

Analysis of Jade with Octagonal Shape as a Sacrificial Vessel

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ABSTRACT

Jade in China has a longstanding history with its early origin rooted in profound influence and continuous development of culture. Ancient Chinese jade has become a predominant physical embodiment of traditional Chinese culture, conveying mysterious, distant, and critical historical information. This article analyzes the beliefs of the ancient Hongshan people in China reflected by the precious jade transmitted to the present and discusses the sacrificial vessel as one type of transmission from the example of Jade with Octagonal Shape. This article highlights the development, role, and status of Jade with Octagonal Shape as one of the sources of Chinese civilization, intended to help people appreciate the faith of the ancient Chinese Jade culture and deepen people's understanding of art collection in contemporary society. This article also plays a summary and ground-breaking role in the study of Jade with Octagonal Shape, redefining it as an abstract turtle.

Keywords: *Sacrificial vessel, Jade with Octagonal Shape, Jade scepter head, HongShan Culture, Ancient Chinese jade.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Sacrificial vessels were used as tools for culturally important rituals and provided insight into the lives of the people and societies who used them. They represent the user's status, socioeconomic rank, and power. Further, these artifacts are also considered treasures instrumental to a nation's founding. The Doctrine of Mean once talked about the importance "In spring and autumn, they repaired and beautified the temple halls of their fathers, set forth their ancestral vessels, displayed their various robes, and presented the offerings of the several seasons." Sacrificial vessels are endowed with special significance and become the embodiment of the etiquette system. Sacrificial vessels are also a symbol of authority, and the sacrificial offerings are displayed to honour, pray, and offer sacrifices to the ancestors. Therefore, sacrificial vessels are very important for the dissemination of culture and the expression of national orthodoxy. It is a reproduction of ancient Chinese society's moral judgment and a visual indicator of the creator's quality, emotion, and character. Therefore, the value behind such an artifact lies not only in the quality of its physical representation but also in the intention of its spiritual and cultural manifestation.

To judge the value of collectibles, people should analyze the substantive and formal attributes of artwork and look at the moral power of self-disclosure aesthetics in the context of specific social backgrounds. Zuo Qiuming's Legend of Spring and Autumn Century is recorded as follows: "In spring and autumn, they carded and beautified the temple halls of their fathers, set forth their rhetorical siren, displayed their various robes, the offerings of the several seasons" [1].

The sacrificial vessel of focus in this paper is the Jade with Octagonal shape, also known as a scepter or multi-headed jade in Hongshan culture [2]. This article explains the development process, function, value, and symbolic significance of Jade with Octagonal Shape as one of the sources of Chinese civilization, and traces its status to explain the belief and manner of Hongshan cultural inheritance. Jade with Octagonal Shape as one of the sources of Chinese civilization [3], this article discusses its development process, function, value and symbolic significance.

This article also plays a ground-breaking role in the study of Jade with Octagonal Shape, traces its status to explain the belief and transmission of Hongshan cultural inheritance. While retaining Jade with Octagonal Shape as the sacrificial vessel [4], it also provides an overview

of Jade with Octagonal Shape unearthed in the past. With the discovery of the largest Jade with Octagonal Shape, the essay concludes that Jade with Octagonal Shape is not the head of a wand or the shape of a star as previously found, but the abstract and metaphorical expression of the tortoise, which deepens the archaeological connection between the Yellow Emperor tribe and the Hongshan culture.

2. DESCRIPTION OF JADE AND ANALYSIS OF ITS VALUE

This largest Jade with Octagonal Shape is a dark green star-shaped Jade with multiple angles and a carefully polished body (as shown in figure 1). There is a large round hole in the middle of the body, which is drilled from the west side. The hole's wall is slightly thinner in the middle and polished. Eight angles surround it, and the size and spacing of each angle are very close. The grooves between the two curves are prominent, forming an inverted triangle. There are a total of 8 inverted triangles between the two angles; the plane is overall octagonal, and four overlapping squares when viewed horizontally, representing a ridge between each pair, so the two sides of the spine are inclined surfaces. The angle's front end is a slightly outer arc, with a diameter of 7cm, a square edge of 14cm, and an outer diameter of 28cm.



Figure 1 The largest Jade with Octagonal Shape

The Jade with Octagonal Shape that archeologists have previously discovered were all very small, about ten centimeters. Such a 28-centimeter vessel is very rare. It is the largest one ever discovered and the heaviest one as a sacrificial vessel in Hongshan culture [5]. Professional archeologist Sun Shulin thinks that this vessel's age should belong to the period of Hongshan culture, which may be a late period of Hongshan culture, dating 5000 to 5500 years ago [6]. The vessel close to natural law explains that physiological images and natural intention dominate beauty; disclosing the inner self is the source of cultural ideals and spiritual values. Such intention behind the creation of vessels and artifacts is what drives its value not only as historical but also as aesthetic collectibles.

The history of the art collection is almost as long as that of the development of art itself [7]. Art collection originates from primitive societies whose sole purpose of preservation of vessels is for religious sacrifice. Hence, numerous ancient sculptures and artifacts have been found in original remains worldwide and are likely to have been preserved and reused in cultural ceremonies. Such sacrifices to Heaven and Earth date back to the Neolithic age [8]. In *The Zhou Rituals*, chapter 18, it has: "With the round tablet pi of greenish jade he pays homage to Heaven; with the yellow ts'ung he pays homage to Earth". Both circles and squares had different but profound meanings in ancient times. In order to better communicate with Heaven and Earth and obtain the blessing and protection of the god, the ancient emperors built the temple of Heaven into a circle and the temple of Earth into a square [9]. The Jade with Octagonal Shape, the drill hole in the middle is precisely a round shape, and two squares are formed through the triangle on the back, so it is related to the historical worship of Heaven and Earth.

Overall, from the perspective of astronomy and geography, it is an understanding of the universe, an embodiment of Heaven and Earth's concept in ancient Chinese cosmology and a symbol of the connection [4]. Jade with Octagonal Shape is not only a symbol of spiritual power in Hongshan culture but also shaped the Chinese nation's ideal personality model through the interpretation of the ancient cosmology of Heaven and Earth: sleek in life, but upright in heart; together with modest not bad people; to follow the path of Heaven[10].

3. CULTURAL IMPORTANCE OF JADE AND ANCESTRAL WORSHIP

Furthermore, the angular shape of the jade is mostly related to ancestral worship. The ancestors believed that their predecessors evolved from some horned animal. The ancestors thought that although their predecessors no longer existed, their souls were eternal [11]. Therefore, their existence and everything else is related to their ancestors and should be accorded respect; this is ancestral worship.

Mr. Sun as the collector of the largest Jade with Octagonal Shape finds that these eight horns, if humans hold two of them, look like a turtle, with a head, a tail, and four feet. The Jade with Octagonal Shape rotates like a continuous turtle, a complex of turtles. There are also many small vessels similar to octagonal in the previous collections in the Rende North Ancient Civilization Museum [6]. One of them is precisely tortoise-shaped. Its hole is drilled in two faces, the middle of the hole wall forms an arc, and the seven corners of the outspread are flat cones. The center of the angular surface is slightly pointed and slightly inclined on both sides, with an inverted triangle between each angle; the distance between the two front and rear paws is 8.5cm, and the

middle transverse distance is 12cm. The distance between the head and tail is 1.3cm, and the aperture is 3.6cm. One of the angles depicts the head image of the turtle. Overall, the largest Jade with Octagonal Shape is too big and heavy to be used as a scepter head on a scepter for sacrificial activities, and the other, slightly smaller Jade with Octagonal Shape does not fit a star but a turtle. So Jade with Octagonal Shape is not what researchers usually think of as the head of a wand or the shape of a star, but rather a particular tortoise, an abstract and metaphorical expression of a turtle as well as an extension of ancestral presence which is continuously worthy of worship and respect. This has great significance to deepen the connection between the Yellow Emperor tribe and the Hongshan culture.

Metaphorical imaging has become recognized in a unique manner in China. Jade with Octagonal Shape symbolizes the latitude of the universe, and through the extension of the metaphor, it represents Heaven and Earth, Yin and Yang, etc. These mythical animal-type jades are not only motivated by aesthetic needs but also by the expectations of the gods [12]. It embodies the abstract turtle through the interpretation of orthodoxy in the art to become a symbol. This turtle transcends the meaning of being an animal and becomes a specific symbol, endowed with special meanings and emotional tendencies and carrying particular cultural connotations.

The symbolic connotation can be interpreted in many ways, including longevity, auspiciousness, authority, and glory. Meanwhile, the ancestral people also believed in divination by tortoiseshell (Gui Bu). They believed that a turtle's shell is a good predictor of future luck [13]. Simultaneously, jade is the primary medium for them to communicate between Heaven and Earth, man and God. Thus, Jade with Octagonal Shape became a sacrificial ritual tool because it was regarded as a living entity endowed with sacred meaning in the ancient Chinese mind. The ancestors of Hongshan culture connected the real world with the world of gods through their works, making it a medium for them to communicate with supernatural forces. The pioneers believed that they could meet the power of mystery through these products. Therefore, Jade with Octagonal Shape is covered with a layer of mystery in addition to the cultural accumulation of turtle worship.

4. OTHER METAPHORICAL AND SYMBOLIC MEANINGS

Normal Jade with Octagonal Shape, also known as Jade scepter head before, symbolizes royal power and ancient ritual practice (li). Jade with Octagonal Shape was used by the leaders of the time. Because society in the Hongshan cultural period was a combination of theocracy and the throne, the community's ruling class must own the Jade with Octagonal Shape as the clergy's sacrificial vessel. Hongshan culture's large-scale

sacrificial rites, worship of jade and totem show that as early as 5,000 years ago, China had already produced a high-level social organization that was both rooted in and superior to the commune [6]. Hongshan culture is related to Xuanyuan culture. Since the Yellow Emperor (Huang Di), also called Xuanyuan, established his kingship, turtles (Yuan) were considered sacred by his community. They believed in giant turtles (Yuan) as their ancestors and protectors.

From the book *Discourses of the States* written by Zuo Qiuming, Xuanyuan recognized himself as the turtle (Yuan)' descendant, the tribe is proud of the turtle (Yuan) and they made the turtle (Yuan)'s pattern as the clan emblem and their worship totem. This is also one of the reasons why Jade with Octagonal Shape looks like a turtle. The Age of Five Rulers' (Wudishidai) is a period of dramatic change in Chinese society, and civilized factors begin to germinate. Yellow Emperor's Tribe centers in the North and is marked by the Hongshan culture [5]. Ultimately, the Jade with Octagonal Shape not only represents the cultural and spiritual importance of the Hongshan people of the time but also embodies the greater historical scene of the time through its representation of the Emperor.

5. DISCUSSION

The Sacrificial vessel is a commodity bearing the information of history, culture and art. Its value may change with the changes of fashion and aesthetic taste over time, nonetheless the overall value is strongly maintained. However, the sacrificial vessel's aesthetic value contains a realistic nature that does not depend on humans. It exists because it objectively does not depend on man's consciousness and will [6]. These artifacts live the interrelationship between these phenomena, man and society, and the mutual relationship formed in social and historical practice. Similarly, the territoriality of the sacrificial vessel refers to the historical status and function of specific art, which is often determined by the characteristics of the era [14]. For example, Jade with Octagonal Shape reflects the Hongshan culture of China.

The process of curating and collecting art, which can use trustworthy and reliable visual images to enrich and verify historical documents, can also apply its spiritual essence to the vessels — let the objects speak for themselves. Whether in academia or people's memory, it can be seen, felt, read, and interpreted as a kind of symbolic physical evidence of cultural history. The object itself tells its own story and that of those who interacted with it. Furthermore, the collection should not focus on economic value. Collecting is closely related to investment, and it often becomes a potential investment method at the same time. However, collecting does not mean buying, nor should it mean purely investing. Only when a work of art has no economic value can it have its own identity, developmental relevance and the

possibility of passing down through the ages [10]. Customs express a community's ideology, and the jade, transmitted as the carrier of the rite (li), reflects the common psychology and religious beliefs of members of society, regardless of form or pattern [2].

As for art collection, there should be a literati attitude: when people collect it completely from the perspective of art (the purpose is not the purpose), it is the happiest. In terms of inheritance, art collecting is a means for collectors as memorizers and it contributes to people's awareness today and later, understanding traditional culture, and enhances the cultural sense of belonging and responsibility. Culture is preserved as a repository in the form of material traces of the past of those people's self-consciousness; sacrificial vessels are the essence and external embodiment of Chinese culture [15]. Jade with Octagonal Shape, therefore, represents the embodiment of self-consciousness existing in artistic value, rather than the artist as an isolated individual. For sacrificial vessels, collectors should have a heart of awe, a sense of pride, and the urgent need to protect and inherit Chinese culture and art [16]. This kind of consciousness is a cultural consciousness and a spiritual guarantee for a powerful art collection.

6. CONCLUSION

This Jade with Octagonal Shape is the largest sacrificial vessel archeologists have found so far in Hongshan Culture, which adds new content to the study of the Jade in Hongshan culture and the understanding of the function of this kind of Jade. It is of great significance for us to understand the social development of Hongshan culture, the concept of astronomy and geography at that time. Through the interpretation of Jade with Octagonal Shape, people nowadays should know that these sacrificial vessels are recipients, specific receivers. Citizens should keep collecting and appreciating them. The bearing and confirmation of Chinese cultural relics pass on artistic genes and civilization history. Images, objects and linguistic characters have traces of cultural construction and artistic creation built upon generations of ancestors and contain and reflect the national will and cultural spirit with specific significance and value. Therefore, in the face of these cultural relics, people can often be aroused by deep cultural identity awareness and then generate cultural confidence. At present, there are still no cultural relics that directly prove the relationship between Yellow Emperor and Hongshan culture, and Jade with Octagonal Shape has not been unearthed in large quantities. At the same time, although Hongshan culture was the same period as Yangshao culture, it did not get much attention due to geographical conditions. In addition, the specific use of Jade with Octagonal Shape as sacrificial vessel is not clear, which can be further studied in the future.

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