

玉器时代

新石器晚期至夏代的中国北方玉器

THE JADE AGE

Jades from Northern China between the Neolithic Age and the Xia Dynasty

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Ai Dan (1962-), Beijing-based jade expert and writer. He has been devoted to researches on antiques for years. In this book, he puts together his collection of jade articles before the Shang Dynasty and accompanies them each by elaborate explanations. This compilation is dedicated to readers who are enthusiasts of jade art.

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玉器时代

玉，一个美好的字，它伴随着一个民族度过了漫长的历史。

人类共同经历了旧石器时代、新石器时代、青铜器时代和铁器时代，惟有中国在青铜器时代之前雕琢出了一个玉器的时代。我不是考古学者，也没挖过坟墓，我是从其他方面认识玉器的。20年不间断地好古，知识是慢慢积累起来的，我是个经验论者。从对陶器、瓷器、石雕造像的喜好，转向对明清玉器、宋辽金玉器、商周至汉代玉器的喜好，所接触的玉器难以记述，回想起来，有一种过来人的感觉。反反复复，最终将心思放在新石器晚期的玉器上。这是一条大河的源头。当时没有文字，只有简单的符号，文字的形成与城市有关，那是商代的事情。没有文字记载的历史是考古的难题，尧、舜、禹的故事很像是神话传说，对于这个时代的考古不仅要有科学精神，还要有想象力，既要运用中医的经验，又要借助西医的手段，否则疑难杂症很多。我这样比喻并不恰当，因为文物不是病人。

人类历史有一个现象，在不同的地域，相似的事物会同时发生，隔着高山大海也是如此。在树木年轮一样的大地的断层中，石器的上面是青铜器，再上一层是铁器，最上面是生活在今天的人们。有意思的是，中国的石器时代的地层上面有一个玉器层，这个层面使我们的文化显得很独特。此时的先民已经发现了铜，这种金属成为切割玉器的主要工具，可以说没有铜的发现便没有玉器时代。这时期被称作新石器晚期，终点是夏代，距今大约3500年至5000年，这是考古学的数据。

说起中国的文明会牵扯到长江和黄河，如果将考古发现比作果实，长江和黄河就是硕果累累的大树，两棵多老的树，不可轻视的树。长江下游有良渚文化区，中游有大溪文化区。黄河下游是龙山文化区，中游是石峁文化区，上游是齐家文化区。辽河流域有红山文化区。星星点点的考古发现，各类器物的重现江湖，人们对于玉器时代的认识豁然开朗。一些有争议的器物被定位，一些断代的盲点被确认，同时也暴露出不足的一面，包括专家们综合知识的欠缺、认识的偏颇和草率的武断。对玉器的研究已不是专业小圈子的专利，众多的收藏家、长期从事玉器经营的商人已经置身其中，研究的方法可能不同，目的却一样：推广中国的玉文化。时代造就了这

样的机遇，做学问不是什么难事，我更看中实践，道理很简单，谁实战，谁就会刻骨铭心。前面这些话是药引子，后面我还有话要说。

我们有一个玉器时代，当时的玉器有着不可替代的社会功能，它是政治，也是信仰。旧石器时代的人类从森林里走出，开始摸索各种活下去的办法，出现了小规模种植和养殖。到了新石器时代晚期，随着野生动物的减少、人口的增多，生存的困境中出现了农业，这是一种集体行为，有秩序的行为。农作物的生长有规律和周期，南方主要的农作物是水稻，北方主要的农作物是粟，也就是谷子。黄土高原雨水量少，土壤含碱，适合谷物生长，是主要食粮。靠天吃饭的人们，对自然界的种种现象有所敬畏，感到冥冥之中总有一种神奇的力量。当风调雨顺、粮食丰收时，便会想到以最美好的礼品祭拜神明。于是，山水之间彩色的玉石进入了他们的视线。也是这个时候，人们在烧制陶器的过程中发现了闪闪发光的铜，发现了这种改写历史的金属。将铜铸造成片状、管状、锥状，以此来带动细砂切割玉石，琢磨玉石，制作出实用的工具、生活用品、兵器和饰物。有些造型逐渐演变成礼器。

玉是山川的精英，人们祭拜祖先和神明的时候，这是最好的礼品。玉不琢不成器，什么样的玉器才能与神相通？原始的思维创造出朴素的造型。今天看来最简单的事情在当时是最复杂的，生老病死、日月交替、电闪雷鸣、四季变换，都是难以解释的。科学蒙昧的年代也是神话的年代，人群中的智者苦思冥想，开始营造诸神的形象，设计礼器的造型，编排祭祀的歌舞和仪式。

所谓玉器时代，就是用玉石制作礼器的年代。当时没有形成统一的国家，原始部落分散在群山大川之间，先民们除了耕耘收获，生活的主要内容就是祭祀和征战。祭坛成为巫师的舞台，礼器用量大，需要规模生产，玉器加工成为当时的高科技。新石器晚期的礼器有璧（图1）、琮（图2）、圭（图3）、笏（图4）、璋（图5）、钺（图6）等；用途不明的有璇玑、柄形器等。



图 1



图 2

璧是最通行的礼器，良渚文化和齐家文化的遗址中有众多的出土。圆形带孔的璧，有着简洁而和谐的形象，它衍生出双璜璧、三璜璧和璇玑等造型，这些器物常见于新石器晚期的黄河流域。作为礼器，定型后不再随意改变。礼是天下通用的，礼也是规矩。在齐家文化时期，普通的玉璧制作粗糙，是随葬器，是带给鬼神的礼品，是死者在黄泉路途上的开销。作为礼器的玉璧就不同了，它体现的是精神，简洁的造型中有丰富的内涵，这是礼天之物，需要格外器重。此类玉璧造型讲究，往往选用质地洁净、纹理清晰的材料。黄河中游在夏代时流行一种中孔偏大的璧，又被称为瑗，可能是手腕上的饰品。齐家文化区出土的成千上万件玉璧已经散落在民间，一位玉器收藏家对我说，自从出现了一坑叠放在一起的大型玉璧之后，齐家的玉器就几乎没有再出现过。此话的弦外之音是一出戏即将要收场了。

通常认为琮是礼地的，这种说法比较笼统。不妨从这一角度来解释：我们最早的文字是象形字，琮的造型很像甲骨文中的男性生殖器，宗字的象形含义是屋内的祭祀。宗加个玉字边为琮，它显然是用于祭祖的，是生殖崇拜的礼器，有上下贯通、一脉相承的含义。琮是良渚文化和齐家文化的主要礼器。良渚的做工精细，带有神兽纹饰，许多玉琮上有规律地琢刻出神明的眼睛，注视着膜拜的人们是否虔诚。齐家文化的玉琮朴素大方，几乎没有纹饰，更注重玉石的纹理和质地，而且西北地区的玉质坚硬，难以琢刻细部。琮是祭祀祖先的，这种严肃的意识根植于民族的血脉之中，无论生存环境如何艰难，义无反顾地传宗接代是这个民族不可动摇的观念。琮是这一观念的象征。

被冠名为圭的礼器流行于黄河流域，其造型是从石器时代的兵器或工具演化而来，它与璋一样，可能是军队出征举行仪式时使用的礼器。我曾见过数件尺寸相同、玉质也相同的圭，是齐家文化晚期的器物，做工像是出自



图 3



图 4



图 5



图 6

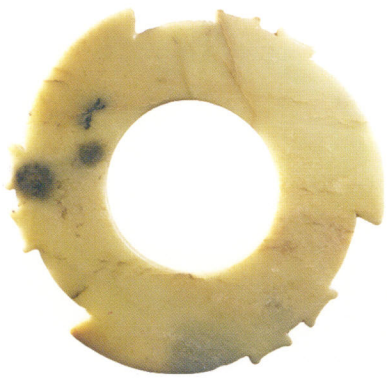


图 7



图 8

一人之手，显然是成批制作的。可以想象，在当时，祭坛上鼓乐齐鸣，捆绑在长竿上的圭璋整齐划一，部落首领率众祭拜，祈求天神相助，出征的兵马奔向远方，在黄土高原上扬起漫天沙尘。这正是英雄们在神的指引下统一天下的年代，文明的霞光中带着血腥的气味，除了神什么也不怕，以神的名义可以为所欲为。战争就是掠夺和征服，抢夺来的女人是性奴隶，抓获的奴隶可以随意处置，随葬时往往是身首分离，小孩儿的头骨破碎，成人缺胳膊少腿。在形形色色的礼器的光环下，人间依然是灾难重重。

作为礼器的玉圭也可能是象征爵位的，出土的玉圭常带有被使用过的痕迹，它也可能是随身携带的器物。圭和璋大都采用不透明的玉石制作，用意不清楚，也许作为兵器类的礼器就不该透明。黄河下游的龙山文化区域出土过带有浮雕纹饰的玉圭，台北故宫博物院里有几件类似的器物，因为乾隆皇帝喜欢，为此写了几首诗词，就琢刻在玉圭上了。当时认为是商周之器，如今断定为龙山文化的遗物，如果再细一点判断，可以说是夏代的玉器。它们是圭的最高境界，令后期的这类器物黯然失色。

钺，其实就是斧子。这是一种在各个地域都采用的礼器。良渚文化中有造型极其优美的钺，似乎改动一点便会神韵顿失。黄河流域各个文化区都出土过这类器物，它可能是祭山的礼器，先民们在砍伐森林、破坏大自然的时候会有负罪感，做仪式敬神是一种解脱。良渚文化的钺被解释为掌握兵权的象征，在黄河流域它的功能没有如此重要。

玉刀在古书里叫笏，也是一种礼器。陕西的石峁文化地域，甘肃的齐家文化地域是玉刀的故乡。我在收藏家那里见过一件齐家的大型玉刀，长度为67厘米，我戏称它为“天下第一刀”。可惜残断为两节，也许是当时入葬时有意而为。它的造型很有力度，抛光精致，刃部琢磨得干净利落，是玉器时代的杰出作品。谁配用这样的礼器？惟有帝王了。这种器物在仪式中可能是礼地的，与收割有关。在农耕时代收成是重要的事情，粮食入仓要庆祝，收成来自神的恩赐，要设坛祭拜，玉刀是这种仪式上的礼器。玉刀的原型是石质镰刀，是收割农作物的实用器，以玉笏祭祀丰收之神是贴切的。玉刀不是工具，也不是凶器，它不是人们概念中的刀。

夏代出现了一种形制怪异的玉器，没有学名，都管它叫柄形器。这种玉器在商代开始流行，偃师二里头文化期出现过，齐家文化晚期也有出土。人们猜来猜去一直弄不清它的用途。我认为它与鬼怪有关。柄形器的前端往往镶嵌有绿松石或其他材料，其图案抽象，丑陋不堪，这样的玉器应该与病魔或瘟疫有关，它是辟邪之物，是巫师的用具。类似的器物在红山文化区也有，称丫形器，用途说法不一，我认为与柄形器的功能相似。

接下来说说璇玑（图7）。这大概是夏代才出现的器型，用途一直难以确定。我存有一对以玉片雕琢而成的布谷鸟，一同出现的有两个璇玑，孔径是普通的手镯的尺寸，都是新石器晚期黄河中游的器物。布谷鸟在玉器中极少出现，在图录中从未见过。北方农民有这类经验，布谷鸟一叫，就该播种谷物了，古人会认它是神的使者。播种之后盼望下雨，璇玑应当是求雨的礼器。旋转的造型象征滚动的云团，齿牙像龙的脊背。布谷鸟、璇玑，一个场景出现了：祭坛上的巫师胸前挂着玉鸟，手腕上戴着璇玑，一边舞蹈一边呼风唤雨。巫师可能是女子，我见过薄如蝉翼的璇玑，像是女人的饰品。多雨的南方少有璇玑的出土，因为无需求雨。

商的祖先以神鸟为图腾，龙山文化流行以鸟为造型的陶器。神鸟就是凤。凤与龙象征着阴阳，东方哲学的基本观念当时已形成。龙有很多说法，凤也如此。龙的图腾可能与龙卷风有关，也可能与恐龙的化石有关。传说中的大禹在治理河山时，也许会发现恐龙的化石。先民们见到化石却见不到活的恐龙，想象着它们不是在深渊里就是在云海中，龙的图腾就这样出现了。凤呢？在夏代的玉器里就有凤鸟的形象。商代王妃妇好的墓里有一件漂亮的玉凤，但从造型和工艺上看，它不是商代的器物。妇好墓出土的700多件玉器里，有红山文化的勾形刀，有夏代的礼器。如果仅以出土实物为依据，不作分析判断，也会造成断代的混乱。如今对商周玉器已经有了全面的认识，眼力好的人能够分清商晚期与周早期的玉器之间的微妙差别；能分辨出春秋晚期与战国早期的种种差异。对商代玉器的认识很重要，它是分水岭，往前看，可以认清夏代和新石器晚期的时代风格；往后看，是一条传承有序的玉器长河。以此可以判断妇好墓的玉凤不是商代的玉器，而是山东龙山文化晚期的作品。古墓里有随葬前代的器物的例子，南阳桐柏县的春秋时期的墓葬中出现了夏代的玉器；唐代的永泰公主墓里出土了一些汉代的玉器，此类现象并不稀奇。

作为图腾的龙有着丑恶的形象，凤却是最美的，这种丑与美的组合有其深刻的文化含义。我手头有一对片状的玉凤（图8），其中一个有伤残，它出自黄河中游，在黄土中睡了4000年。它应当是凤鸟的雏形，是想象中的凤，变形的凤，也许与夜空中缓缓移动的星象有关，它不精美，却很重要，最早出现的东西都重要。人们比较喜欢动物造型的玉器，史前的玉雕动物不追求写实，讲究神似，表现得惟妙惟肖。古人在观察动物时是多么用心。新石器晚期的黄河流域少见动物题材的玉件，南方的汉水流域有一个石家河文化，那里出土了一批憨态可掬的玉制的动物和昆虫，而在东北的红山文化区，简直就是动物和昆虫玉雕的自然博物馆，我所见过的有螳螂、飞蛾、蚂蚱、蜘蛛、蚕蛹、甲虫、蝎子、蜗牛、蝉、鱼、鳖、燕、鸮、鹰等，先民们从动物和昆虫身上观察到一些神秘现象，粉蝶的羽化过程，猫头鹰的夜视能力，沉睡于地下十几年的蝉蛹又爬上了树枝，开始新的生命轮回，一切都不可思议。他们大概认为高于自身能力的都是神力，理应崇拜，将这些动物和昆虫雕琢成玉器，佩戴在身，以求神助。万物有灵的观念是人的最初的意识。

我简单梳理了一下，红山文化中几种常见的器形可能是不同部落的族徽，或者说是各自的图腾。玉鹰是辽宁省



图 9



图 10



图 11

阜新一带的原始部落的族徽；被通称为猪龙的玦形器（图9）是辽宁、河北、内蒙古三省、自治区交界地带的族徽，抽象的勾云器也在此地，还有筒状蹄形器（图10）。蹄形器有发冠和护臂的双重功能，举行仪式的时候戴在头顶，行进或征战的时候戴在胳膊上。所谓的猪龙应当不是猪，北方剽悍的民族不会以猪为图腾，当时已经开始圈养牲畜，狗、羊、鸡、猪已被驯化。猪身上没有什么令人敬佩的品质，它可能是财富的象征，但不会是崇拜的对象。所谓的猪龙是什么动物的变形？我认为虎，瞪着大眼睛的东北虎。我希望以后人们能将猪龙称作虎龙。内蒙古的翁牛特旗出土过大尺寸的C形龙（图11），我还见过中型的、小型的。我认为它是奔马的变形，长脸，飘扬的鬃毛是马的特点，草原民族崇拜骏马是顺理成章的事情。

新石器晚期红山文化的墓葬不讲究深埋，往往只随葬玉器，似乎别的东西不值得随葬。大型的墓地附近有石头垒成的祭坛，埋葬前会有仪式。有些地域把死者葬在丘陵的顶部，出土的玉器往往有火燎的痕迹，火葬与灵魂升天有关。更多的墓葬都是简单的浅埋，据说牧民在沙漠地带放牧时偶尔拾到过红山玉器。若干年前，春季的大风刮过之后，寻找玉器的人会顺着早晨或黄昏的阳光往沙漠里了望，哪儿出现了反光，可能就是红山玉器。这个地域几乎没有出现过玉琮、玉圭和玉璋，这里对神明的理解与中原不同，礼仪可能也不像中原那样繁复。玉器时代的不同地域存在着文化差异。写到这里，我发觉自己对一些事物的认识和理解带有明显的主观意识，有点自以为是。没办法，我不喜欢旁征博引，人云亦云。我在这里所涉及的是没有文字记录的年代，这个领域里的探讨是自由的。

我围绕着新石器晚期的玉器漫谈，其实视线总是停留在北方。我生在北方，了解北方，古老的北方有我们这个种族最古老的文明。从新石器晚期到商代，黄河流域发生过众多的征战、吞并，文化在建设毁灭、在毁灭中又诞生。从上游到下游，形成一个相对统一的文化体，开拓出玉器时代的先河。这里的先民留给后人的是不带任何注解的遗存，在偶然的相遇中人们看见了一些破碎的片断，即便如此，我们依然领悟到了一种价值

的光芒，就是用艺术方式表达出的礼和神性。正因为它有着坚实而博大的内涵，才形成了河流般的延续，从石器时代到夏商周、春秋战国、汉唐，在各个时期都显得光彩照人。而其他地域的文化往往是即兴的间断的，这不是什么偶然。我想，良渚文化和红山文化在夏代之后怎么就衰落了？在壮丽的商周时期他们做了些什么？能不能这样解释：商代是个改天换地的时代，是改写历史的时代，在商王庞大的战争机器的倾轧下，一些曾经繁荣的群落退回到蛮荒年代，文化也随之衰败。我还想到一个现象，在黄河中上游，新石器晚期的玉器常常与周代的玉器同时出土，在它们之间似乎空白了一个商朝。玉器时代之后发生了一些不可思议的事情。

黄河的上游有个齐家文化，这是一个常被忽略的文化，地域偏远，考古资料少，一些专家并不清楚那里曾出现过多少精美的玉器。一位做玉器生意的人对我说，他闭着眼睛摸一下，就知道是不是齐家文化。齐家文化出土过史前的各种礼器，玉琮和玉璧的数量难以计数，其中玉圭和玉刀的制作水平最高，我想用完美两个字来形容它们，还有简洁和朴素，还有优雅和力度，简直没有任何杂念。玉工一定是怀着虔诚的心情制作它们的，以心中神的形象驱走世俗的杂念，从而达到了如此境界。

我觉得，从新石器晚期直至清代，玉器文化在技术上走的是上坡路，在艺术上走的却是一条下坡路，假如将漫长的岁月中有代表性的玉器按顺序摆放在一起，你看过一遍之后，也许会有同感。这也是我轻视鼻烟壶、玉牌子，重视玉圭、玉钺的主要原因。扯远了，还是回到河流的源头。史前玉料的选择通常是就近取材，也比较宽泛，有一定硬度和透光度的石料都能派上用场。齐家文化的玉料来自祁连山脉，有白玉（图12）、青玉（图13）、黄玉（图14）、墨玉，硬度和温润度与新疆的和田玉相似，我见到过齐家文化遗址出土的玉料，被切割过的碎片带有石皮，表明曾是鹅卵石状的璞玉。了解这一点很重要。目前的玉器专家们几乎一致认为，在新石



图 12



图 13



图 14

器晚期的中原一带已经开始采用新疆的和田玉。专家在《中国玉器全集》的序言中说：“和田玉玉器在我国古代玉器史上的主流地位是从殷妇好玉器中和田玉器所占的工艺、艺术的地位及数量上的优势被认识之后才确立下来的。和田角闪石玉从原始社会晚期向东输送至少有6000余年的历史。”我真不知道此类学说的根据在哪里，这样虽然将民族文化的交流史推前了几千年，却犯了一个常识性的错误：和田与中原相隔3000多公里，属于不同的民族和地域，怎么能到那里去寻找玉石？商朝以前的先民谁要是知道有个出产玉石的和田，他一定是个神仙，即使是神仙也不会如此舍近求远。如果说妇好墓里的某些玉器的原料来自祁连山脉还不算离谱，因为那里就有类似新疆和田的玉料，齐家文化采用的正是这种玉料。

黄河中游的神木区域出土的玉器显得玉种繁多，同时出土的数件玉器往往由数种材料制成，在这个相当于夏代的文化遗存里，璇玑和玉瑗的数量多了起来，玉刀、玉璋是主流，玉琮明显减少，此类现象耐人寻味。这一时期出现的玉器的镂空方式似乎对秦文化的玉器风格有所影响，这种与中原总是保持着距离的文化一直延续到秦始皇统一中国。

黄河中下游的二里头文化被考古专家划分出几个阶段，在相当于夏代的层面里，出土过一些气质非凡的礼器，我曾见过几件大型的玉戈、玉璋、玉刀，是当时重要的礼器，是王侯之器，从中可以感到中原统治者的气度和力量。

黄河下游的龙山文化在玉器发展的进程中起过重要作用。新石器晚期玉雕工艺的最高水平出现在这一地域，遗憾的是传世品多，考古发现的少，浮雕、镂雕工艺的精美程度令人叹服，题材犹如神话故事，符合那个时代的精神。我觉得龙山文化直接影响了商代的玉器艺术，或者说商代传承了龙山文化。商代的先民沿着黄河逆流而上，统治了中原，像铸造青铜九鼎一样铸造出华夏民族的正统文化。在玉器艺术上影响了商代的不是良渚文化，也不是红山文化，这些地域的文化在根源上缺少礼的高度，这是渗透在政治文化和日常生活的所有细节中的礼，不仅是表面形式。

新石器晚期的文化被称作史前文化，那个可敬的玉器时代依然凝固在石器时代和青铜器时代之间的地层里。我原以为对那个时代是熟悉的、了解的，在行文中我渐渐觉着底气不足，我对北方的玉器时代同样是一知半解的，只认清了一些斑斑点点。但这并不妨碍我表达的目的，我向往那个时期的艺术，也向往那个神话般的年代。此刻，我想像着，在玉器时代的一个阳光普照的夏日里，在黄河的上游，先民们划着独木舟将色彩斑斓的玉石运往黄河对面，他们换回了一堆包裹在苧麻中的彩陶；与此同时，黄河中游的高原上，光脊梁的男人们呼着号子在凿井打水，村落里炊烟升起，牛羊走出了围栏；而在黄河下游的田野里，先民们正打开土窑，从中取出了轻薄如纸的黑陶器皿，不远处的玉器作坊里，一个工匠正捧起一件刚刚完成的玉璧。好了，神游于此，让玉器时代的帷幕徐徐落下。■

The Jade Age

Jade, a word of elegance, accompanied the Chinese race during a long history.

Mankind experienced the Paleolithic Age, the Neolithic Age, the Bronze Age, and the Iron Age. It is only in China that before the Bronze Age lay a Jade Age. I am not an archaeological scholar and have never got a chance to excavate tombs. I gained my knowledge of jade by other means. I am an empiricist. Knowledge accumulated by and by during my last twenty years of virtuosi. I have been drawn by my interest from pottery, china, and stone statues to jade articles of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, then back to those of the Song, Liao and Jin Dynasties, and eventually to those in the Shang, Zhou and Han Dynasties. I have encountered so many jade articles that on retrospection I consider myself somewhat an expert. My focus finally nestled into jade of the late Neolithic Age, which is the fountainhead of a long-stretching river. At that time, people recorded events by simple signs rather than Chinese characters that did not come into use till the Shang Dynasty. Unrecorded history always

poses challenge to archaeology. For example, the folktale of Yao, Shun and Yu sounds more like mythology than history. People have to be equipped with both scientific mind and imagination, both the experience of the Chinese traditional medicine and the science of Western medicine in order to cure these peculiar diseases. Perhaps I am doing a poor comparison, for antiques are not patients.

It's curious that the history of different human races, mountains and seas apart, may take on similar appearances. In the layers of the earth, iron articles are above bronze ones, and bronze articles above stone ones until it gets to the top, the layer of human beings alive. Interestingly, above the layer of the Stone Age, there rests a unique layer of jade that distinguishes our culture. Our ancestors had discovered bronze, with which they were able to cut jade into pieces. In this sense, without the discovery of bronze, the existence of a Jade Age was by no means possible. This era is also called the late Neolithic Age, which ended in the Xia Dynasty and is somewhere between 3,500 or 5,000 years ago, according to archaeological statistics.

It's inevitable to come to the topic of the Yangtze River and the Yellow River when we talk about Chinese civilization. If archaeology is compared to fruits, the Yangtze River and the Yellow River can then be regarded as two huge trees, old and eminent, laden with fruits. There are Liangzhu Culture in the lower, and Daxi Culture in the middle Yangtze River basin. And there are the Longshan Culture in the lower, Shenmu Culture in the middle, and Qijia Culture in the upper Yellow River basin. Hongshan Culture is located in Liao River basin. People's horizon of jade is continuously broadened by these archaeological discoveries. Some controversy over jade articles are settled, some blind spots of ages covered, and some deficiencies exposed, including the experts' lack of composite knowledge, bias of understanding and arbitrary judgement. The research of jade is no longer confined in an exclusive circle, and numerous collectors and dealers trading in jade are also involved. These men may employ different methods, but they target at the same end, that is, to spread China's jade culture. It is time that moulds this chance. It's not difficult to do scholarly researches, but I am more concerned with practice, from which one gets a more vivid picture. So far, I have given an introduction that the following part is based on.

We had a Jade Age when jade had unparalleled social function. Jade meant politics and belief. Human beings of the Palaeolithic Age got out of the forest and began to learn all the means to survive. Small-scale planting and breeding came into being. In the late Neolithic period, the growing population is challenged by a reduction of the number of wild animals. Agriculture, highly social and orderly, began to develop. Crop production varied over

China. The southerners grew rice, while the northerners mainly grew millet. The Loess Plateau was marked by little rain and alkaline soil, which was agreeable to the growth of millet. People depended a lot on nature. They felt great awe for various natural phenomena, and believed in the existence of supernatural forces. When they had favourable climate and the harvest turned out to be good, they gave sacrifices to gods. In search of offerings, they discovered colourful jade. And it was exactly the time when bronze was uncovered in the process of pottery production. Bronze was to change the entire history. People shaped bronze into sheets, tubes, and cones. Using these tools together with sand, they were able to carve and polish jade into all kinds of articles—those of daily and military use as well as jewellery. These articles were the prototypes of offerings.

Jade is the nymph in the mountains. When men made sacrifices to ancestors and gods, jade was the best offering. As the saying went, Uncut jade forms no article of vertu. In what way could one make a jade article that communicates with gods? Unsophisticated mind created the simplest pattern. The simplest things today were the most complicated in those years. No one was capable of explaining life and death, day and night, bolts and thunders, and the relay of seasons. Lack of scientific knowledge bred myths. The few wise men thought hard. In their meditation, they visualized gods, designed patterns of jade articles, and arranged the dances and rites in sacrifices.

The so-called Jade Age refers to the period when jade was made to be offerings. No country was formed then, and people lived in tribes scattered all over mountain and

river areas. Our ancestors were occupied by sacrifices and wars besides daily agricultural work. Altars were built as stages for wizards. There was an immense need for jade articles and mass production was called for. Jade processing was considered high technology at that time. In the late Neolithic Age, some of the most commonly seen offerings were *bi*, *cong*, *gui*-tablet, *zhang*, *yue*, *wu*, etc. And there were also some articles, *xuanji* and handle-shaped articles for instance, with unspecified usage.

The most widely used offering was probably *bi* that is unearthed in large quantities in relics of both Liangzhu Culture and Qijia Culture. *Bi* is a shaped as an orb with a perforation in the centre. *Shuang lian bi* (two *bi*-disks joined together), *san huang bi* (*bi*-disk made up of three *huangs*) and *xuanji* are all based on its design, and they are found in the Yellow River basin in the stratum of the late Neolithic Age. The shape of offerings, once set, was not changeable. Offerings (*li qi*) had to obey universal rules (*li*). In Qijia Culture, ordinary jade articles were roughly made to perform their role as funerary objects—gifts for ghosts on the dead's way to Hell. Jade articles for sacrificial use were different. They were gifts for heavenly gods, and they had to be carefully designed to carry specific meanings. These articles were shaped after particular patterns. Moreover, only jade of the best quality could be used. In the Xia Dynasty, a special pattern of *bi* (*yuan* as it was called), with a slightly larger central hole, was popular in the middle Yellow River basin. *Yuan* might have been used as jewellery on the wrist. Tens of thousands of jade articles that were unearthed in Qijia sites are now scattered all over China. A jade collector once told me that, since the discovery of a site where

lots of large *bis* were buried, he had never heard of any new discovery of jade articles of Qijia Culture. What he suggested was that a play had reached its end.

It is almost too general to consider that *cong* was a sacrifice for the earth. The earliest Chinese characters were pictographic, and the design of *cong* resembles the pictograph for penis. The character of *cong* consists two parts: *wang* that means jade and *cong* that connotes sacrifice under roof. Therefore, *cong* was apparently used as sacrifice to ancestors. It symbolized phallism and carries the meaning of connection and inheritance. *Cong* was a major offering in Liangzhu and Qijia Culture. Those found in Liangzhu were finely made and decorated with holy animals in relief. On many *congs* one can find eyes of gods, watching if men in sacrifice were pious. *Congs* of Qijia Culture were simple in design. Its focus was on the grains and quality of jade rather than decor. Moreover, jade in the northwest areas was much harder than those in other areas, which made it difficult to carve in details. *Cong* was used in the sacrifice of ancestors. This was so deeply rooted an idea for our race that every generation had the responsibility to pass down the family line however unfavourable the living conditions were. *Cong* was a manifestation of this idea.

Gui-tablet was in popular use in the Yellow River basin. Its pattern was based on some weapon or tool of the Stone Age. Like *zhang*, it might have been used when an army set out for battles. I once saw several *gui*-tablets of the same size and the same kind of jade, and I presume that they were made in batches by the same artisan of late Qijia Culture. Drums were beaten on the altar; *gui*-tablets and *zhangs* tied at the ends of long sticks were in good

order; the headman led the whole tribe to give sacrifice, impetrating the help of heavenly gods; military horses galloped away, leaving a huge cloud of dust behind. It was an era when heroes strived to hold dominion of the whole world. In the name of gods, the civilization was marked by a strong sense of cruelty. War meant nothing other than plunder and conquest. Female prisoners were forced to be sexual servants, and captured slaves could be maltreated in any way. Slaves, as funeral objects, were found in tombs badly disfigured, children's head shattered and the elderly limbless. In a world where various delicate offerings sparkled, suffering still predominated in the world.

Gui-tablet might have been used to mark one's rank of nobility. *Gui*-tablets unearthed usually bore the traces of being once used, which suggested that they were normally taken along with their masters. *Gui*-tablets and *zhangs* were made from opaque jade, perhaps because offerings in the shape of weapons were not supposed to be transparent. *Guis* with relief were once found in Longshan Cultural Sites located in the lower Yellow River basin. The Imperial Palace Museum in Taipei houses several similar articles on which Emperor Qian Long of the Qing Dynasty, who loved them very much, had some of his poems engraved. In Qian Long's time, these articles were considered to be made in the Shang or Zhou Dynasty, and now they are finally judged to be relics of Longshan Culture, or of the Xia Dynasty to be precise. They were the best *gui*-tablets ever to be found and tarnished those that were made later.

Yue has the pattern of a flat axe. It was used as offerings everywhere around China. *Yues* of the most elegant design

were found in Liangzhu Cultural Sites, and they were so perfect that any minor change risked spoiling their heavenly beauty. *Yues* are unearthed in all the cultural sites in the Yellow River basin, and experts think that they might be offerings to mountains. Our ancestors felt regret when cutting down forests, and they gave sacrifices to mountains to relieve the sense of guilt. *Yue* in Liangzhu Culture symbolized military power, a different case from cultures in the Yellow River basin.

Jade knives, another offering, were called *wu* in ancient books. Shimao Cultural Area in Shaanxi Province and the Qijia Cultural Area in Gansu Province are homelands of jade knives. I once saw, when visiting a collector, a big jade knife of Qijia Culture that was 67cm long. I called it playfully Knife World No.1. Regrettably, it was broken in two halves, perhaps broken intentionally when buried with the dead. It has a forceful design, well polished and with a sharp blade—undoubtedly an outstanding work of the Jade Age. Who could be qualified to be its owner? Perhaps only the emperor. *Wu* should have been used in sacrifices to the earth, as it was related to reaping. Harvest was an event in the agricultural age. Celebrations were held when the harvest, gift for gods, was carried into barns. People gave sacrifices during which jade knives were used. The prototype of jade knives was the stone sickle, so it was quite proper to use jade knives during sacrifices to gods of harvest. Jade knives were not used to kill or to meet any practical needs; they were not knives in the word's common association.

In the Xia Dynasty, there appeared a kind of jade article that was strangely shaped. No one knows how they were called, and people call them handle-shaped articles

nowadays. These articles became popular in the Shang Dynasty, and they were found in Yanshi Erlitou Period and late Qijia Culture. Despite all people's guesses, its use is still controversial. I personally think that it should be related to ghosts. One end of a handle-shaped article was inlaid with turquoise or other materials. Its abstract and terrifying engravings remind one of diseases or epidemic. Therefore, it should have been used by necromancers to dispel ghosts. Similar articles, named Y-shaped articles, are found in the Hongshan Cultural Sites. Their usage is also controversial, and I think they might have similar usage to handle-shaped jade.

Now it goes to *xuanji*. *Xuanji* came into existence around the Xia Dynasty, and experts have been arguing about its usage. I once came across a pair of jade cuckoos, together with a *xuanji* that were of the same size of regular bracelets. They were found in the Yellow River basin and should have been made in the late Neolithic Age. Jade modelling after cuckoos was rarely seen and classic illustrative books of jade articles had no record for that. Farmers in the north had the experience that once the cuckoo twittered, crops should be planted. Our ancestors, therefore, considered cuckoos as messengers of gods. After the field was sown, people expected rain, and *xuanji* was used in sacrifices for rain. *Xuanji* had the design of cirrus, and its minor convexities symbolized the back of Long (Chinese dragon). Cuckoos and *xuanji* together made a vivid scene. The necromancer stood on the altar. She wore jade birds on the chest and *xuanji* on the wrists, dancing and saying prayers. The necromancer might well be a woman, for I have seen *xuanjis* that were extremely flimsy. In the rainy southern parts where people had no worry about rain, *xuanji* was scarcely discovered.

The ancestors of the Shang Dynasty took the holy bird as their totem, so Longshan Culture was famous for its bird-shaped potteries. The holy bird was Feng (Chinese phoenix) that stood for *yin*, which, together with Long that stood for *yang*, formed the basic concept of Eastern philosophy. There are different versions of the origin of Long, and it is the same with Feng. The totem of Long might have something to do with cyclones, and it might also be related to the fossils of dinosaurs. In the folklore, Emperor Yu changed the surface of the nation, which suggested the possibility of finding fossils. Our ancestors saw the fossils of dinosaurs that were completely alien to them, and it was natural for them to speculate that these animals should be hiding in mountains and clouds. Therefore, they created the totem of Long. How about Feng then? The earliest image of Feng was found in jade articles of the Xia Dynasty. In the tomb of a princess of the Shang Dynasty, people unearthed a piece of jade depicting a beautiful Feng. But after close analysis of its pattern and technique, experts concluded that it shouldn't have been made in the Shang Dynasty. In another case, 700 jade articles were unearthed in Fuhao Tomb, and among them were hook-shaped knives of Hongshan Culture, offerings of the Xia Dynasty. If we venture to judge the period of a jade article only from the age of the tomb, we are likely to make mistakes. Up till now, we have got a comprehensive knowledge of jade articles of the Shang and Zhou Dynasty, and some experts are capable of seeing the nuances between jade articles of the late Shang period and the early Zhou period, between the late Spring and Autumn Period and early Warring States period. It is important to gain knowledge of jade