Shan said: “Qi of Xia once enjoyed music at the dyke of Jin River, and built Xuan Tai(jade dais) by the north side of the river”.(Fang, Shiming, 2005:213).

Xuan Tai was a dais decorated by beautiful jades. As a dais name for Xia’s emperor, Xuan Tai had more or less connection with the emperors after Xia and Shang dynasties. In his Chronicle of Emperors (Di Wang Shi Ji), Huangfu Mi wrote: “King Wu of Zhou ordered Duke Yuan to release the prisoned people and return the jades of Xuan Tai”. In his Seven Orders, Zhang Xie of the Jin dynasty wrote that, “the rails were surrounded by clouds, with green walls and trees. There were eight guarded doors and Long Tai (Xuan Tai) was the ninth one”. In later literatures, the dwellings of the deities were also called Xuan Tai. In the poem No. 10 of Guo Pu’s Poetry about Immortals, he wrote: “Xuan Tai was the hat of Kunlun Mountain and wavered on the seaside of the West Sea”. Kunlun, the production place of jade located in the west, was imagined as a mountain with a top like Xuan Tai. From these resources, we can see that, ancient people’s memory of Xuan Tai didn’t go beyond what was described in the age of Xia Qi. So, the same as the theme of dragon riding, the mysterious theme of jade dais, semi-circular jade, jade ring etc. carried some historical information which was prior to the Shang dynasty.

4. Mythical Narrative and Mythological History of Shang Dynasty

4.1 Myth of King Zhou of Shang’s Burning Himself Together with Jades

The following jade myth is about the last emperor of the Shang dynasty, King Zhou of Shang, who burned himself together with jades. In the *Lost Book of Zhou: Defeat of King Zhou of Shang*, “King Zhou of Shang lost the battle on the outskirts of Shang’s capital. On that night, King Zhou took out five Heaven Wisdom Jades (jade of supreme beauty which didn’t get warm in the fire), wore them on his body and burned himself. Some people told King Wu of Zhou that King Zhou had burned four thousand jades. Five days later, King Wu of Zhou ordered his chiliarch to look for King Zhou’s body and the jades. The four thousand jades had been destroyed, but the five Heaven Wisdom Jades were still in good condition”. (Huang Huaixin, 2006: 203).

For King Wu of Zhou, who succeeded King Zhou to rule over the Central Plains, all jades could be valid evidence of the transfer of power and heaven's will and kept in the royal family, rather than destroyed or canceled like the pictures of gods, the totem or the memorial tablets. After the story about King Zhou's self-burning, *Lost Book of Zhou: Defeat of King Zhou of Shang* continued with King Wu's inheritance of jades: "All Heaven Wisdom Jades were treated as precious jades by King Wu. The total jades King Wu captured from King Zhou of Shang amounted to one hundred million (a million of that age is treated as 80 thousand)". Later generations have different understandings of the "one hundred million jades. Huang Huaixin, after studying various citations and annotations, concluded that, six Chinese characters were lost in the sentence. Added the six characters, the sentence meant, "All Heaven Wisdom Jades were treated as precious jades by King Wu. In all, he captured 14,000 old precious jades and 180,000 wearing jades from the Shang dynasty".

Whether treated as history or mythology, the narration in *Lost Book of Zhou* can at least show that, together with the revolution of Zhou dynasty, a large amount of jades had a new owner. Even with a conservative estimation, around 200,000 jade articles were included in the Zhou royal warehouse. (Yang Shengnan, 1992: 538) Before its meaning of wealth and luxury, jade's higher value was to represent holiness and heaven's will at the beginning of Chinese civilization. Those documentaries put special emphasis on numerous jades instead of gold ware, silver ware or the bronze. For the author of *Lost Book of Zhou* who covered three dynasties in his book, we could see that the special cultural tradition of jade motivates or unconsciously dominates his choice or narrative focus of jade.

When King Zhou of Shang burned himself, he also burn jade except the Heaven Wisdom Jades. The idea that jade can be refined also appeared in the myth of Nv Wa's patching up the sky. In this sense, "jade refining" is also called "Dan refining", which was an important magic in later Taoist beliefs and practices. The basic step of Dan refining was to smelt is to smelt the cinnabar in a stove. Later, Dan was divided into the internal Dan and exterior Dan (alchemy): internal Dan was refining the human body through Qigong, and exterior Dan was to smelt the medical stone with fire. Comparative religionist Mircea Eliade told people that we should focus on the mythological concepts in gold smelting or Dan refining, that is, how the materials and the spiritual interacted. "This magic technique made the mineral mature, the metal purified. It developed into the alchemy, since it accelerates the perfection of metals". (Eliade, 2001:323) In accordance to this hints, scholar Yang Rubin from Taiwan, attempted to interpret the root meaning of Gold, one of the Five Element, and also related to the mythological connection between alchemy and immortality belief. (Yang, 2008: 677-709)

Base on "dual verification" methodology, oracle inscriptions on the bones or tortoise shells of the Shang Dynasty show that, in the hearts of Shang people, jade myths were not pure literary creation, but a valid and evidential belief and ritual narration. In his paper *From Oracle Inscriptions, See Shang People's Valuing and Using of Jades and a Few Revelations*, Wang Yuxin made some useful explorations into this. He pointed out, in the oracle inscriptions, the character Yu (jade) appeared so did Ya (press,) which combined two Yu characters. And the character Nong (play) presented an image of a hand holding a jade. Correspondently, there are physical evidences, including numerous animal decorations such as jade fish, jade birds, jade turtles and jade cicadas. This was the scene of Shang people's "playing jades". Another character Bao (treasure) was combined with Bei (cowry) and Yu (jade), which shows that the slave owners of Shang dynasty had been conscious of regarding jade as treasure. "In Shang dynasty, since people treasured and loved jades, the shamanism and mystification of jade took its shape. The nobility even dreamed of jades". (Centre for Chinese Archaeology and Art, 1998:18-25). The royal nobles also used jades as the presents to the deities in their rituals. This kind of jade ritual was a transition from prehistoric jade culture and custom to the later tradition of jade rites system lasting from West Zhou dynasty to Han dynasty, (Sun Qingwei, 2008) which laid the foundation for the core contents of Chinese ritual culture.

5. Mythical Narrative and Mythological History of Zhou Dynasty

5.1 Myth of Jiang Ziya's Knowing Heaven's will by Gaining a Semi-circular Jade

The following myth is Jiang Ziya of the West Zhou dynasty gained a semi-circular jade. According to the first volume of *Shangshu Dazhuan*, "King Wen of Zhou arrived at the Bo river, where he saw Lv Shang (Jiang Ziya) fishing. Lv Shang went to introduce himself to the King Wen. Lv Shang said: "I fished a semi-circular jade. I saw words on it: the heaven's will is to let King Wen of Zhou rule over the world and Lv Shang will help him." Later, semi-circular is cited to refer to Lv Shang's assistance to Kong Wen of Zhou. For example, in Epitaph for Zhou's General Zhao Gong, Geng Xin said, "the land produced a good harvest and by the time, wars had ended. The semi-circular jade (with the assistance of Lv Shang, the King Wen of Zhou's son) stopped the chaos, and the gold glimmering in the court". In his poem Officer Li of West Zhe Expressed His Dream in a 40-line Poem, Liu Yuxi said: "His family have the stove supported by gold pillars (signifying officers important to the country), and the semi-circular jade talent (signifying outstanding talent in assisting the emperor and administering the country)". In his *Yujia'ao*: Poem Written on the Painting of Feng Jiang River's Fisherman, Sun Zhiwei of Qing dynasty said: "He was happy that he had fished the semi-circular jade. It was time for him to stop fishing and fight for the people's welfare". These ancient poems and citations are enough to show the popularity and re-creation of Jiang Ziya's jade fishing myth in later literature. But, if we want to know more about the practical functions of jade articles in West Zhou dynasty, we need to consult to the historical records.

According to the article *Gold Case in Shang Shu*: "Two years after defeating Shang, King Wu of Zhou got sick and there was no sign of recovery. Two dukes said, 'let's practice divination for King Wu'. Duke of Zhou said, 'why don't we pray for our king?' Duke of Zhou made himself the sacrifice, and built three altars. He also built an altar on the south side. Duke of Zhou stood there, facing north. He held a Bi (round flat jade with a hole in its center used for ceremonial purposes in ancient China), and a Gui (an elongated pointed tablet of jade held in the hands by ancient rulers on ceremonial occasions), and prayed to King Tai, King Ji and King Wen (they all were ancestors of the royal family, including King Wen was King Wu's late father). The official historian wrote down his prayers: 'Your eldest grandson Ji Fa (the name of King Wu) has got a serious disease. If you three have sacrifice duty in heaven, please make me the sacrifice instead of Ji Fa. I'm kind and talented, I can serve the gods. Your eldest grandson is not as talented as me, so he's not good for serving the gods. It's the heaven's will that ordered Ji Fa to rule the country and win the world, so that he could ensure peace and prosperity for your precedents. All the people love him. Please don't disappoint the heaven's will. Thus you, our ancestors, can forever have honors. Now, I have given orders to the holy turtle. If you answer my appeal, I will offer the Bi and Gui to you; if you don't, I will take back the Bi and Gui'. Then, he practiced divination to three turtles, they all told auspicious results. He opened the writing bamboo slips, the outcomes were all auspicious." (Ruan Yuan, 1980: 196)

Jiang Ziya acquired the capability of knowing the heaven's will and orders from the semi-circular jade which was bestowed by the heaven. Duke of Zhou used the jade articles as a precious bribe and bargain with his ancestors to ask for their blessings. The scene how people talked to and communicated with the gods or supernatural beings, though happened 3000 years ago, was still as vivid as we can see.

5.2 Myth of King Mu of Zhou's Gaining Jade Flowers and Jade Leaves

Another jade myth is the narrative about King Mu of Zhou, who went to visit the Palace of Yellow Emperor and gained jade boughs and jade leaves. According to volume two of *Tale of King Mu, Son of Heaven*, "on a good day of Xin You year, King Mu climbed up to the Kunlun Mountain, to visit the Palace of Yellow Emperor".

Here, the Palace of Yellow Emperor was basically the same location where, the Yellow Emperor ate the jade cream and planted the jade buds as in the first case's citation from the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*: Classic of the Mountains, West, which can remind people of jade halls-palace in the moon. The Palace of Yellow Emperor may be the palace of worshipping gods with jades, place where "all gods and ghosts feed on jade". King Mu of Zhou traveled such a long way to Kunlun Mountain, to the Palace of Yellow Emperor, which contained the meaning of return to the prehistoric jade culture. Comparing Duke of Zhou's offering jades to the gods, King Mu of Zhou worshipped the god of river with jades, which demonstrates his sincerity respect and awe. In these solemn sacrifice rites, the jade myths is more of a belief and concept, instead of pure literary narrative.

According to *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, the location where King Mu got the precious jade flowers and jade leaves is described in this way: "Clear water springs out of the Chong Mountain, which is warm and windless. Flying birds and various animals feeds here. Former kings called it "Xian Pu"(the Fairyland). The Son of Heaven (King Mu of Zhou) got the flower buds of jade boughs here". According to the old annotation: "jade bud, the essence of jade. According to Shi Zi, 'there are jade buds in the Dragon Spring'. According to the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, 'the Yellow Emperor took the jade flowers of Mi Mountain and planted them on the south side of Zhong Mountain". Du Qi said: "Shi Hua said: 'At the beginning of all jades, there are buds, flowers and blooms' Buds are the very beginning of jades' birth, as the buds of grasses and trees; flowers are the most beautiful status of jades, like the flowers of grasses and trees; blooms are the newly maturity of jades, like the blooms of grasses and trees". (Gui Qi, 1987:29) The treasure King Mu gained also came from the water. The jade buds, jade flowers and jade blooms can be produced from the water and planted the same as crops, which conveyed most naïve and pure ideal of ancient people. They grew year by year, and came back to life when the spring came. The jade trees and jade flowers on the mountains became the symbol of immortality and eternity of human beings.

Since the Stone Age, jade had been the symbol of eternal life, or become the magical medicine for immortality in the eyes of ancient people. The health care function of jade had long been talked about, for example, in the Huannanzi, "Boil the jades from the Zhong Mountain for three days, yet the color of jades won't change, because they have got the essence of nature". In Baopuzi, Ge Hong said, "people who eat metals will live as long as metals, and people who eat jades will live as long as jades". Jade was also called "Xuan Zhen (magic essence)". Once dieting the magic jade, the body will become light as flying, and people who eat it will enjoy an everlasting life.

In *Introduction to Herbs*, Tang Shenwei of Song Dynasty said: "jade powder has a mellow taste. It's non-toxic. It mainly helps to remove the heat in stomach, heel the wheezing, the dysphoria and thirsty. Eating bean-sized jade regularly, you will feel light and live longer. Jades are born in Lantian and can be picked in any season of the year", it also cited the prescriptions from many sources, including Views on the Treasure, The Qingxiazi, Anecdotes during Tianbao reign, etc. In *Compendium of Materia Medica*, Li Shizhen recorded 14 medical functions of jades, including healing the heat in stomach, the wheezing, the dysphoria, the thirsty, and eating bean-sized jade regularly, you will feel light and live longer. He also cited from other books that, jades can help smooth the lung, clean the throat, and flourish the hair. For scars on the skin, grind them every day with a real jade, and the scars will disappear gradually. (Li Shizhen, 1986:626-629)

6. Mythical Narrative and Mythological History of Qin Dynasty

6.1 Myth of Bi (Round Jade with Hole in the Center) of Emperor Ying Zheng

Qin Dynasty, the first united empire in China, the following will choose part of the historical narration in the first Chinese comprehensive history book, i.e. *Records of the Great Historian: Annals of the First Emperor of*

Qin, which talks about the behaviors and incidents of the supreme nation ruler, to illustrate the potential dominance of jade mythological concepts. The 36th year of the Emperor of Qin was also 211 BC, which is the 10th year Ying Zheng, King of Qin, united China and established the first empire in China. According to the tradition, there should have been a series of celebrations in the 10th year. But only two events, slaughter of the innocent and migration of 20,000 people are recorded in *Annals of the First Emperor of Qin*: A meteorite fell onto the East Town, and became a stone on the earth. People carved "The First Emperor of Qin dies and the state divides" in it. The Emperor heard of it and sent an official to investigate it. Nobody admitted his guilt. So the Emperor ordered to kill all the people living nearby the stone and burned the stone. The Emperor was upset and ordered the scholar at court to write Xian Zhen Ren Shi (a poem to praise the Emperor) as the lyrics, and the musicians to make tune to it, so that it could be sung and tribute to around the country. Till the autumn, a messenger passed by Pingshu Road, Huayin Town. Someone holding a Jade Bi (piece of jade with hole in center) stopped the messenger and said, "Please bring this to Mr. Hao Chi for me." He also said, "In this year, the ancestral Long will die." The messenger asked him the reason, but he disappeared, only leaving the Jade Bi. The messenger took back the Jade Bi and told the Emperors all he experienced. For quite a while, the Emperor remained silent, and then said, "Ghosts in the mountains could only foresee things in the next year." Later, he said, "the ancestral dragon should be the ancestor of man." He asked the jade council to inspect the jade Bi, which was identified as the very jade Bi the Emperor himself dropped in the river when he toured the country in the 28th year of his reign. So the First Emperor practiced divination to it, and the oracle said that it was blessing to migrate. So he ordered to 30,000 families migrate to Yuzhong, north to the Yellow River. All members of these families are entitled as the first class officials. (Sima Qian, 1982: 259)

In this record, the prediction carved in the meteorite brought about the deaths of countless families. The sentence that "the Emperor ordered to kill all the people living nearby the stone" clearly shows the cruelty of this tyrant and his inward cowardice. It is worth noticing that the mysterious message conveyed by the jade Bi, like the oracle in the Apollo temple in the Greek myths, brought by the immortal. Eight years ago, Ying Zheng was stuck in a storm when crossing the river. He threw this jade Bi into the river which protected him to cross the river sound and safe. Eight years later, this jade Bi magically returned to the Emperor. He ordered the officials in the jade council and divined it personally. The reason why the Emperor ordered to slaughter the innocent and migrate many families, has something to do with the mythological function of jade the ruler believed. The reason to kill is directly illustrated in the text – to punish the fabricator of unlucky augury. The stone on the earth came from the sky, which was deemed as the mythological media or will from holy heaven. To eliminate the spiritual threat brought by this meteorite with unlucky augury, what Ying Zheng could do was only to make a slaughter. The reason to migrate 30 thousand families is due to the mythological message brought by a lost-then-found jade Bi. The capability of prediction of God of River is limited, only able to foresee the second year. Faced with this mysterious message, Ying Zheng himself didn't understand, so he divined it to ask the heaven's will. The result showed that, if he migrated many people, he would be able to turn calamities to blessings. 20,000 families, with the elders and youngsters, were forced to migrate, just in order to conform to the oracle.

6.2 Holy Symbol and Sublime Sign of Jade Imperial Seal in Qin Dynasty

Ying Zheng, the founder of the first united empire in China, couldn't foresee his own fate or that of the empire's regime. With ambition and fear in mind, how he relied on the priests (necromancer, wizards) is demonstrated vividly here. (Gu Jiegang, 1978: 9-12) The four characters "Shi Huagn Bu Zhi" (meaning: the First Emperor

practiced divination) by Sima Qian illustrates the profound historical tradition after Shang dynasty that the emperors practiced divination by themselves, which was still popular after Qin and Han united China as one. It is worthwhile to notice that, according to the archeological discoveries, Bi, a round sacrificial jade with a hole in the center, dating from the 6000-year-old Hongshan Culture and 500-year-old Liangzhu Culture, then extending the more-than-2000-year-old Qin dynasty, had lasted for nearly 4000 years.

Parallel with jade Bi that embodies the heaven's will, the jade imperial seal initiated by the Emperor Qin symbolizes the supreme national power is also based on the mythological logics of the integrity of man and nature and the unification of the state and the church. In *The Emperor and the Assassin* (Clements, 2008: 1), a picture inscribed on a stone in the Han dynasty which was unearthed in Wuliang ancestral temple, Shandong Province, the only magic weapon the Emperor Qin used to threaten the assassin was the imperial jade seal held in his left hand and lifted over his head. The jade seal is not only the holy symbolism of luminous bodies in the sky, but also the holy signs which embody the will of heaven, i.e. Eight characters inscribed in the front of seal character by Li Si, the Prime Minister of Qin: "Shou Ming Yu Tian, Ji Shou Yong Cha" (meaning: Heaven's Will Grant Ruling, long Lasting and prosperous)." (Tang Rongzuo, 1998: 158) In spite the harsh reality that, the Qin dynasty only lasted for 15 years, which constitutes a sharp contrast and irony with the ideal "long Lasting and prosperous", the ruler's faith in the mysterious heaven's will is for sure and real.

Without the awareness of the conceptual tradition of jade myths, the later generations are subject to neglect the essential roles jades played in ancient historical narrations. Without the mythological values of regarding gold as holy, the ancient Greek won't have the imaginative narration of gold age and gold apple. Similarly, without Chinese mythological values of worshipping jade as holy and immortal, Chinese won't have the mythological history of jade stories, including Bian He's presenting beautiful jade to the kings, Bi of He (Bi-a piece of jade with hole in center), and Wan Bi Gui Zhao (literal meaning-Bi came back to Zhao sound and safe, extended meaning-to return a thing intact to its owner), let alone First Emperor of Qin's imperial seal and Emperor Wu of Han's funeral rites of being buried with gold and jade clothes on.

7. Jade Worship and Mythological Concept

The previous jade myths related to the kings of four dynasties –Xia, Shang, Zhou and Qin dynasties, covering a time span of more than 2000 years. From the analysis of them, we can see the continuation and evolution of jade's mythical narrative and mythological concepts. Mythical narratives do not come out of vacuum and exist in an isolated realm. Thus our next task is to turn from the literary study of the mythology to the genetic or archaeological study on its mythological concepts, which is similar to the archaeology of knowledge proposed by Michel Foucault. Then, the scope and subject of mythology extends from ancient mythological narratives in written form to the pre-writing prehistoric jade articles for worshipping purposes. To figure out the underlying motive of jade worship, we have to study the mythological concepts of jade in shaping the inward ideology and exterior behavior in the integrated view of ideological history and cultural history.

The initial beliefs of jade should be traced back to Chinese cultures and civilizations in the prehistoric age. The Mythological Concepts of the pre-historical tradition functions effectively to the construction of the core concepts of a given culture, just as Schilbrack holds, "The political mythological theories should be demystified, since the daily activities of political interactive texts is filled with mythological creation. There's no need to regard myths as some special ways of expression or confine beliefs to an irrational psychopathic mythology. Mythological creation is no rare matter or mistake. It's nothing less than a way to make the political events easy

to comprehend by way of ideological beliefs. After a long time, some narration seemed quite important for a social group; while, some others soon disappeared. But the creation and re-creation of mythological narrations is permanent in the political life.” (Schilbrack, 2002:188) Schilbrack stresses that mythological concepts plays a deterministic role and prototype function in the formation and evolution of ideology. Richard Oians, a distinguished scholar on the religious origin of the ancient mythological literature, holds that philosophies and sciences originated from the religious beliefs at the outset of civilizations, “those are the basic beliefs about life, thought and fate, which determine man’s discourse and actions, which are not exclusive to the Greek. In some sense, what we are digging is none other but the root or origins of civilizations in Europe and other places. I think, the basic beliefs expressed in Greek and Roman languages and the earliest literary works are also shared by the Germanic people, the Celts, and other races. At least in some cases, these beliefs have already been widely accepted in the Paleolithic age. They can explain people’s weird behaviors at that time, which also exist in modern idioms and phrases in the way we are not aware of.” (Oians, 1954: 1)

Jade as the gene of Chinese culture, which plays an integrated function in the material and spiritual resource possession and distribution. The critical link between mythology and cultural origin lies in the special cultural factors that mold the ideology. At the early Chinese history, jade functions as the bonding that integrate the central plains and the surrounding areas. Such bonding was both material (from the mining, exploitation, transportation, exchange to the processing and distribution of jade minerals), and spiritual (the cross-region spreading and unification of jade’s mythological concept). The long-term interaction of material and spiritual demand finally brought to the eve of Chinese civilization (the era before the Bronze Age) its core values: jade as holy, jade as treasure, and jade ware as the sign to communicate man and heaven (man and god). Jade has gone through the building of Chinese civilization with various gestures, which provides us a panoramic perspective to know about the integrity and continuity of Chinese civilization. The continuity of Chinese civilization consists of has two related layers of meanings: first, Chinese civilization never stops from the ancient to now and still enjoys a vital energy, which enchants the west scholars; second, there is a structural continuity of belief, ritual, politics and economics within Chinese civilization system, which is proposed by Tu Weiming as “the continuity of being”. He then introduce a peculiar omnipotent and omnipresent Chinese concept “Qi” (air) to explore the particularity of Chinese thoughts. He raised a question about the origin t of “Qi”, “in what sense do the most unintelligent substances, such as stones, and the most intelligent embodiments, such as the heaven, constitute of the same thing – Qi?” (Tu Weiming, 1981: 6) Here, “Stones” and “heaven” listed exactly correspond to jade and “jade-as-god” ideology in the jade oriented theory. Thus, jade theory enjoys potential in the illumination and interpretation of the continuity and integrity of Chinese philosophy, the inner logic of the underlying ideology and derivative tradition can be seen.

Jade myths demonstrates the dialectical tension between the truth and the fake within myths, thus we should keep alert for the authoritative narration in history records, and realize the dialectical tension between the truth and the fake within myths, the myths’ possibility and capability of narrating history. Jade mythical narratives are absolutely not the exactly account of authentic history, but it takes efforts to penetrate through the fantastic mythical narratives to perceive the authentic history or grasp the leading threats to authentic history. By elucidating the connection between mythical concepts and historical narrative, mythology successfully gets rid of the narrow discipline limitation and is regarded as the common source and the integrated origin of the modern principles, like literature, history and philosophy. The historical and rational elements in jade myths, which shed light on the dialectics of mythical narratives. The discovering of underlying relation between mythology and history, the revealing of the dialectics within mythical narration offer methodological support for the deep exploration of the jade mythology and origins of Chinese civilization.

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