

## JADE, ITS HISTORICAL VALUE TO CHINESE PEOPLE AND ITS NOMENCLATURE

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### WHAT IS YŪ

The name Yŭ (jade) as used by Chinese denotes Nephrite, a species of the amphibole group. What I am going to discuss in the present paper is not the mineralogical character of the subject, but its relation with the Chinese history.

### THE USES OF YŪ AND ITS SOURCE OF SUPPLY

When did China begin to know and to use jade? By reading history, I am only able to say that it was about the time when Chinese history was first known by written record, i.e. in the reign of Huang-Ti (黃帝, 2598-2697 B.C.). He used it to adorn his military weapons.<sup>1)</sup> When he assigned political divisions and appointed officials, the jade was again used for making the so called *kueh* (珪), a tablet conferred upon the officials to show their respective dignity, authority and feudal rank.<sup>2)</sup>

But Yŭ was known to occur only in Sinkiang (新疆), Yŭ Tien (于闐), Tsung-Ling (蔥嶺 the Belurtagh Mountains in Turkestan) and Kun Lung (崑崙), but not in China proper. Huang-Ti was also said by various historical records to have frequently visited the region of Tsung Ling and Kun Lung. It is said in Shan-Hai-Ching and Hsi-Shan-Ching that Huang-Ti collected the jade from Mih Shan (崑崙山) and transported it to the south of Chung Shan (鍾山) (another name for the Kun Lung Mts.).

These facts seem necessarily to lead to the conclusion that communication between China and the West at that time was very convenient and the same facts have suggested the idea that western people came from the Chinese region. Those who hold this opinion base it on other evidence, but this is not the place for the detailed discussion of the problem although it is undoubtedly true that Yŭ must have been supplied by the western regions

1) Based on Yueh-Shu-Sho. 越絕書.

2) Based on the biography of Huang-Ti. 軒轅黃帝傳.

and was first introduced into China by Huang-Ti, no matter where he originated. Moreover, the name, Yü, appears simultaneously with the very beginning of Chinese history.

#### THE JADE AGE

From the time of Wu-Ti (五帝, "Five Emperors" 2206-2647 B.C.) to San-Tai (三代, "Three Dynasties" 247-2205 B. C.) the use of Yü in China was especially prevalent. For various purposes such as diplomatic intercourse, official appointment, religious worship, funerals, war, ornament and presentation it was always required. In Chow-Shu (周書) it is said: "Wu-wang (武王) captured from the Shan dynasty (商) 14,000 pieces of used jade and 180,000 pieces of jade for ornamental purposes (武王俘商舊寶玉萬四千, 佩玉億有八萬). How commonly the jade was used, becomes evident from these enormous figures. That was the age of bronze, but it is not unreasonable for one to call it also the Jade age, because both were of equal importance.

Since the period of San-Tai, the importation of jade seems to have been reduced. Down to the time of T'ang (唐) and Sung (宋) only the false jade named "Mien" (珉) was used in ceremonies instead of Yü. After the fall of the Han dynasty (漢) the practice of wearing jade articles had long been forgotten though it is still often found in the history that Yü was frequently imported from Yü Tien. Such geographical names as Yü Ho (玉河) and Yü Chon (玉州) in that region, evidently mean the jade-producing localities. Even Yü-Tien is still known to be one of the jade-producing districts.

#### THE QUALITY AND SOUND OF YÜ

In ancient times, Yü was believed to have five or nine qualities (五德九德). Its physical properties must have been minutely investigated. One of them which has never been touched upon by the mineralogists of today, is the sound of Yü (玉聲). It seems that in ancient times people were quite able to distinguish between its various sounds. Such qualifying words as "slightly vibrating" and "far-reaching" were applied to them. On this account, some musical instruments of the ancient days were made of Yü, e.g., Yü-ching (玉磬 a jade plate), Yü-ti (玉笛 a flute), Yü-Kuan (玉琯

a flute pipe), Yü-Hsiao (玉簫 a flute) and Yü-Sheng (玉笙 a kind of reed organ). It is most likely that the sound of jade meant a great deal to our ancient musicians. Unfortunately, what it really means is not known today.

#### MULTICOLORED YÜ

The color of Yü did not escape the attention of our scholars in the past. It has been described as being of the red of cock's comb; the yellow of cooked chestnut; the white of resin and the black of pure varnish. At present, five varieties, white jade (白玉), blue jade (青玉), green jade (碧玉), yellow jade (黃玉) and smoky jade (墨玉) are actually found in Peking, but the purple variety has never been seen.

#### NOMENCLATURE AND ITS CONFUSION

What is the origin of the name Yü? Shu-Wen (說文) says, "Yü is the best kind of stone". This suggests that Yü means precious. However, many jade-like objects have been called Yü. A clear distinction is thought to be necessary. For example, rock crystal is also called Shui-Yü (水玉 water jade); and Mien (玢) is called Mien-Yü. These terms do not really denote the genuine jade, but mean "jade-like". This kind of nomenclature is still used by the Japanese. For example, they call corundum, Kan-Yü (kewgioku); turquoise, To-Ehr-Chieh-Yü (Torukgioku); and jasper, Pi-Yü-Hsi (Glokusui).

The author is of the opinion that nothing should be called Yü except the actual material which from the beginning has been denoted by the term Yü; otherwise, confusion will be the result. One example will suffice to illustrate this point.

Formerly in China, there was a kind of stone called Sê-Sê (瑟瑟). Usually it is defined as Pi-Chu 碧珠 (green bead). In an article on this subject by Berthold Laufer<sup>1</sup>, three things have been included under this term, viz., Balas ruby, emerald and onyx. This I have discussed in my "Lapidarium Sinicum".<sup>2</sup> Laufer regarded the onyx as a kind of Sê-Sê because in the Chinese-English Dictionary published by the Commercial Press, Shanghai, onyx is defined as Pi-Yü, and in old Chinese books, Sê-Sê is usually

1) Notes on Turquoise in the East, Chicago.

2) Memoir Ser. B. No. 2, Geol. Surv. China.

referred to as Pi-Chu; now Chu and Yü are sometimes used interchangeably in this country and this is where the confusion arises. Again, onyx was defined as Pi-Yü because of the fact that the Japanese translated jasper as Pi-Yü and because onyx is in the same group with jasper. Thus, it is seen that Laufer based his correlation on a misunderstanding of the origin of these terms. I have always been of the opinion that for such mineralogical terms the study of nomenclature must be guided by historical research. This is the reason why my "Lapidarium Sinicum" was written.