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**An Ethnography on Jadestone Crafts: A Comparison between the National Chinese
Historic Narrative and the Use of Jadestone Craft in Everyday Life**

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Introduction

The current ethnographic research attempts to track the presence of jade in the oral tradition of China, starting from the earliest references to the stone, which dates back to at least six thousand years, following its course until its arrival at the Ancient Jade Gallery at the Shanghai National History Museum and the usages of jade in daily life. This is a work that primarily attempts to make a description on jadestone objects in the Chinese culture, by firstly examining their significance in the construction of a national official Chinese historical narrative, as well as the use of jadestone crafts as part of everyday life. Secondly to identify the role of jade as an agent, which interacts with the people and even plays a part in the forging of the Chinese identity.

The components that constitute the collective memory of a nation, are its oral tradition, its written historical and literary texts, its museums, and its modern life.

Jade is not just present, but rather, I dare say, a keystone to all the above. Jade objects can be found in most, if not all Chinese places of memory, monuments and museums. It has helped create objects and images of public culture. It has molded language, territory, and common history into concrete forms of official culture and identity (Anderson 2006 [1983]).

By analyzing the museum planning expansion in China, it is possible to observe that conservation and exhibition of cultural heritage in China has been of paramount importance, particularly since the 90's (Kirk 2014).

Therefore, the archeological findings have a preponderant role that can provide the tools for the construction of the idea of nation, particularly in East societies¹ (Ikawa-Smith, Fukima 1999).

As the National History Museum of Shanghai displays one of the most prominent jadestone craft exhibitions in China, the Jades Gallery collection is the most eloquent way to exhibit jade as intrinsic component for the interpretation of the process carried out by the peoples who had built Chinese civilization. Through their shapes, jades illustrate the development of carving techniques, consequently, the evolution of 7000-year Chinese civilization: from the geometrically shaped artifacts in the Neolithic era until the animal, nature and human-shaped designs of the most recent periods.

However, the impact of the archeological findings of the last decades around the country

¹ The exhibition I examined, displays among the different periods of history, prominent archeological findings corresponding to the culture of Longshan 龙山文化 [lóngshān wénhuà].

This Neolithic culture inhabited the Yellow river area around the years 6,000 and 2,000 BC and is considered by scholars the zenith of evolution in Neolithic period, principally, as the excavations have revealed a high quality on craft technique for such as ceramics, jade carving and silk production. The objects found in these excavations demonstrate the long span of Chinese civilization, but also the attempt of local archeology upon the creation of a national historical narrative that could be able to link the Pre-historical cultures with the culture of today. The archeological studies on Neolithic Chinese cultures bring up the trajectory of these communities from simple villages to complex political systems, in fact, that is interpreted as the linking hub for the connection between Pre-history and history, in other words the beginning and continuum of Chinese civilization (Li Liu 2004).

has obliged scholars to reformulate the theories that support the time line scheme of Chinese history; particularly taking into account the Marxist approach on History and Archeology of the People's Republic of China².

Jade, as a semi-precious gemstone, allures people with its different colors and textures. The mineral analysis on jadestones shows certain particular chemical and molecular features on its external structure that are not visible to the eyes of an expert. However, Chinese people can identify some material qualities on it that help on the recognition of a good or bad jade: color, shape, hints in the stone, transparency and sound. These characteristics fix its price. What it is more noteworthy, is that its intangible qualities: the spiritual and traditional thoughts and beliefs are far more influential in the final price of the jadestone. The intimate relationship between people and jade is not merely aesthetic, but emotional, sometimes supernatural. Jadestone crafts are objects that embody traditional beliefs of morality, integrity, health, purity and eternity.

The interviews and the observations that were carried out at the Ancient Jade Gallery and the

² Dirif Arlik describes on his book, *Revolution and History: Origins of Marxist Historiography in China, 1919-1937*. University of California Press. 1978. the ways in which the Marxist materialist conception of history was introduced in China and influenced Chinese intellectuals. This involved the entrance in China to Eurocentric ideas for the interpretations of the process of construction of Chinese history. “*History to the Marxist historians was neither a mere pastime nor a scholarly enterprise; it was both functional and eminently practical. Marxists wanted urgently to understand the past because it held within it, they believe, the secret of dynamics of contemporary society whose destiny they wished fervently to shape. For the same reason, the changes they envisioned for the future shaped significantly their visions of history.*” (Arlik 1978:4)

jade shops demonstrated that jadestone crafts' materiality is a topic that anthropology has not dedicated a special interest, despite its massive presence nowadays, particularly around Shanghai.

As a social anthropologist, I have been intrigued by this dual nature of the stone and the connection it has had to the very existence of the Chinese people and culture. It serves as an agent of action and interaction. From a material point of view, in the past jade belonged to the royalty. It was a symbol of nobility and it remained in their hands, because they were blessed with its possession as well as upheld their power over the lower classes.

Conversely, in the China of the 21th century, jade can be observed as a commodity which varies in price and it is accessible to everyone who can afford it. It has ceased to be a privilege among the aristocracy of China. The working class can convert their life savings into jade as a means of financial security.

From a spiritual point of view, they associated the stone with all that is pure and ethical as it can be deducted from Confucius and the literary tradition. Honesty, ethics and nobility, were virtues of the stone which, of course, were transferred to the owners. These qualities of jade do not seem to be recognized in the same way by the citizens of modern China. However, although not overtly, there are more than a few people, especially women, who admit to bear a jadestone piece as a means of protection against accidents or bad luck. Hence, traces of spirituality are still found in popular beliefs regarding jade.

The above give my ethnography its dual mission: firstly, to trace how through the millennia of Chinese mythology, archeology and history, jade was invested with 'personality' and impacted on the people (Hoskins 2006). Secondly, to explore or interpret how jade was "commodified" and lost 'personality', currently befalling into the general trend of buying and

selling it amidst fruit markets. Do these routes originate, develop and end up completely separately without crossing paths? or do they intertwine somewhere along the way, in order to address the needs of the historical moment? This is what my research is painstakingly trying to discover.

Bearing that in mind, it is possible to observe that the agency of jadestone crafts is a fact that can be traced back in time as a utilitarian, sacred and status maker object. Moreover, I will also try to address the following: the way in which jade objects interact with the post-revolutionary and high technological Shanghainese society. Secondly, whether the new ideologies of market exchange and the radical changes within the modern China are able to alter the spiritual features of jadestone crafts.

The methodology of this ethnographic work is the bibliographical research and the fieldwork conducted in situ during my stay at Fudan University and my visits to the Shanghai National History Museum and jade markets as well as the interviews done during the present spring semester (2016), when I attended an exchange student program in Shanghai, China. The interview subjects are mainly female students and workers in Shanghai, whose ages span between 19 and 34 years. The subjects were requested to individually reply to a semi-structured interview related to their experiences with jadestone crafts: jewelry, ornament, history and mythology. During the interview, subjects could openly talk over other topics that need not be directly related to jade, but which can provide this research with additional hints on contemporary society

First Chapter

What is Jade?

Jadestones' external raw and uncarved shape in many cases does not differ from an ordinary piece of rock. Mere expert eyes are able to recognize from particular hints on the external gloomy look of the rock; the existence of these bright greenish color seems that eventually it could be distinguished as genuine jade. Traditionally, fine jade in Chinese can be classified into white, blue, yellow and black. Although in most parts of the Western World jade is automatically associated indistinctively to a green or blackish green color. The noun jade actually constitutes a particular kind of stone whose color is not ineludibly green. By interpreting the Chinese language, the character jade (玉) refers simultaneously to nine different semiprecious gemstones types.

Hetian jade or soft jade: It is named after its origin in Hetian, Xianjiang. It can be classified by color into white jade, blue jade, bluish white jade, yellow jade, black jade and green jade. It varies between vitreous luster to greasy luster, and between translucency to opaqueness. Smooth, shining, hard and compact, it was a major kind of material for ancient jade ware.










Fig. n°1

Jadeite: Usually known as hard jade, is mainly found in Myanmar. It can be red, green, purple, blue, yellow, gray, white or black. It is hard, and varies from vitreous luster to greasy luster and from translucence to opaqueness. Its Chinese name *feicui*, is the combination of *fei* a kind of red bird and *cui*, a kind of green bird. It was not widely used until the late Qin Dynasty.



Fig. n°2

<p>Xiu jade: It is also known as Xiuyan jade and is named after its origin in Xiunyan in Liaoning province. It is usually green or yellowish green, pea green or blackish green, with a waxy luster. It varies from translucent to opaqueness, and it is not hard.</p>	 <p>Fig. n°3</p>
<p>Nayang jade: Also known as Dushan jade. It is named after its origin in Nanyang. It comes in various colors, the most common of which being white, green, bluish green, yellow, purple and black. It varies from vitreous luster and waxy luster and from translucent to opaqueness.</p>	 <p>Fig. n°4</p>
<p>Crystal: it is found in many places and varies in color. It can be classified by color into colorless crystal, amethyst, topaz, smoky quartz, black quartz and rose quartz. The variety with needle-like objects inside is called hair crystal. It has vitreous, luster and varies from transparency to translucence.</p>	 <p>Fig. n°5</p>
<p>Agate: it is found in many places and varies in color. It can be red, blue, green, black, white, gray and purple. It usually has a ring or stripe-shaped structure. Special varieties include water agate, sardonyx and moss agate. It has vitreous luster and varies from transparency and translucence.</p>	 <p>Fig. n°6</p>

<p>Turquoise: it is called dianzi or green dianzi in ancient times and is mainly found in Hubei, China and Iran. It is also called Turkish jade, because it was exported to various countries via Turkey. It can be azure, bluish green, yellowish green and light green. It usually has brown or black lines. It has waxy luster and varies from translucency and opaqueness.</p>	 <p>Fig. n°7</p>
<p>Lapis Lazuli: It is mainly found in Afghanistan. It can be azure, light blue, purplish blue or greenish blue. There is usually spots of pyrite on its surface. It has vitreous luster, and varies from translucence to opaqueness.</p>	 <p>Fig. n°8</p>
<p>Coral: It is mainly found in shallow water areas, is formed by the bones of coral, a lower coelenterate, and is usually in the shape of branches, with naturally formed lengthwise grain on the surface, it is usually white, pink, orange or red. It varies from waxy luster and greasy luster, and from translucence and opaqueness.</p>	 <p>Fig. n°9</p>

Source: Ancient Jades Gallery. Shanghai National History Museum, China.

According to minerology, jade is in fact two different stones. The scientific nature of jade was not fully understood until the 19th century when Professor A. Damour proved that the stone that is commonly called jade is actually two separate and distinct materials: jadeite and nephrite. The former is usually the more valued of the two for jewelry and carvings, because fine-quality jadeite is an intense medium green, whereas even the best nephrite tends to be a darker, more blackish green. When the intense-green jadeite began to enter China from Burma in the middle of the 18th century, the Chinese called it *feicui*³ instead of jade. In fact, these two stones are actually ‘genuine’ jade (jadeite and nephrite). Both stones are similar and composed of dense closed-grained aggregates, but technically they differ in color and chemical composition. Jadeite forms under great heat and pressure. Found in underground seams as far as forty below the surface of the earth, this variety, commonly called “microcrystalline”, is quite appropriate for polishing, but it breaks easily. Chinese nephrite, on the other hand, is tougher; geologically it is called “amphibole” and is formed much closer to the surface. Calcium, magnesium and water contribute to its formation; it is fibrous and hard to fracture. Nephrite is the toughest stone on earth, even more so than diamonds: 50 tons of pressure is necessary to crush about 3cm² of nephrite (Sartor and Wang 2009:11).



Fig. n°10. Nephrite.

Fig n°11. Jadeite

³ Most of the jadestone today in the Chinese market are imported from Burman/Myanmar since the PRC government imposed restrictions on jade mining.

Etymology.

The current noun -jade- was adopted within European languages after the 16th century. By analyzing the etymology of the word jade in English, Portuguese or Spanish languages, it is possible to notice that there is any Chinese linguistic element in it, however this stone is mainly related to the green gemstones, usually a synonym of Chinese jade. The noun jade appeared in Europe during colonization period of the Americas by the Spanish Empire; this green stone was brought along by the conquistadors during the 16th century with the name of “*piedra de [m]ijada*”⁴ (meaning loin stone) and refers to the virtue attributed by native populations to it as being a cure for pains of the loins and kidney. (Kennedy Easby 1968:7). However, it seems that jadestones were already known in Europe long before the discovery of the New World; it is worth mentioning Marco Polo’s references about “jasper”, the green stone he found during his journey to Central Asia. When he traveled in the Orient in the late 1200s and visited Turkmenistan, he recognized the stone -actually nephrite- being recovered from streambed gravels. By referring to these stones as “jasper”, Marco Polo was just using the word he knew best for such stones. On the other hand, Portuguese merchants were using the word “*pedra de mijada*” both for Chinese jade and the New World jade brought by Spanish Conquistadores. In 1555, when China allows Portugal to purchase the Peninsula at the mouth of the Canton River (the former colony of Macao) to use it as a trade center there, was already an illicit trade of jade towards Europe. Presumably Spanish merchants might well have borrowed the name and reputation of the stone from the Portuguese during this period of bustling trade and commerce

⁴ “*Piedra de [h]ijada*” in Spanish or “*pedra de mijada*” in Portuguese. Since the Spanish adjective is unclear, the Portuguese adjective is more accurate in order to represent the curative attribute of jade over urinary diseases. From the verb “*mijar*” (vulg.) to piss, to urinate.

with China and colonization in America (Desautels 1986:2). Mapping out the origins of the noun jade in Europe, it might seem that jadestone was introduced from these commercial links with China and America. However, jadestones had been present as an everyday material all around the world, even in Europe, for a long time. Indistinctive pre-historic communities in different geographical places had already recognized jade as having a particular feature related to its material composition.

Modern minerology approaches and examines jadestone: by categorizing mineral composition such as: transparency, compactness, hardness, brightness, features that are quite correlative with its internal structure of jadestones. The microscopic structure of the stone is composed by a blend of different minerals that creates its particular texture. The interconnection of minerals in its internal world is what provides jadestone with toughness, the characteristic which probably induced people to choose it as a material for the construction of different objects. Over its external hints and its toughness, jadestone incited people to select it as an appropriate material for the construction of functional tools such as axes; jadestones were used around the Swiss lakes area, China and Central American cultures.

Second Chapter

Tracing the Role of Jadestone crafts as a Spiritual Agent Throughout Chinese Mythology

Jadestone crafts objects apply to a cultural frame that concedes particular spiritual characteristics that are broadly recognized by Chinese people. Appadurai (1986) claims that objects have a social life that is in a constant process of change. The meanings that are derived due to the changes on jade are subjected by a “regime of values”. This regime of values is molded by the biography of the object and the trajectories of the objects through different owners, however, particularly jadestone can have several trajectories that do not end up in the realm of commodity. In the case of jade, its biography appertains to a deep spiritual and mythological realm, which provides jadestones with cultural features of historical heritage that endow it with intrinsic value of national symbol. Even nowadays jade is recognized as a gift from the gods to the Chinese people, a synonym of purity, loyalty and eternity and as a symbol of the emperor’s power⁵. This cultural heritage perspective on jade unearths the duality on its value (Gaeber 2001): as to jade as a piece of a museum, its value is fixed by the findings and the contribution that scholars made to the intellectual realm as well as the Word that coils up the stone, which is basically created by the literary and mythological tradition.

⁵ China’s emerging status as a global powerhouse is increasingly reliant on memories of dynastic glory and the Confucian ethical system that undergirded the imperial state. (Dirk 2004:22). Bell (see. Bell 2008) notices the multiple roles of Confucianism in contemporary PRC culture it can both serve the interests of the authoritarian state and the critics who would seek to move that state toward democratization.

To begin with, even the name China in Chinese denotes that it is the “Jade Kingdom” (玉国). Jadestone crafts have been historically attached to the body, as an ornament or as an amulet; people have recognized on it a sort of magical, religious or social attributions which could emerge from the interaction between the mineral structure of jadestones and human senses. Chinese philosophical and literary tradition eloquently describes this interaction: The ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius (551-479 B.C.) on the “Book of Rites” or “Liji”⁶ recognized some unique visual traits of jade when he linked them to worldly virtues: “The wise have linked jade to virtue. For them its gentleness and brilliancy represent benevolence (仁[ren]); its perfect compactness and extreme hardness typify the sureness of Wisdom (智[zhi]); its angles, which do not hurt, although they seem sharp, signifies righteousness (义[yi]); it looks like a pendant when droops and hangs, implying ritual (礼[li]); the pure and prolonged sound, which gives forth when stricken and could stop abruptly, alludes to music (乐[yue][le]); it flaws never obscure its splendor and vice versa, which calls to loyalty (忠[zhong]); glittering, translucent and glorious in color, it bears the quality of honesty (信[xin]); its iridescent brightness represent heaven (天[tian]); its admirable substance, born of mountain and of water, represents the earth (地[de]); made price that the entire world attaches to it represents the principles (道[dao]).”

⁶ It is a collection of texts describing the social forms, administration and ceremonial rites of the Zhou dynasty.

Tracking back the seven thousand years of Chinese history, it is immediately perceived that Chinese culture has endowed jade with several spiritual connotations and magical properties and also a symbol of the emperor's power: as a theme and inspiration for literature, a symbol of purity, chastity, elegance, reserve, loyalty and intelligence. During the conduction of this investigation on jade, it was possible to notice that the people who took part in the interviews recalled some legends they had heard of, or read, and which are closely related to the creation of the world and jade, as well as that jadestone craft were objects whose use was an exclusivity for the upper classes. In most of the interviews, well-known Confucius quotes about jade were mentioned. As long as I could have access to more information concerning ancient Chinese literary tradition, I was able to observe the narrative links that jade and the creation of the world share.

Nor is there an exact analogy, jade could be figured out like fire, as it is depicted in the scene of Prometheus in western tradition or bread in Christianity: elements whose presence is recognized broadly by a heavenly, divine connection. Jadestone as a gift from the gods, an element which supports with its aesthetic and hardness the emperor's power and conceptions of morality and goodness: it is a one of the materials which is able to confer legitimacy to the nation's rulers. At the same time jadestones embedded within their materiality a moral and aesthetic value, which is also present as part of the traditional narrative. Two of the main world creation myths will illustrate that jade is a primordial element for humankind and an object that manifests power.

Chinese tradition has ranked jade in a high level not merely due to its rarity, but mainly due to its aesthetic value. The prevalence of the jadestone crafts usage among other material for the accomplishment of custom of worship, adornment and contemplation indicates its important

position within the society.

People, ever since the times of remote antiquity, have attributed a deeper meaning to the Chinese character of jade (玉)⁷ [yù] (Gu and Li 12-13:2013); the three horizontal lines and the single vertical pillar represent the earth and the droplet-like dot was that utterly precious and valuable material that Nüwa⁸ 女娲 [nǚwā] sprinkled on the earth- jade itself. The character jade 玉 [yù] is almost similar to the character king 王 [wáng]. As it is shown by the shape of its character, jade is a gemstone brought along from the heaven by gods as a gift to humans; a kind of bridge connecting the heavens and the earth; the particular traditional Chinese vision of the

⁷ It is important to mention that the character jade 玉 [yù] that it is described here, it presents some similarities with the character 国 [guó] which means country, nation, kingdom. This character is also a component for the noun of the nation -China- 中国 [zhōng guó] (Central Nation, Country Kingdom). However, this character 国 [guó] is the result of the simplification process and reduction of strokes on Chinese written language carried out by the PRC in order to reduce illiteracy. In Classic Chinese script the character for [zhōng] was like this 國. The simplified form puts the three pieces of jade strung together as a symbol for king with the boundary 口 to produce nation.

⁸ According to Chinese mythology she is the creator of humankind and the goddess that helped humans before the major disaster which occurred when the sky pillar was destroyed. When she patched up the sky also gave men pearls and jade. She is usually represented like a snake with woman's head. Nüwa is also the Jade Emperor's daughter.

cosmos where the figure of the ruler was able to maintain the balance and to be the bridge that links this world to the god's upper world. The antecedents regarding the origin of jade are as ancient as the myths trying to account for the creation of the world. Jadestones are a prominent part within the mythical narration; ancient literature, in particular, the one describing the creation of the world and humankind, illustrates jadestones among the elements that were given to humans from the gods such as the stars, the sun, the animals, rivers, trees, etc.; objects and elements whose existence allow humans to live on earth.

The earliest records pertaining the creation of the world according to the Chinese tradition⁹ appear around 3,000 years ago. In myths found in scattered and fragmented forms in various written materials (Lihui and Deming 6-7:2005). One of the most important sources for the study of ancient Chinese mythology is called the book of *Shan Hai Jing* 山海经 [shānhǎi jīng] *Classic of Mountains and Seas*¹⁰. It is unsure as to who wrote the book and to when it was written the book is divided into eighteen sections. On this book there is reference to one relevant deity, Nüwa; the female creator of humanity. However, the book does not provide further information about the goddess, who created jadestones and gave them to human beings. On

⁹ Chinese literary tradition refers mainly to the body of myth transmitted around the Chinese territory, and including the Han tradition as well as the other fifty-five recognized ethnic groups

¹⁰ It is widely believed in the popular tradition that this book was written by mythical figures, however Sinologist have determined that this book was not written at a single time, but by numerous people from the Warring State period to the Han dynasty. The most notorious translation into English was made in 1999 by Birell, Anne, "*The Classic of Mountains and Seas*". Penguin. 1999.

another source for ancient Chinese mythology, the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [huáinánzi] *Writings of the Masters of Huainan*¹¹, makes possible to meet a much detailed account of the participation of Nüwa in the process of creation and the way in which she spread on the earth jadestones. This book is a compilation of ancient myths, legends and historical accounts. It is said that the “*Huainanzi*” is based on the inspiration of Liu An, the King of Huainan, at the beginning of Western Han dynasty; he carried out the task of gathering in one written work the readings and narrations he liked to listen to with music, in order to transmit them to the next generations as a legacy.

The *Huainanzi* brings the reader far back to the ancient times, as Zhuanxu¹² and

¹¹ It was compiled in 139 BCE under the editorship of Liu An, the prince of the southern kingdom of Huainan. A vast work containing twenty-one chapters (or twenty-eight, in some editions), it stands out as a work of synthesis of different traditions, including teachings based on the Taode jing and the Zhuangzi, as an exposition of the arts of government and self-cultivation, and as a description of several cosmological sciences.

¹²Zhuanxu 颛顼 [zhuānxū]: He was a mythological emperor of ancient China, the grandson of the Yellow Emperor and god of the north and waters. He was one of the five gods corresponding to the five basic directions (east, south, west, north and center) and the five basic elements (wood, fire, water, wind, earth.)

Gonggong¹³ were fighting for the throne. Defeated, Gonggong smashed his head in a fit of anger against Mount Buzhou- part of today's Kunlun Mountains, a pillar holding up the heaven. Then immediately the Mount Buzhou¹⁴ collapsed and caused immense change between heaven and earth: the sky tilting towards the northwest and the earth shifting to the southwest, together with vast floods and huge fires, turning the man's world into a living hell. The collapse of the sky pillars caused a great disaster. Fires raged fiercely and could not be extinguished. Water flowed without abating.

Seeing human suffering in great misery, the goddess Nüwa was quite distressed and resolved to collect five-colours of earth to refine huge five-color stones to patch up the heaven. And then she cut off four legs of a giant tortoise- who used to carry Mount Tiantai in the water- and used them to supplant the fallen pillars to support the four poles of the heaven. She defeated the fierce Black Dragon to save people, and collected ashes of reeds to stop the flood. The rest of the stones were left unemployed, thus scattered on the earth and later became the beautiful jade we see today. Nüwa's mythical actions have often served as an etiology to explain why people today can see colorful clouds in heaven (because the goddess mended heaven with colorful stones) and why the current western land of China is high while the east is low (she used the

¹³ Gonggong 共工 [gònggōng]: God of the water. His name could be translated as “common work. He destroyed the pillar that supported the sky during a fight against Zhuanxu. He is described as a rebellious nobleman. He became powerful by using shrewdness and punishments.

¹⁴ The name of this mountain can be translated as “not enough”. Mao Zedong often cited this myth, because it was an allegory on rebellion. As an outstanding revolutionist, he tried to show his praise of the rebellion against the establishment.

longer legs of the tortoise to support the west, using the shorter legs to support the east.) (Lihui and Deming2005:75)



Fig. n° 1 Nüwa.

By tracking back the origins of jade, one comes across other traditional narratives that derive from the Chinese mythology and illustrates a different interpretation. It is said that the spore of the first of mankind, Pangu became jade and pearls. Pangu¹⁵, who was born from a

¹⁵ Pangu 盘古 [pángǔ] is a compound noun; 盘 [pán] means “coil up” 古 [gǔ] means “old”,

“antiquity”. Since he was too tall for the cosmic egg in which he was being bred. He had to twist his body in the egg. At the beginning of time, heaven and earth were in chaotic formlessness like a chicken’s egg. According to the same version of the myth regarding the creation of the world from Zhejiang Province (right south from Shanghai) Pangu could not bear to be confined to the darkness in the egg, so he shattered the egg into pieces. The egg white was the light so it became the heaven, whereas the yolk was heavy, so it became the earth. The broken shell of the egg was mixed into the white and the yolk. Two bigger pieces of the shell became the sun and the moon,

cosmic egg, appears as the creator of the world, in other words the first god. He grew up in the egg while shaping heaven and earth. Each day heaven rose ten feet higher, the earth ten feet thicker, and Pangu ten feet taller. In this way Pangu could keep Heaven and Earth separated. This process took at least 18,000 years. When he died, his breath became the winds and clouds, his voice became the thunder, his left eye became the sun, his right eye became the moon, his four limbs and trunk became the four extremes of the earth and the Five Mountains, his blood became the rivers, his veins became the earth's arteries, his flesh became fields and soil, his hair and beard became the stars, his skin and body hair became plants, his teeth and bones became various metals and rocks, his semen and marrow became pearls and jade, his sweat became the rain and the dew, and the various insects on his body reacted to the wind and turned into human beings (Lihui and Deming2005:64).

and the numerous smaller pieces mixed into the white became the stars. In contrast, those pieces mixed into the yolk became stones. Pangu is still worshipped at many shrines around China, usually with Taoist symbols such as the Bagua.

氏 古 盤

圖 河 然 自 地 天



Fig. n° 2 Pangu

Fig. 3 Bagua

Third Chapter

History through the jadestone craft's shapes at the National History Museum of Shanghai



Fig. n°1 National History Museum of Shanghai

The Ancient Jade Gallery at the National History Museum of Shanghai displays one of the most prominent jadestone collections in China. The exhibition's name -Ancient Jades- could at first glance make us believe that this gallery displays a collection of pre-historic and classical pieces of jade carves; perhaps a collection immediately connected with the Imperial China. However, through the exhibition, visitors can observe something that lies within a quite broader scope of time; the evolution of jade carving techniques from the pre-historic times until the Qin and Ming dynasties, in other words 8,000 years of jadestone art tradition. For this reason, the title given to this gallery -Ancient Jade- is not completely pairing with the idea of antiquity; for instance, in Greece the collections that are named with the title of "ancient" or "classical" are delineated within a precise historical period of time. In contrast to a time line, the Ancient Jade Gallery seeks to represent with its name an idea about jade carvings, which is a result of the official attempt to outline the importance of these pieces from the rest of jadestone crafts, seen on the different gemstone markets; since jade still has value as a commodity; therefore, jade can

be exchanged into money. The value of the jade crafts at the National History Museum cannot be exchanged in the market, because they are not appraised and mainly they belong to the realm of representative objects for the cultural and spiritual background of the Chinese Civilization, however the exquisite carving and design techniques present on these “ancient” jade pieces become the inspiration for jade craftsmen who imitate some patterns on design from the original ones at the museum. The exhibition at the National History Museum under the name of “ancient” could be interpreted consequently, as a manner of distinguishing a jade of an incalculable historic value from jadestone as a commodity. Although this title represents a deep fact which is not a mere categorization of authentic and modern jade carves, but the materialization of the nation through its collection and building (Bouquet 2012:34).

The national historical narrative of the People’s Republic of China has been exploring and interpreting the course of the different political and social periods after the Maoist Revolution theoretical schemes that could provide a scientific support to the contingencies that are part of the socialist process of progression. Through these explorations and reinterpretations over history, decisive facts and events have been evidencing a sort of temporal restructuring: for instance, nowadays Chinese Imperial dynasties provide the means of outlining the historic periods of Chinese Civilization, in juxtaposition to a pure Marxist historical periodization based on the kind of labor relations in specific periods along Chinese history. Except for the discussion that stems from the ways in which different theoretical approaches on history divide it, the importance of this issue lies on how these periods are represented to the observers by the official state narrative. In this introspective process of history construction, the past comes forward to ascribe meaning to the present in the material realm and reorients the path for an auspicious future as well.

The Chinese political and social paradigm is intrinsically built based on a socialist frame; it means that history is an issue that embodies the ideology of Marxist evolutionism. However, the social and historical processes are not stable and unchanging circumstances; for example, the reforms carried out by the Chinese government in different aspects of their economy are the result of the changes during the last decades such as economic growth, annexing of territories like Hong Kong and Macau, and the introduction of more progressive ideas to the core of the CCP. Every new situation obliges the system to make decisions which can provide sustainability and coherence to the people's necessities without these changes becoming an alteration on the revolutionary process to socialism. Under this restructuration, Chinese history has been scrutinized and explored in order to be reconnected and exposed within a modern socialist society frame, in other words the creation of a sphere to establish a coherent narrative by making history grasped by and tangible to the masses. Herein it appears one of the main aspects of a museum: education, aspect which the National History Museum of Shanghai is working upon as a tool, since it represents shapes whose importance in the Chinese official historical narrative is primary, as they symbolize mainly the different periods in history that configure the today's conception on Chinese Culture and national historical narrative (Kirk 2014).

The museum hosts the most prominent object collections of Chinese culture: on its six floors there are bronzes, ceramics, sculptures, seals, calligraphy, furniture, minority art representations, and jade exhibitions. Every one of these collections illustrates what is considered important and representative from a more than 7000-years culture. From its façade and design, the building itself can be observed as a combination of Chinese history and the embodiment of the ideas of a Post-revolutionary process carried out by the People's Republic of China the last decades. The building is a modern interpretation of the ancient Chinese cosmological view from

the Han dynasty: the heaven is round-shaped as well the earth beneath the square, following the Temple of Heaven's architectural idea. The location in Shanghai, the symbol of modernity and progress in China, also provide the proper background to bridge past, present and future.

Shanghai, after the Treaty of Nanjing, became one of the four free-trade ports. The city suffered one of the most dramatic demographic and territorial configuration changes, as it was divided into two foreign-ruled districts and a Chinese Municipality, a huge migratory wave came all around the world. The new foreign administrated territories were the International Settlement and the French Concession. The first one ran under a self-governing regime and the French Concession more under a colonial model regime (Wassestorm 2009:2). The arrival of the foreigners at the city of Shanghai is interpreted by many scholars like the introduction of modernity in China.

On this realm, Shanghai is particularly described with the myth "fishing village": it is broadly believed that the foreign influence in Shanghai is the fact that propels China into early modernization¹⁶. This idea promulgated particularly by Western writers, is also a subtle version

¹⁶ Since the dynastic ruler system ended up in the 20th century, and the afterward creation of the nation state model, there were brought Western conceptions upon archeological research to China. These Western theories were supported by many scholars, who saw on them a way to bring modernity to China. Westernization is a constant topic of interest among Chinese scholars during the first decades of the 20th century. Chinese intellectuals sought to asset the patterns that could link Chinese and Western history as well to create the conditions for the assimilation or complete embrace of Western culture, influenced by the evolutionist theories upon human and social evolution. Many scholars who were less radical claimed that Chinese culture could survive

of a Eurocentric branch of history that maintains that China desperately had to have the impact of West transformed into a modern society (Cook Johnson 1995:9). The Shanghai modernization process was deeply attached to an idea of the “other China”, to the industrialization as well as the bad reputation. Shanghai the -sin city- was a recurrent topic that arose specifically during the nationalist uprising: since the foundation of the Republic of China (1912-1949), one of the main goals of this government was the fight against immoral activities such as prostitution, drug trafficking and gambling, some of the calamities brought along by the Westerners. Shanghai was blamed as the source of all that was bad and wrong in China. Therefore, the new state’s effort aimed at creating a civic culture, a sort of national reconstruction plan; the creation of a concept of citizenship.

The narcotics abuse was a widespread issue in China and according to the records, especially in Shanghai. China, in the decade 1920-1930, consumed the 90% of world drugs supplies. Gambling was also another issue to be fought by the municipal nationalist authorities. Horse race gambling was, in the beginning, an exclusive activity for foreigners, and gradually local Chinese residents could take part in gambling, also because there were other gambling activities like greyhound races, the lottery and casinos. It was observed by the authorities that gambling fostered crime and the ruin of ordinary urban residents. However, the efforts of the nationalist government to eradicate these activities failed. (Wakeman 1995:23-25). Due to its

mixing up some aspects of Western culture such as science, capitalism, industrialism labor-management. (Fung 2010:31-46). These ideas, as it could be expected, had a deep influence in the realm of historiography and archeology.

history: the colonial and imperialist past, Shanghai suffered the impact of the development model of the Maoist Communist regime¹⁷ that adopted the form of the soviet schema.

By the centrally planned economy model, the importance of Shanghai retained was measured by its contribution to the country's development. But even if it was one of the pillars of the economy, it could not be its beacon, for that role was reserved for the capital, Beijing, the face of which was subjected to an upheaval designed to provide the Communist government with a setting suitable symbolic of its power. Contrary to some predictions, Shanghai did not destroy the revolutionary project, but was obliged to submit to it (Bergère, 2005:367).

Starved of funds, the city started to do its best with its own resources. No new buildings were constructed to house the new administration, so most of the properties along the Bund were converted into public office, many streets and avenue names were changing as an effort to phase away the imperialist past. The creation of a park and the layout of People's Square on the site of the former racecourse altered the urban landscape very little and preserved a central oasis of greenery and a large empty space now dedicated to political demonstrations. The entire and cosmopolitan city past had vanished and assailed: The Shanghainese themselves appeared oblivious to the silent present of that past, unknown to the younger generations and deplored by the rest (Bergère, 2005:378-379).

The imperial, Republican and People's periods are linked in a harmonious way by the construction of the museum on what it was some time ago the personification of colonization, backwardness and vice: the horse race track. The construction of the current building gives back to the citizens a public space that can work as a gate to the encounter of their past and present.

¹⁷ The People's Republic of China was established the 1st of October of 1949 by the Chairman Mao Zedong.

The National Museum of Shanghai (founded in 1952) itself is a representative landmark of the changes occurring in China from the Communist Revolution until the reforms in the 90's; by following the antecedents of its planning, we can see that its first allocation was the former Horseracing Club's building. Then it was moved out to the Zhonghui Building. However, the place was not ample enough, since the museum had recently started to function as an important spot for the promotion of activities related to research, education and exhibitions. Over this demand, in 1992 the Shanghai municipal government decided to relocate the building at People's Square, where there was the former race horse track. The importance of this fact, as it was observed until the foundation of the PRC People's Square was the Shanghai Horse Racetrack.

People's Square is the main symbol of the Revolution in Shanghai and its conversion from a gambling and foreign running club to a public space, is a historic happening that endows the city with the main character of the first decades of the Maoist Revolution: the returning of the land to China to its People as well as the disconnection with the city's capitalist past. However today it is possible to perceive a different approach to the past. Shanghai as the main symbol of the modern China is being the scene on which several local and central planned projects are being carried out, in order to link the present and past; as a way to model an idea of historical continuity.

Ancient Jades Gallery, Neolithic Jades.

The Shanghai National History Museum is the most representative piece in this effort of history reconnection and reeducation. In this realm, the Ancient Jade Gallery supports in many ways the idea of cultural unity and history continuum.¹⁸

The gallery is on the sixth floor of the museum. The gallery windows display by a temporal visual description the evolution of jadestone crafts and Chinese history through the shapes and traces on the gemstone. The exhibition is divided into six historical periods: Mysterious Jades in the Pre-historical Times (ca. 6000-2000 BC), Lofty and Elegant Jades in the Xia, Shang and Western Zhou Dynasties (21st century-771 BC), Unconventional Jades of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods (770-221 BC), Elaborate Jades of Han and Jin Dynasties (206 BC-420 AD), Multifarious Jades of the Tang, Song, Liao and Jin Dynasties (618-1279 AD), Dazzling Jades of the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties (1271-1911 AD). The main plaque at the entrance of the Gallery cited: *“The natural properties of jade were thus endowed with personal and moral significance. Chinese jade workmanship had reached a high level by Pre-historic times in the selection of material, in decoration and design, and in carving and polishing. While ritual jades developed fully during the Xia, the Shang and Western Zhou Dynasties, ornament jades in the various intricate shapes flourished in the Spring and Autumn, the Warring States and Western Han periods. However, the craft declined in the years between the Eastern Han and Northern and Southern Dynasties. It revived in the Tang and Song*

¹⁸ Some scholars claimed that Shanghai does not have history. Actually it is a city with a variety of the ancient architectural wonders that can be found in Beijing or Xi'an. In a personal analysis the allocation of such impressive collection in Shanghai comes to set up the city as a referent for this idea of cultural unity and modernity.

Dynasties, when jade shed much of its ritual significance. Depictions of nomadic life were a special feature of the jades of the Liao and Jin Dynasties, while the crafting of particularly large pieces of marked Qin, by which time the popularity of jade had spread over a much wider segment of society”. (Shanghai Ancient Chinese Jade Gallery)

The following description is taken from the gallery prospectus that outlines the landmarks of the jade exhibition. This guide is designed by the Education Department of the Shanghai National History Museum.

The first part of the Ancient Jades Gallery: “Mysterious Jades in the Pre-historical Times” (ca. 6000-2000 BC). The jade craft items displayed in this section are: ornaments, tools and ritual objects. The ritual jades according to their significance have been divided into two groups: totemic and intermediary objects. Totemic jades are often carved with human and animal gods shapes; they are representative of the Liangzhu culture¹⁹. In the same period -Pre-historical times-, animals were a permanent subject for the jade carving; particularly dragons from the Hongshan²⁰ culture. Dragon-shaped jades are representative of this culture and they are

¹⁹ The Liangzhu culture 良渚文化 [liáng zhǔ wénhuà] was the last Neolithic jade culture in the Yangtze River Delta and today is one of the most important ancient cultures, because of its rice agriculture development, handicraft industry and art achievements. This culture was highly stratified, as jade, silk, ivory and lacquer artifacts were found exclusively in elite burials.

²⁰ The Hongshan culture 红山文化 [hóngshān wénhuà] was a Neolithic culture in northwest China, also Hongshan sites have been found in an area stretching from Inner Mongolia to Lianing. This culture is known for the jade pig dragons and most of them were found around burial sites.

recognized as the beginning of this tradition of carving, as well as a design whose hints represent status, power and good luck.



Fig. n°2 Jade Pig Dragon

The Bi disc is another representative geometrical shape from the Neolithic period and was broadly used during the Liangzhu culture period. As it was illustrated in the Second Chapter there is a mythology around this geometrical jadestone craft²¹. A Bi jade is a flat round piece in the shape of a disc with a hole in the center. It was originally used as a ritual vessel to offer sacrifice to the God of Heaven. These jade discs are the earliest ceremonial objects to appear.

During the Neolithic period Bi discs were mostly used to accompany burials or in sacrifices. Through the centuries jade discs were undecorated, but from the Western Zhou dynasty it has been noted that the trend to use decorate jades as ornaments was more common.

The *cong* is cylindrical on the inside and square on the outside and was used as a ritual object in early sacrifices to the Earth God. Some scholars believe that the square and cylindrical aspects of the *cong* represent heaven and the earth and that central tube represents a conduit between the two. During the mid and late Neolithic period, the jade *cong* appears in a large

²¹ See the Bi disc on the Bian Heh's Legend.

number in the Liangzhu culture, which is the most developed: adorned with patterns of animal heads centered on a four-cornered line divided into four panels, the decoration following the edges of the jade to produce identically patterned panels. Some *cong*, in addition to the basic animal face pattern, have finely incised figures of deities and cloud and thunder patterns. During the Spring and Autumn (ca. 771-476 BC) and Warring States periods (ca. 475-221 BC), the patterns are quite similar with the Shang (ca. 1600-1046 BC) and Zhou (ca. 1046-256 BC) dynasties. During the Han dynasty *cong* rarely appeared. From the Ming until the Qing dynasties there were many imitations of the small plain Shang and Zhou *cong* as well as of those of the Liangzhu culture.



Fig. n°3 *Cong*.

Decorative pieces for swords: it was very popular for the nobles in the period from the Eastern Zhou to Han dynasties (770 BC-220 AD) to decorate their swords with jade pieces to show their dignities. So, there appeared jade swords pommel and scabbard slide and chape.



Fig. n°4 Jade scabbard.

Gangmao: A rectangular jade piece about 3cm long with a small perforation through the center and inscriptions at the four sides. The Han people wore it as an amulet.



Fig. n°5 Gangmao

Han: a jade piece put in the mouth of the deceased upon burial. This burial custom could be traced back to the Neolithic Songze culture²² (ca. 3800 BC-2200BC. In the Han dynasty (206

²² Songze culture was a matriarchal Neolithic culture that existed between 3800 and 3300 BC in the Lake Tai area nearby Shanghai.

BC-220AD), it was mostly a cicada shape. It was believed that the dead could regenerate like cicada.



Fig. n°6 Han jade, cicada-shaped.

Wo: a pair of jade pieces put in hand of the deceased upon the burial. In the Han dynasty they usually appeared in a pig shape. This was a symbol of wealth and people wished to have wealth company with them for the next life.



Fig. n°7. Wo jade

Fourth Chapter

My Personal Treasure

When it comes to purchasing jade, there is a certain ritual that is observed: the prospective buyer is comfortably seated at the store, and then they are presented with an elaborate, red box which protects, and subsequently reveal its valuable contents in front of their eyes. The box contains a small and smooth pillow on which lies the jade. It is interesting to point out the motives that drive Chinese people to buy jade. If we accept and go along Laura Ahearn's definition in which "agency" is the sociocultural mediated capacity to act modeled by language (Ahearn 2001) and that this can be applied to people as well as objects, then jade would certainly fit in this, as it has played an indisputably active role in the formulation of the consciousness of Chinese culture.

Financial Instability

As one of the informers cited, people are getting more involved in the business of jade because it represents a sound investment in a quite unstable economic environment. Hence, she was describing the people's fear of currency devaluation and how Chinese people are attempting to store some savings for the future, as it has been happening in Greece with the gold market. Since the first years of the recession many Greeks have exchanged their money into gold as a means of keeping their savings safe. Also, in general, people do not trust the currency (euro) since they have had to cope with the likelihood of Greece being ousted from the Eurozone. Although the economic situation is not of the same nature in China, there are some aspects that make people perceive jadestones as an investment.

This trend on jadestones is not something unusual, because, as it is claimed by Graerber, it is quite an ancient practice. Beads, as well as jade, fit most of the standard criteria economists usually attribute to money. Jade stones are not divisible, they are portable and they do not decay. They are also pleasant to look at and they are suited for use as personal adornment.

Satisfying a Collector's Needs

One of the informers, a Shanghainese woman admits to her predator's quest for good quality jade objects. She does not belong in the category of people who buy jade because they are worried about the future; she just wants to collect jade jewelry that catches her fancy. When she was asked to rationalize her preference, she explained that she was intrigued by the fact that jade is not affected by time²³ and that it is a gemstone that is found exclusively in the earth, thus enabling her to remain connected with the energy of the universe.

²³ The informer was aware of the fact that jadestones can change color with the passage of time, especially when they are affected by body temperature. However, jadestones do not erode as other materials.

Jade as a Gift for the Completion of Services and for Good Luck.

The informer, a student from Xinyi, a famous city for jade extraction and carving in southern China, brought and demonstrated to me two pieces of jade jewelry which she had received from her father, whose possession they had come to after he had helped out some of his compatriots and they wanted to thank him. This kind of reward is considered more ethical than offering money, as the stone is thought to be laden with a host of spiritual qualities. The above was also verified in another interview by a girl whose father was a doctor, and he was offered pieces of jade after attending conferences in various provinces of China. Within the realm of gift, it is a moral obligation of the person who has been benefited to offer something to their benefactor, who, in turn, is obliged to accept the present. Hence the process is stripped of material and base elements, and constitutes a noble act in itself.

In this system of ideas one clearly and logically realizes that one must give back to another person what is really part and parcel of this nature and substance, because to accept something from somebody is to accept some part of his spiritual essence, of his soul. To retain that thing would be dangerous and mortal, not only because it would be against law and morality, but also because that thing coming from the person not only morally, but physically and spiritually, that essence, that food, those goods, whether movable or immovable, those women or those descendants, those rituals or those acts of communion- all exert magical or religious hold over you (Mauss 2002[1954]:16).

Another characteristic of success power, or to put it in lay terms, good luck is that it is often contagious. It is transmitted materially (Douglas 1984 [1966]:113). In the case of jade, luck and protection from external afflictions such as accidents is transmitted in heirlooms and treasures which are lovingly bestowed upon us by caring family members.

An offer of jade as a gift is also present in another interview, which was given to me by a student who I met at the library of Fudan University. This girl was wearing a bracelet of white jade, which was given to her by her aunt as a farewell present prior to her departure from her hometown. In contrast to the first interviewee, who was not willing to attribute any hidden spiritual side to jade, this one admitted to wearing it because it provided a kind of shield to the body against accidents. As she characteristically put it, were she to experience an accident, the impact would befall on her bracelet, which might break, but she, its owner, would survive intact.

Metaphysical Properties.

An additional touch to the mosaic of jade spirituality, was provided by another interviewee, a girl who worked as an interior designer. She said that jade allegedly possesses *Qi* 气 [qì]²⁴, the same life force that permeates every human existence, and it can supply protection and guidance exclusively to its owner. Thus, it can never change hands. This, according to the same conviction, may result in having to endure the negative energy and its consequences, if we wear another person's jade, which may carry their bad *Qi*. The above is verified by Mary Douglas who remarks: "*If this [talismans] changed hands, Luck changed hands too. In this unbalance Qi. respect these powers are like pollution, which transmit danger by contact.*"

(Douglas (1984 [1966]:113)

²⁴ It is translated as "breath", "air", the active principle forming part of any living thing. In Chinese tradition is described as the "life force". It is linked to the energy that flows around the body. In traditional Chinese medicine it is affirmed that the body has natural patterns of *Qi* that circulate in channels called meridians.

Jade Markets

The imposing jadestone stores are the perfect examples that make us perceive that the trade and the business of jade in China has been constantly increasing in the last twenty years.

Today, it is possible to find an abundance of jade jewelry stores around the city of Shanghai, particularly at places with an easy access to commercial facilities, such as metro stations: for instance, *Wanda Plaza*, a shopping center at Jiangwan Stadium Station (metro line 10), has got at least three jadestone stores, whose location is strategically set up on the main street, at the exit of the afore mentioned metro station. It is easy to understand who the target consumer of these stores are, as most of the advertising of those stores is aimed at women; the models selected to take part on this kind of jadestone commercial advertisement, are dressed up in traditional Chinese costumes combining massive pieces of green jade, principally bracelets. The size of the stores at this shopping mall takes up over 500 m² and most of the sellers are women. Security guards, as it is customary, are men, and they just stand at the front store doors. The shops' windows display different kinds of jade crafts, and it is quite easy to spot the difference of quality among jadestones.

A point which brings my ethnography to the last of its interviews. If there is massive demand for jade, this means that there has to be a source for supplying it. The above was happy news to the lady vendor of jade from south China, who originally moved to Shanghai in order to set up her crystal vending business. Soon, however, because of her entrepreneur spirit, it dawned on her that she had to switch to the trade of jade if she wanted a thriving business. And where would she choose to establish her store? The ideal location seemed to be no other than the center of a fruit market making it accessible and easy to spot. Although the woman seemed to be an

entrepreneur oriented on the material aspect of jade, she did not fail to give an account of how her jade talisman had saved her life from a nearly fatal accident.

A visual approach on jade is the first step to recognize its quality, although it is not the only way, since jade is a quite sophisticated and alluring material which allegedly possesses the quality to interact with humans through the senses. People are capable of noticing jade properties by touching it, examining it, even listening to it. Some jade experts, including the lady vendor herself, consider the stone as a living organism and as such, it requires particular care and provisions like water. The treatment of the crafts is one of the first impressions I tried to trace during the procedure of this research by observing other jadestone stores. Just strolling around, I noticed that small glasses (like shot glasses) filled with water were set inside the windows; the prices written on those pieces of jade, made me understand that water shots were displayed mainly next to good quality jade, in other words, the expensive ones. During another visit through a jewelry store in Beijing, I watched a shop assistant that randomly began to throw water all around the shop's carpets. A first thought was: they are just cleaning up the place, however I realized that the whole room was an exclusive room for good quality jade. Also it was the only floor in the store with a decorative wall fountain, so at a first glance it seems that the humidity level inside the exhibition room was something really important to maintain. Chinese craftsmen believe that water improves the color intensity of the stone, as well as keeping it 'alive'; since jadestone is considered a living organism, it is said that craftsmen's transpiration during the carving process can have the same impact on jade color as water. Also a shop assistant explained to me how to recognize a good jade by striking it with a crystal stick. When jade is of good quality, the sound produced after the blow is nice and intense, whereas a bad quality jade sounds hollow.

Quality and Prices

The above shop assistant was kind and willing enough to enlighten me on quite a few secrets regarding her business. First and foremost, I was told that prices are fixed according to optical material features of the stones: color, texture, carve, shape, size, etc. The appraisal upon jade crafts is not exclusively based on an optical approach, but it has to be with more complex characteristics. It is necessary to be very careful when we are about to purchase a piece of jade, because there is a lot of fake going around. These imitations of jadestone²⁵ can sometimes be obvious; At the Yuyan Gardens, one of the main touristic hubs in Shanghai, a street vendor offered me a jade carved into the shape of a dragon. At first it could be considered a fine piece of jade, however noticing the suspicious and intense uniform green and the lack of weight on the jade dragon, one could not help concluding that the ornament was nothing more than a piece of plastic.

²⁵ The Chinese government has developed a system of certification of jade quality. These offices for precious stones are very respectable in China and the officials therein are responsible for categorizing and appraising the good quality jade. China has sought a national standard on jadeite grading for years. It is a very difficult process, because jadeite has a wide range of appearances, including transparency, color zoning, and texture. Therefore, every piece is unique and evaluated largely on personal experience using trade jargon. In 2009, the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine and the Standardization Administration published a national jadeite grading standard, GB/T 23885-2009. This standard mainly deals with green jadeite but it can also be applied to transparent, lavender, and red-brown material. The four factors evaluated are color, transparency, texture, and clarity (Tao Hsu, Andrew Lucas, Zhili Qiu, Mu Li, and Qingyuan Yu 2014).

Jade, in every one of its aspects, materialistic, spiritual, philosophical, and even supernatural and has been interwoven into the essence of China for at least seven thousands of years. As we noted in previous parts of this paper, even the spelling of the country's name in Chinese, includes the symbol of jade. Consequently, its presence is not only admired in museums and gallery collections. Nor does it merely adorn books with collections of myths. It is deeply rooted in the history of the land despite all the changes, transformations and interpretations which have been attempted by politician leaders and movements used as collateral or financial security in times of recession, offered as a sign of gratitude to seal the completion of services and attach a noble meaning to the transaction or secretly worn as a good luck charm that keeps bad luck away from its bearer, it seems that jade is here to stay.

Buying Jades

Because of its particularities (color differences, luster, internal structure), every piece of jade is unique -the informer constantly said- “my customers should be aware of what they are purchasing”. As I decided to go by myself to explore her store, I tried to buy a piece of jade by myself, but the vendor refused, pleading that buying a piece of jadestone for the sake of it is senseless, she needed to know what I wanted and to explain to me what I was purchasing (there is a jargon for jadestone pieces) when I could finally phone my interpreter she accepted to sell a bracelet. This lady also showed me another aspect of jade materiality that is not mentioned by the official methods of classification, but by Confucius: the sound of a good jade.

Confucius said that the pure and prolonged sound, which is given forth when someone strikes a jade stops abruptly and this alludes to music. However, the word music represented with the character (乐 [yue][le]) does not refer merely to music, but as well as a melody, joy and

happiness. My informer coiled up with a red thread two jade bracelets, she dangled them and then stroked them with a crystal stick. Actually both bracelets were quite similar, but the sounds given forth, were absolutely different; good jade quality has a harmonious and constant sound, while bad quality jade is quite hollow.

Conclusions

Throughout its course of development, anthropology has leant towards two diverting theories: the first attempts to draw its conclusions by studying how society functioned as social systems, and practically ignores the material world, debasing it to mere inanimate objects that aid with practical tasks. One of the most indicative words of this trend is the study of Radcliffe Brown on Andaman Island (1922), which virtually confines the references to the material world to an appendix. The above led to universities' loss of interest in the study of objects, and museums mainly focusing on collecting, registering and filing objects in order to compare and contrast them. The second tendency makes its debut as early as the end of the 19th century with Franz Boas, eminent cultural anthropologist, who values field research and collection of empirical data and establishes itself after the decade of 1960's with the advent of structural and symbolic anthropology. According to the credos of the above fields, the material part of culture is not just a collection of objects of utility; the way people create and use artifacts is directly connected to the way they signify and codify their experiences. So, artifacts, jade in our case, are bearers of meanings and information. Things were not only for using, but for thinking as Levi-Strauss remarks (Yalouri 2012:22).

The socioanthropological studies on “agency” that were mentioned in my ethnography, concluded that, more often than not, things can seem to act almost as persons, thus objects can be given a gender, name, history and ritual function, and persons can invest aspects of their own identity in things as it is pointed out, “even objects of aesthetic contemplation [art] are in fact made in order to act upon other persons. To mediate social energy” (Hoskins 2006:75).

My work on jade has proven that it, more than any other material object in China, has acted as an agent, spiritual voice through the millennia, and can be even asserted that jade took the role of a grandfather who has wandered through the paths of time, narrating the tale of China. Through its silence language, jade, as we saw, offers versions on how the world was created.

By belonging to royalty and nobility, it granted them authority, power and morality. By bearing human-like qualities such as honesty and virtue, which it passed on its owner. By belonging in the treasures possessions of museum, it helped link the past of China to its present, and formulate a feeling of identity and national consciousness.

Even if we were to address the most ardent devil's advocate who would hold in the China of 21st century, jade has lost its identity as a spiritual agent, and has been transformed into nothing more than a commodity, we would readily answer that this is not the case by any means. It is true that objects which act as agents, undergo shift in their identity which take them through different regimes of value (Appadurai 1986).

It is also true that there are contradictions among objects which are born in order cater the needs of the historical moments, and all the above elements are presented in the case of jade. But, even when jade is sold at street markets, or it is bought as financial security, this does not mean that it has been stripped off of its spiritual hue.

As it has been directly or indirectly testified by the subject of my interviews, jade continues to act upon the people of China as an agent. It is not a lifeless commodity nor a mere object of trade. The presence of *Qi* in jade is still acknowledge as well as the metaphysical abilities it is said to possess, namely protecting its bearers from accidents and maintaining good health.

Things maybe, drawn into significant diversions from familiar paths (Thomas 1989:47) and jade is the perfect example. The abundance of identities it assumes however, does not presume that one perishes and others follow suit. Rather, they are all present, making jade an agent, still as active in the modern China, as it was in its mythical past, thousands of years ago.

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Pictures of the First Chapter:

Fig. n° 1 (Hetian jade) China Nanyang Shifosi Jade Carving Factory catalogue

Fig. n° 2 (Jadeite) <http://www.caa-auction.com/art-asian-14E/14E3128.htm> (last access: 12-07-2016)

Fig. n°3 (Xiu Jade) http://jadeite.ca/catalog/images/XJ1005_1.JPG (last access:12-07-2016)

Fig. n° 4 (Nayang jade) China Nanyang Shifosi Jade Carving Factory catalogue

Fig. n° 5 (Crystal) <https://pixabay.com/es/photos/rock%20crystal/> (last access:12-07-2016)

Fig. n° 6 (Agate) <http://m.dhgate.com/product/natural-red-agate-round-bead-bracelet-12mm/142817629.html> (last access:12-07-2016)

Fig. n°7 (Turquoise) <http://www.misi.co.uk/gifts/129574/men-s-bracelet-men-s-turquoise-bracelet-men-s-gemstone-bracelet-mens-jewelry-men-s-beaded-bracelet-mens-cool-jewelry.html> (last access:12-07-2016)

Fig. n° 8 (Lapis Lazuli) <http://mineralminers.com/html/lapjlry.stm> (last access:12-07-2016)

Fig. n°9 (Coral) <https://www.samakishop.com/Pulsera-preciosa-piedra-coral-rojo-con-Llamador-de-angeles> (last access:12-07-2016)

Fig. n° 10&11. From Hobbs, Jill M., *The Jade Enigma*. in *Gems and Gemology*. Gemological Institute of America. Spring 1982.

Pictures of the Second Chapter.

Fig. n° 1 Nüwa. Chalmers Werner, Edward Theodore, *Myths and legends of China*. (1922).

Fig. n° 2 . Pangu. From Sancai Tuhui.

Fig. n° 3. Bagua. From https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bagua#/media/File:Bagua_Zhao_Huiqian.jpg (last access:12-07-2016)

Pictures of the Third Chapter

Fig. n°1 National History Museum of Shanghai. Personal file.

Fig. n°2 Jade Pig Dragon (replica) National Shanghai History Museum.

Fig. n°3 *Cong*. National History Museum of Shanghai. Personal file.

Fig. n°4 Jade scabbard. <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot/a-grey-and-russet-jade-scabbard-slide-5542170-details.aspx> (last access:12-07-2016)

Fig. n°5 Gangmao. http://rastichineseart.com/exhibition_cat/oct2014-woa/ (last access:12-07-2016)

Fig. n°6 Han jade, cicada-shaped. <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot/a-white-and-russet-jade-cicada-han-5448368-details.aspx> (last access:12-07-2016)

Fig. n°7. Wo Jade. Shanghai National History Museum. Personal file.