

A Litho-Anthropological Study on Jade's Mythological Narration and Chinese Cultural Origins

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Abstract

Based on the recent scholarship by Chinese literary anthropologists' on mythology and jade ideology, this paper attempts to trace the conceptual premises, integrated paradigm and methodological innovation of Chinese literary anthropology, elucidate the inner logics of the jade theory, introduce the integrated function of jade in the material and spiritual resource possession and distribution, exam its relation with the Chinese cultural origin and demonstrate the necessity and capacity of inter-disciplinary interpretation, especially the probability and potentiality of mutual interpretation between the "Great Tradition" and the "Small Tradition" of Chinese literary anthropology.

Key words: Litho-Anthropology; Jade Mythology; Cultural Origins; Chinese Cultural History

Introduction

Max Weber once pointed out that, “The supreme gold of social sciences is not to pursue the construction of new ideas or new concepts, but to make efforts in understanding the cultural meaning of concrete historical links”. (Weber, 1999: 60) In May, 2013, at the international symposium on literary anthropology held at Shaanxi Normal University, Ye Shuxian, the leading scholar of Chinese literary anthropology, proposed an innovative jade-oriented theory that held that Chinese jade functions not only as a material symbol of civilisational origin, but also as a centripetal force that promotes the development of prehistoric multi-cultures toward the integrated civilization of the Central Plains of China. This proposal was followed by a heated debate, a debate also informing this essay. In terms of tracing the origin of Chinese civilization, what is the theoretical innovation of the jade-oriented theory? What is the value or significance of this proposal in the systematic exploration of Chinese civilization origins? This paper attempts to introduce the conceptual premises of this approach, an integrated paradigm and the ensuing methodological innovations for Chinese literary anthropology, It further elucidates the inner logics of the jade-centered theory, examines its relation with the exploration of civilization origins and illustrate the inter-disciplinary interpretation capacity of Chinese literary anthropology.

Conceptual Premises: Theoretical Innovation of “Myth-history”

Based on Ye’s 30-year-long research on literary anthropology, the proposal of Jade theory didn’t come out of a vacuum. This innovative theory has its ideological foundation in the developments of Western mythology and literary anthropology. Regarding myths, scholars from different fields have different views even on a working definition, with more than fifty definitions (Doty, 2000: 28-30). Sarah Allan defines myths more narrowly as “stories of the supernatural” (impossible in natural, not cultural reality) in *The Heir and the Sage*. (Allan, 1981: ix). In her later work, however, Allan sometimes uses another definition of myth, “sacred narrative” and considers it as necessarily linked with “a religious context” (Allan, 1981: 126) since Alan Dundes distinguishes “sacred” from “secular and fictional and associates myth with all forms of religion.” (Dundes, 1984: 1). But defining a myth as “a sacred narrative explaining how the world and man came to be in their present form,” (Dundes, 1984: 1) Dundes also applies “myth” to such topics as child archetype (Dundes, 1984: 244-255) and George Washington (Dundes, 1984: 336-342), which surely enlarges the scope of myth beyond religion or the supernatural.

In lieu of Allan's seemingly narrow definition, Birrell opts for William Doty's 'eclectic synthesis' (Doty, 2000: 28-34) and insists on viewing myth as “a human experience that must be understood on its own terms and in its own right with its own autonomy” (Birrell, 1993: 4-5). Mark Lewis, however, criticizes Birrell’s view as “incoherent” and “illusory”, because there exist no grounds for seeing myths as an autonomous realm, while myths should rather be historicized “within its own culture,” where its “place(s) and meaning(s)” (Lewis, 2009:553-554) may vary over time in accordance with its interest and utility for communities which keeps telling them in one way or another.

Quoting classicists and mythologists like Walter Burkert, Georges Dumézil and Geoffrey Kirk, Lewis defines myth then as any traditional tale with secondary, partial reference to something of collective importance, where “traditional” means that it has no identifiable author but appears in several sources and further develops over time. These stories dramatically express the ideology under which a society lives, reflect on the elements and tensions that form a society and justify the rules and traditional practices without which everything in a society would disintegrate. Myths thus belong to and serve to define particular groups. As the groups change across time, the form of the myths and their uses will likewise change, or the danger exists that those stories will simply be forgotten. (Lewis, 2009: 549)

Drawing on the notion of “mythistory” from Joseph Mali’s *Mythistory: The Making of a Historiography* (2003), some scholars have vigorously pushed forward the focal point of literary anthropology. In *The Heir and the Sage*, Sarah Allan contends that, “Ancient Chinese literature contains few myths in the traditional sense of stories of the supernatural but much history.” (Allan, 1981: ix). In fact, the Chinese tradition does not even have a word for myth and the term *shenhua* (borrowed from the Japanese translation for myth, *shinwa*) did not exist until 1902 when Liang Qichao uses it in one of his essays on “new historiography” (Liu Xicheng, 2006: 19). At the time when mythology is introduced into China at the beginning of the last century, while “the problem of myth for western philosophers is a problem of interpreting the meaning of myths and explaining the phenomenon of myth-making”, as Allan remarks. “The problem of myth for the sinologist is one of finding any myths to interpret and of explaining why there are so few.” (Allan, 1991: 19) Utilizing Claude Lévi-Strauss’s structural theory and methodology in her analysis of the foundation and succession myths of early Chinese dynasties, Allan demonstrates that “history, as it appears in the major texts from the classical period of early China (fifth - first centuries B.C.), has come to function like myth.” (Allan, 1981: 10) Referring to this sort of “historical myth-or mythical history” (Allan, 1981: 12) as “legend”, Allan concludes that the legend types (whether archetypes or stereotypes) in Chinese thought have affected Chinese politics and literature throughout history. (Allan, 1981: 145) Allan’s argument that history functions like myth in early China goes hand in hand with a rather postmodern recognition that historical narrative is by nature mythical and thus functions as a sort of “mythistory”.

Western literary anthropology traditions and its conceptual redefinition of mythology exert tremendous influence on the Chinese scholar. Ye Shuxian groups scholars of literary anthropology into roughly five categories: archetypal critics (N. Frye, J. Vickery), New Historicists (S. Greenblatt), anthropologists (F. Poyatos, L. Portis Winner), anthropologist-writers (S. Diamond; L. Eiseley), and Chinese scholars (Fang Keqiang). (Ye Shuxian, 1999: 28-33). This classification is neither all-inclusive nor strictly categorical, but rather for the convenience of discussing literary anthropology from both sides of literary criticism and anthropological studies and both sides of western theories and Chinese practices.

An Integrated Paradigm: “Mythological Image” and “Mythical China”

Although influenced deeply by the western interdisciplinary studies, the Chinese literary anthropology school is deeply grounded in the native land and offers some novelties and

nuances. The initial development can be traced back to the early 1980s, when a number of scholars, with Yuan Ke foremost among them, made the abundance of Chinese myths clear to mythologists and sinologists alike. In fact, as early as in 1933 Chinese scholars had started to question the validity of the prevalent view that myths in China are scarce, fragmentary and unsystematic and they rejected such a view as “a profound mistake” or “a false proposition” (Yuan Ke, 1993: xi) and argued instead that “despite their protean and contradictory forms, Chinese myths are more reliable documentary evidence of a primitive and archaic oral tradition in the world of myth.” (Yuan Ke 1993: xii). For the new generation of Chinese scholars, the problem of myth is no longer why Chinese myths are so far and few in between, but how to recover lost myths and advance comparative mythology through up-to-date approaches.

In the 1980s, a younger generation of scholars emerged, especially the new Chinese literary anthropology school led by Xiao Bing and Ye Shuxian, who applied archetypal theories and cultural anthropology to the rediscovery and reconstruction of Chinese mythology. Supported by archaeological findings over the past few decades and mythological theories like those of Mircea Eliade and Roland Barthes, this school differs from earlier scholars such as Mao Dun and Yuan Ke who confined myths to the realm of literature. Instead, it propagates literary anthropology and advocates a paradigm shift in Chinese mythology, to treat myth as the cultural gene, social code and psychological source from which literature, art, philosophy, religion, politics, education, law, etc. all sprang.

In the first place, Ye Shuxian’s conceptual reinterpretation of “history” is triggered not only by the post-modern views of history, such as New Historicism, but also by the prolonged debates between Yigu (School of Doubting Antiquity) and Gushibiau (School of Defending Antiquity) in Chinese history studies. The Yigu movement of the 1920s, the historicisation of myths carried out by the literati of the Zhou and Han dynasties, has been the main explanation for the “death” of myth in ancient Chinese texts. The leading scholar, Gu Jiegang, put forward the “pile-up theory” and regards all history recorded by ancient myths as nonsense. He thinks what myths record is merely the later generations’ authoritative narration. The Doubting Antiquity School’s denying the historical significance of myths has its grounds in the scientific conception of history in China’s modern history studies, which keeps alert for the authoritative narration in history records. However, the Doubting Antiquity School, failing to realize the dialectical relation between the truth and the falsehood in myths, thus completely denies the myths’ possibility and capability of narrating history. In contrast to the above two schools, the Chinese Literary Anthropology School holds a rational and impartial view towards myth, believing that myth enjoys priority in narrating and interpreting history. In the meantime, while “eighty years ago the School of Defending Antiquity scholars adhering to the tenet of historical positivism, tried to revert ancient Chinese history to myth or false history,” this school rather expects “an anti-movement” that from myths and legends interprets the lost clues of ancient history, or histories with a multitude of “marginal narratives.” (Ye Shuxian, 2009: 20-26) In other words, myth is in no way the entirely accurate account of authentic history, yet it takes much more efforts to penetrate the fantasies in myths and perceive authentic history or even the threads leading to an authentic history.

In the second place, in the 1980s, with a high self-awareness of tool reforms, Ye not only introduced myth archetype criticism in Chinese literary studies, but also applied the approach to the re-interpretation of Chinese classics. The introduction and practice of myth archetype criticism in literary studies is a breakthrough for the conceptual innovation of “myth”. Myth archetype criticism becomes the inter-cultural and interdisciplinary gene of the subsequent development of Chinese literary anthropology. In the *Lao Tzu and Chinese Mythology* (Ye Shuxian, 2005), *Cultural Analysis of Chuang Tzu* (Ye Shuxian, 2005), *Cultural Interpretation of Shijing* (Book of Odes) (Ye Shuxian, 2005), Ye not only reveals the ideological thoughts of literary texts, but also illustrates the literary expressions of philosophical ideas, which were integrated and incorporated simultaneously by the decoding of “mythological images”. In *The Hero and the Sun* (Ye Shuxian, 2005) and *Chinese Philosophy of Mythology* (Ye Shuxian, 2005), the approach of literature-philosophy's mutual interpretation, with the “mythological image” as the core value, opens up a broader cross-cultural horizon and exhibits the capacity of theoretical innovation.

In third place, besides being motivated by the history-interpreting function of “mythological images”, Ye calls for a “Mythical China” (Ye Shuxian, 2009: 33-38) that contains a holistic understanding of Chinese culture, the code of which encompasses even the structure of religion. *Totem of Bear* (Ye Shuxian, 2007), is a case in point which illustrates the complicated and intimate relationship between myth and history. The close association or the intimacy between myths and history is related to a special type of myths — the Genesis myth which exists and plays an important role in all nations' mythology. The Genesis myth is about the creation of the universe and man and thus contains some essential information about cultural origins. Ye's systematic research on the totem of bear marks a breakthrough of viewing historical elements from the perspective of myths. In *Totem of Bear*, manifest multi-evidences relating to the bear totem in ancient myths (the name of the Empire, pattern narration, fold legends, etc.) and shows the great capability and promising potentiality of myths to record and reveal history. Thus, the history of myths is presented for clarity.

By elucidating the deep connection between myths and philosophical thoughts and historical facts, Ye successfully does away with the narrow limitation of myths and consciously regards myths as the common source and archetype of the humanities of modern principles, like literature, history and philosophy. Mythology is redefined as the integrated origin of civilization. Via the aid of the totem bear, Ye displayed history and reason in myths, which shed light on the dialectics of mythical narratives. By discovering and consciously adopting the underlying relation between “mythology” and “history”, Ye reveals the dialectics of mythical narratives, which can be seen as the accomplishment of a Chinese syllogistic view of history: from believing in antiquity to doubting antiquity, then from doubting antiquity to interpreting antiquity.

Methodological Innovation: “Quadruple Evidences” and “Little/Great Tradition”

“Literature” and “philosophy” in myths are connected through mythological images, while the reproduction of authentic history in myths relies on the concept of “mythistory”, a term adopted by Ye. Although it has its theoretical roots in Western mythological research, it is still closely

rooted in Chinese native materials. Given mythology is multi-faceted and also the “prototype” that constructs Chinese civilization, Ye even uses the concept “Mythological China” to generalize the self-expression of Chinese civilization. Owing to the activation of myths’ multi-interpretation capacity and the penetrating understanding of the relations between mythology and history, “Myth history” offers methodological support for Ye’s deep exploration of the origins of the Chinese civilization.

Furthermore, this school follows the Levi-Straussian logic of mythical thought and contends that myths “derive their meaning as part of a system” and “their structural relationship can, to a certain extent be decoded” (Allan, 1991: 125). Based on Wang Guowei’s “Dual Evidences” (canonical texts and excavated documents) and Rao Zongyi’s “Triple Evidences” (canonical texts, excavated documents and material objects) for textual criticism, this school proposes and advocates “Quadruple Evidences”, seeking evidence from not only canonical texts and excavated documents but material culture, a narrative of objects and icons (Ye Shuxian, 2010: 1-8) and intangible heritage, which was usually studied by folklorists and ethnologists. (Ye Shuxian, 2011: 87-90) Such methodology of quadruple attestation, however ambitious, theoretically surpasses previous scholars’ practices, whose versatile expertise was primarily based on early Chinese philosophy and history, etymology and archaeology (e.g. ritual bronzes oracle bones, bamboo slips).

At the international symposium on literary anthropology held at Shaanxi Normal University in May 2013, Chinese literary anthropologists borrowed and adopted a pair of Western anthropological terms, the “Little Tradition ”(the folk/unlettered kind) and the “Great Tradition” (the elites/literate), which were coined by Milton Singer and Robert Redfield when they studied the orthogenesis of Indian Civilization in Madras city, now known as Chennai. In their view, tradition consists of the inherited practices and opinion and conventions associated with a social group for a particular period. This also includes attitudes of the people, durable interactional patterns and socio-cultural institutions. The Great tradition is associated with the elites, literate and reflective few who are capable of analyzing, interpreting and reflecting cultural knowledge. The Great Tradition is a body of knowledge which functions as the beacon light of knowledge. In contradiction to this, the Little Tradition comprises belief patterns, institutions, a knowledge including proverbs, riddles, anecdotes, folk tales, legends, myths and the whole body of folk-lore of the people and /or the illiterate peasants who imbibe cultural knowledge from the great tradition. The unity of civilization is reflected in the perpetuation of the unity of worldview of both the folk /peasant and the elites or the literati through cultural performance and their cultural products. Cultural performances are institutionalized around the structure of both Great and Little Tradition.

Chinese literary anthropologists redefined the “Little Tradition” as the cultural tradition marked by metal and language characters and the “Great Tradition” as the cultural tradition before the appearance of characters, metals and nations (Ye Shuxian, 2011: 8). On the basis of this redefinition of tradition, the Chinese literary anthropology school integrated jade into its objects of study, i.e., the literary textual evidence, the material evidence, the unearthed archeological evidence, and the anthropological evidence, were thought together to propose

that jade, as the material symbol of civilization origin, functions as a centripetal force that leads a path from the prehistoric multi-cultures to the integrated civilization of Central Plains. This proposal gave rise to heated debate. Thus, the theoretical innovation and the inner logics of the proposal should be examined to decode jade mythology and the origins and characteristics of Chinese civilization.

Jade-oriented Theory: Mythological Exploration of Civilization Origin

In the early 21st century, Ye not only promotes the integrated methodology of “Quadruple Evidences” and the redefinition of the “Little/Great Tradition” in Chinese literary studies, but also applies them to the re-interpretation of Chinese jade cultural heritage. Ye uses the early antique jades as a kind of “Object Narrative” to explore the literature and culture, which is the natural extension of his “Quadruple evidences”; as his research on the literary anthropology has developed from the literature texts to the culture texts, the early jades also transferred from the “material evidence” of multiple evidence of the literary anthropology to the material symbol of civilization origins, which makes “jade” an new alternative to bronze and deeply connected to the logical progression of literary anthropology and civilization exploration. Ye confirms that the “Great Tradition” identifies jade as the source of the “Little Tradition” related to bronze, which for the first time identifies the relative pre-existence of jade in time. Ye explicitly places early jades in the context of Chinese civilization exploration in papers including "My Stones"[J] (*Ethnic Arts Quarterly*, 2012(3)), "Mythological Analysis of the Origins of Chinese Jades— Taking Jades of Xinglongwa Culture as an Example "[J], (*Ethnic Arts Quarterly*, 2012(3)), "Shun Issued Jades to Tribe Leaders after the Abdication from Yao: the Myth History of the Two Legendary Rulers" [J], (*Ethnic Arts Quarterly*, 2012(3)), and in the "Mythological Analysis of Chinese Civilization Exploration— Interviews with Ye Shuxian" [J], (by Liao Mingjun, *Ethnic Arts Quarterly*, 2012(3)). He continued this line of thinking at the above named 2013 symposium.

Ye’s mythological mode of exploring civilization origins has its distinctive characteristics and unique approach. Before analyzing its uniqueness, we can take a look at how it complements those traditional modes of academic research. Magic treasures appear in almost all mythological narrations relating to the ancient heroes or kings. As the luster and color of gold obsessed the Greek and Roman writers, the beautiful jades, jade cream and jade flowers obsessed those Chinese writers. (Bernstein, 2008: 1-6) Jade is valued and has been worshiped continuously so that Chinese civilization has for several-thousand-year experienced a “Jade Age” right from the beginning of its formation. Gold has had a history of around 3000 to 4000 years, while jade of around 7000 to 8000 years, twice that of gold. (Liu Jinhua, 2007: 26). Though the economic value of some other natural resources, such as gold, silver, bronze and iron, are emphasized as well in these narratives, none of them could compete with jade in the way that it is closely connected to the origin of Chinese civilization.

With the increase of archeological discoveries, exploration of civilization origins is obliged to connect as many verified Chinese civilization forms as possible on its timeline. Previous civilization exploration tried to specify the exact time, but what numerous archeological discoveries now offer is the chronological development of civilization. The search for an exact

time stops being the sole pursuit of civilization exploration. Scholars also devote themselves to exploring the underlying driving forces of the prolonged evolution of Chinese civilization. To explore the origin of civilization, various theoretical approaches have been proposed, including the “oasis theory” (R. Pempelly), the “two revolutions” theory (V. G. Childe), the “unequal distribution of resources theory”, the “population pressure theory” (M. J. Harner) and the “religion forces” theory (T. Earle). Likewise, the mythological method, providing the theosophical concepts, is actively trying to search for the underlying forces that promote the birth of civilization. The jade-as-god model, offered by jade-oriented ideology, shares two commonalities with other theoretic approaches: firstly, what is invoked in civilization is material (jade); secondly, the social distribution or configuration of material resources implies conceptual and spiritual resources.

Besides, the jade-oriented theory enjoys obvious advantages. Instead of separating the material and spiritual resources, it integrates them as the combined forces of civilization's origin, which can be analyzed by Marxism's separation of materials and spirits. According to the jade-oriented theory, the fight for spiritual resources goes along with striving for material resources. This theory considers both the material and the spiritual, which results from the unification and fusion of mythological thoughts. Ye points out that, at the very beginning of civilization, humans must have undergone an era when man and god were equal and that the sacred and the secular were not divided. This means, the jade-oriented theory does not only bring us to the start of civilization, but also presents the possibility of the integration of the material and the spiritual. Going beyond the confusion of spiritual factors, the exploration of civilisational origins is enriched by the input of the archeology.

Theoretical Structure and Psychoanalysis of Jade Mythology

In order to grasp the archeology of Chinese civilization's core value that is implied in the jade-oriented theory, it's necessary to analyze the theoretical structure of the jade-oriented theory. This includes the spiritual and conceptual analysis of jade — the core of jade myths. The following analysis is the induction to and explanation of the inherent logical structures underlying the jade-oriented ideology.

Jade, as a natural mineral, enjoys certain characteristics that are superior to other minerals. Firstly, it's formed in extremely harsh conditions, which makes it rare and special. Secondly, it has special physical properties, such as, hardness, color and luster, and touch. Numerous phrases and idioms in *Shijing* (Book of Odes), including “a gentleman is as gentle as jade”, “a gentleman always wears jade”, a gentleman shall cultivate his morals the way jade is sculpted — by “cutting, polishing, carving and rubbing”, and the concept of “jade virtues”: all these are related to jade's physical properties. However, Ye explains them as the reflection of the great tradition of “jade-as-god”. And the reason why jade is respected in the Little Tradition of Chinese civilization lies in the jade myths of 5000 years ago. “Jade myths” are particular to Chinese mythology, and the mythological mode of thoughts provide a multi-dimensional panoramic view of the origin of Chinese civilization.

Ye's psychoanalysis of jade is interpreted on the back of mystical witchcraft and magic in

comparative religious studies. Chinese jade, together with the Western “hierophany” — gold and Lapis Lazuli — enjoys a holy and sublime status in the early civilization. The earliest “jade as god” reference appears in the great tradition of the mythological world. Ye analyzes six jade myths — “The Yellow Emperor plants jade” and others. — that start from “the legendary Chinese ancestor Yellow Emperor and ends with the three wise rulers of the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties.” (Ye Shuxian, 2012: 23). The analysis, stretching 2000 years, is the transition period from Great to Little Tradition. Ye “interpreted the little tradition of characters by the knowledge of great tradition” (Ye Shuxian, 2012: 13), and verified the great tradition by the little tradition.

All of the six myths listed by Ye show jade’s sanctity and function of connecting man and god. To be specific: “Yellow Emperor’s planting jade”, recorded in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, shows that jade can increase the power of gods or ghosts and protect a gentlemen from evil (Ye Shuxian, 2012: 14); the story that a jade article made Yu the Great the ruler of the country, as recorded in Shang Shu and *Records of the Grand Historian*, shows jade’s honorable status in the secular world (Ye Shuxian, 2012: 16-17); Qi of Xia going up to heaven with the ring of jade in his right hand and semi-circular jade wearing around his waist shows that semi-circular jades and jade wearing are all holy media that connect man and god (Ye Shuxian, 2012: 19); according to *The Yizhoushu*, Zhou, the last emperor of the Shang dynasty, burned himself together with jade, which implies that jade can be smelted (Ye Shuxian, 2012: 20); Jiang Ziya got semi-circular jade and the Duke of Zhou talked to the ancestors through a jade sacrificial vessel, which shows that jade conveys mythical information (Ye Shuxian, 2012: 21); King Mu of Zhou visited the Yellow Emperor’s Palace and received a jade bough and jade leaf, which hints at the fact that the Yellow Emperor’s Palace may be the palace where the worship of god with jades is performed (Ye Shuxian, 2012: 22). In the previous interpretation of mythological stories, Ye re-interpreted both the Great and Little Tradition under the guide of the “jade-as-god” concept and presented the multi-dimensions of jade myths.

With the aid of two scholars (Charles de Brosses and F. M. Muller) from the comparative studies of religion, Ye confirmed the mythological association between “jade” and “god”, points out that the Great Tradition of regarding jade as god has potentially dominated the Little Tradition of “jade is virtue”, and, more importantly, he suggests the method of searching for the driving force of regarding “jade as god”, that is, the “supernatural power” in myths (Ye Shuxian, 2012: 25). The eternity concept in the jade-as-god theory is the Chinese version of the pursuit for eternal life in mythical mode of thoughts. The association of water as the source and the color similarity with the sky provides mythical logic for jade’s holiness. Holy narratives, Nüwa (a Chinese goddess) repairing the heavens with “five-colored stones” jade being the essence from “the combination of heaven and earth”, intensifies jade’s holiness by integrating both water as the source and the color similarity. The pursuit of jade and the privilege of “worshipping god with jade” bred the beginnings of early Chinese civilization. Jade, which integrates the material resources and spiritual ideology, becomes a holy symbol that attracts various power groups, invoking the birth of Chinese civilization.

Archeological Jade Antiques and Jade Mythological Concepts

Jade mythology can be the key to understanding how Chinese civilization came into being in its particular fashion as based on excavated prehistoric jade articles. The inclusion of the story of jade can expand these mythological studies which used to be constrained to the domain of language characters and textual studies. Such more inclusive research can be conceived of having multi-principle perspectives, and includes archeology, religious studies, anthropology and petrology.

It was mentioned above that Chinese literary anthropologists adopted a pair of Western anthropological terms and redefined the “Little Tradition” as a cultural tradition marked by metal and characters and the “great tradition” as the cultural tradition before the appearance of characters, metals and nations. According to the redefinition and based on the unearthed jade articles, Ye Shuxian retraces the cultural identity drive of the Chinese civilization(s) to five mythological concepts, whose chronological order is as follows:

- 1) The birth of jade mythology: represented by the Xinglongwa Culture in the north and the Peiligang Culture in the Central Plains. The belief that “jade is heaven” and that “jade is god” is fundamental to the creation of Chinese identity. This is the embryonic period of core values, which appeared around 8000 to 7000 years ago. The two Cultures respectively produced jade and turquoise articles.
- 2) The mythological concept of “unity of man and god” which formed on the premise of “man-and-god communication”. To communicate with the heaven or god under the help of jade was the source of Chinese rites-and-music culture. This happened 7000 to 6000 years ago, represented by the appearance of Huang (semi-annular jade pendant), which was one of the 6 musical instruments recorded in Rites of Zhou. Evidences can be found in Hemudu Culture, Yangshao Culture, Daxi Culture, Hongshan Culture etc.
- 3) Totem worship which is represented by mythological animals, such as the dragon, turtle, snake, frog, cicada and silkworm. It were 6000 to 5000 years ago, and was represented by Double-Dragon-Head Huang of the Hongshan Culture.
- 4) The Mythological geographic concept which is characteristic of “Tian Xia (land underneath heaven)” (5000 to 4000 years ago). In later the classic, it is described as “Yu the Great’s remains” (Shu: Establishment of Politics); or “Yu the Great’s land” (*Classic of Poetry: Lesser Court Hymns – Xinnan Mountain*), “nine-state island”, “holy state” etc. In the rubric The Fourth Year of King Xiang’s Reign of Zuo Zhuan, the writer stated, “Yu the Great’s remains are boundless. On the map, we see it as a nine-state island”.
- 5) The Mythology of holy kings or holy people which is represented by Yao, Shun and Yu the Great. (5000 to 4000 years ago). The predecessor was jade statue in the shape of a holy man that was able to communicate with god or heaven. After the Shang and Zhou dynasties, people re-created the ancestral mythology of the five kings which began with the Yellow Emperor. Such mythology is represented by Taosi Culture and Longshan Culture. (Ye Shuxian, 2012: 23-25);

In the age when *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, the *Classic of Poetry* and the *Songs of Chu* came out, the Little Tradition of literal narratives merged. The Great Tradition, as its coding basis, was very influential. Thus, the study of mythical texts on jade should draw more on the unearthed archeological and anthropological findings.

VII. Conclusion

The origin of a civilization is more than simply making a chronological table and arranging various cultural inventions in order, but it involves exploring the core values formed along with the birth of this civilization, especially the cultural features particular to it. Jade theory, initiated by the Chinese literary anthropology school, attempts to illuminate jade as the gene of Chinese culture and the potentiality of mutual interpretation between the “Great Tradition” and the “Little Tradition”. This leads to the following conclusions:

First of all, jade theory illuminates that jade as a major gene of Chinese culture plays an integral function in material and spiritual resource possession and distribution, reveals Chinese cultural integration and continuity in a panoramic manner and demonstrates the necessity and capacity of inter-disciplinary interpretation. The critical link between mythology and cultural origin lies in the special cultural factors that mould their ideologies. Looking at pivotal cultural elements, we can better approach the core values of a specific society through the interaction between materials and concepts, thus exploring those identity factors that help unify these multi-elements. Jade mythology can be the key to approach the question how the Chinese civilization came into being in its special fashion. At the turning point to becoming a civilization, jade articles function as the bonding material that integrates the Central Plains and the surrounding areas. Such bonding was both material (from the mining, exploitation, transportation, exchange to the processing and distribution of jade) and spiritual (the cross-region spread and unification of jade’s mythological concept). The long-term interaction of material and spiritual demand finally brought to the eve of Chinese civilization (the era before the Bronze Age) its core values: jade as holy, jade as treasure, and jade ware as the sign to communicate man and heaven (man and god).

Secondly, jade theory reveals Chinese cultural continuity in a panoramic manner. From the historical background of “worshiping the heavens with jade” to the gold medals inserted with jade in the Beijing Olympics, from the “virtue of jade” emphasized by Confucian morals to the “fortune of jade” acquired by jade business and trade, from being buried minerals in the primitive age to the symbol of the sublime in the later civilization age, from its natural reserved, modest and mild properties to humans’ quarreling and fighting over it, jade has gone through helping to create Chinese civilization through various gestures. The continuity that Chinese civilization consists of has two related layers of meaning: first, Chinese civilization never relented from ancient times to today and still enjoys a vital energy, impressing Western scholars; second, there is a structural continuity of belief, ritual, politics and economics within the Chinese civilization system, which Tu Weiming calls “the continuity of being”. He then introduces a peculiar omnipotent and omnipresent Chinese concept “Qi” (air) to explore the particularity of Chinese thoughts. He raises a question about the origin of “Qi”, “in what sense do the most unintelligent substances, such as stones, and the most intelligent embodiments, such as the heaven, consist of the same thing – Qi?” (Tu Weiming, 1981: 6) Here, “stones” and “heaven” listed exactly correspond to jade and the “jade-as-god” ideology in the jade oriented theory. Thus, jade theory enjoys potential in the illumination and interpretation of the continuity and integrity of Chinese philosophy, the inner logic of the underlying ideology and its derivative traditions.

Thirdly, Jade theory offers an alternative for the motivation and genetic study on Chinese

rituals, which are peculiar features of the Chinese civilization. Jade as source of civilization has not only confirmed the typical jade type of different civilisational ages, but also revealed the most essential particularity of the Chinese jade ritual. To figure out the motivation or spiritual resource of the rituals, which is verified via various material evidence, including unearthed sacrificial pottery, jade and bronze vessels, one should probably resort to the mythological mode of thoughts of the Chinese ancestors. According to the jade theory, the source of rituals lies in the ideology of regarding jade as god – “worshiping the heaven with jade”. Jade theory, when combined with the “Asian-American Shamanism” theory initiated by Kwang-chih Chang, could further elucidate the study of Chinese civilization. On the basis of Peter Frost’s “Asian-American Shamanism”, Kwang-chih Chang put forward the “Asian-American Shamanism as the basement” theory and the Maya-Chinese continuum theory. He believes that the re-construction of “Asian-American Shamanism” can be extended to the east of the ancient world, especially China, instead of being limited to the Central and South American region. Since ancient China shares many similarities, such as religion and arts, with Central and South America, they could be placed in the same category of Shamanistic Civilization. (Li Hongwei, 2003:18) The “Asian-American Shamanism” theory provides a solid conceptual foundation and spacious interpretative room for the jade theory, which is correspondingly reflected, verified and echoed not only in the jade-ritual obsession but also the conceptual logic of the “worshiping the heaven with jade” to “jade as god” ideology.

Fourthly, jade theory demonstrates the necessity and capacity of inter-disciplinary interpretation, especially the probability and potentiality of mutual interpretation between the “Great Tradition” and the “Small Tradition”. The prolonged history of jade mythology can be verified by the unearthed prehistoric jade articles, which expand the mythological studies from the textual-constrained domain to the mutually-related and multi-dimensional evidence of archeology, religion and anthropology. This integration is not confined to the research patterns of all related natural principles in empirical archeology, but also extends to the integration of different views and methods of empirical natural principles, social principles and interpretive humanities. With the deep involvement in civilization exploration, jade theory is characterized by the empirical rigour and analytical methods of the social sciences (the sociological analysis of the way of jade) and the interpretational features of the humanities (here the “spiritual archeology” of the jade-as-god view). The integration of jade-as-god ideology, the unity and integrity of Chinese jade rituals, the richness and the continuity of the Chinese civilization are mutually reflexive and interpreted by both the “Great Tradition” and the “Little Tradition”. If cultural continuity is an outward feature of the formation of Chinese civilization, the transfer from “jade-as-god” to “virtue-of-jade” is the conceptual thread passing through the Great and Little Traditions. And the transformation of “worshiping the heaven”, a mythological view, to rituals set as political rules, shows that both traditions share the same ideological regulatory structure.

The litho-anthropological approach to jade myths and the origin of Chinese civilization demonstrates why the Chinese still give priority to jade today, rather than to other materials. It allows researchers to transcend the pitfalls of having to “make up history” or to “prove the reality of history”. To avoid these extremes, jade theory can go a long way and needs to be

examined further internationally. Combined with further pervasive spiritual archeology and the study of solid unearthed materials, its theoretical probability and potential can thus be demonstrated on a more substantial level.

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