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An exploration of jade

Maria Jones

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AN EXPLORATION OF JADE

by

Maria Jones

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ABSTRACT

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Special Features: This paper is in a hand-bound book with an unusual page size of 6 by 4 inches. The paper is illustrated throughout with pictures of Han jade. The paper is manila with a linen quality.

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Meaning of Jade

The ancient Chinese perceived jade as a precious stone at one time thought that jade was created by the supernatural forces of heaven to guide humanity. According to the Chinese, jade embodied the five virtues: charity, modesty, courage, justice and wisdom (Zara, 9). Jade embodied the forces of nature and the universe and emanated transcendental qualities. Through this precious stone’s power, the ancient Chinese sought the key to earthly protection and everlasting life (Qua, 4). Because of this belief, jade in the Han Dynasty, 206 B.C. to 22 A.D., became a vital element in burial rituals. Throughout China’s history, jade has been a symbol of immortality and ceremony. Ornaments, pendants, seals, burial shrouds, and decorations in jade have been created to exploit this otherworldly power.

Jade and Jade Sources

The word jade comes from the Spanish term “piedra de ijada” which translates to “stone of the loins.” The name was created when Spanish sailors reached America and found the Mexicans using the stone against kidney infections. The stone also took on the name “piedra de los rinones” which in Latin is “lapis nephriticus,” or “stone of the kidneys.” The specific word “Jade” is a European translation of the Spanish term “piedra de ijada” (Savage, 3). Chinese call jade Yu, which means “precious stone.” Yu is thought
of as the true jade and comes in only two forms: nephrite and jadeite. Both minerals take on a liquid luster when handled frequently. Without human touch the stones have a dull, corroded state, which is not as attractive and does not show the true beauty of the stones. Unpolished and found in nature, jadeite appears sandy whereas nephrite has a shiny surface. This unique need for the stone to be handled is taken into consideration by jade collectors.

Nephrite is a hard stone from the amphibole group made up of silicate of calcium and magnesium, with or without iron (Nai, 5). It has the same chemical composition as the mineral tremolite, which is white or pale in color, or actinolite, which appears in various shades of green, depending on the iron content. The difference between these minerals and nephrite is the aging processes. Nephrite undergoes metamorphosis; changes take place in the crystalline structure due to pressure or heat which forms interlocking fibrous structures (Ayers, 5). Nephrite has a very hard, fibrous crystalline structure. It is softer than jadeite. Also, nephrite is lighter than jadeite, and when polished, looks oily rather than glassy (Zara, 14-16). Nephrite is the primary jade used in Han and other ancient dynastic periods. Nephrite was mainly found in boulders washed down from the Kara-kash, Black Jade, and the Yurung-kash, White Jade, Rivers flowing from the K’un-lun Mountains down into the oasis of Khotan in the Taklamakan Desert (Ayers, 6). Although this oasis was nowhere near the center of power of the Han Dynasty, it was along one of the empire's major trade routes. Nephrite was mined by the same method used by the Romans. The rock was subjected to fires and then squelched with icy water to split it; then wedges were driven into the cracks to make smaller stones (Savage, 4). In its purest form nephrite is pale white, also known as “mutton fat” in
ancient periods. The pale color of nephrite is unusual because, when foreign compounds are introduced into the pale colored stone, it changes color dramatically from white to greens, browns and other colors of the spectrum. It has been theorized that different colors found in jade were prized at different times, but the predilection for a particular color might have been due to the availability of colored stones during a specific period. It was not until eighteenth century that jadeite was used extensively, after a large deposit was found in Burma. China then began trading for this precious stone. Jadeite is a silicate of sodium and aluminum within the pyroxene group. It contains an interlocking granular structure that takes on a highly glossy, glasslike finish when polished. Like nephrite, jadeite is pale white before being introduced to other elements. Its colors cover the entire spectrum. Interestingly, the colors in jadeite cannot be found in nephrite (Qua, 5).

Nephrite can be found in large clumps, small clumps, and seams within large bodies of non-precious rocks. Due to weathering, many of these deposits are split, which can cause boulders and pebbles to wash down rivers and streams. Most of the nephrite used in the ancient dynasties, including the Early and Later Han, came from a particular area, Lake Tai in Jiangsu Province, however many jade carvers worked with raw materials from riverbeds and quarries of distant regions (Qua, 5). Much of the jade from distant regions came from areas close to Central Asia, including Khotan and Yarkand. Desiring jade, the ancient Chinese civilizations traded with the small tribes in those areas (Nai, 12).

Nephrite and jadeite are extremely difficult to carve and require a harder stone like quartzite and diamond to abrade them. Because of this, jade objects from ancient periods in China had very smooth basic shapes and little decoration. The main tools used
to create artistic wonders were awls, bamboo drills, and saws. In addition, the stone carvers worked the stone with abrasive quartzite dust and water (Qua, 5).

Common Superstitions

There are many superstitions about jade and some are still prevalent today. Specifically, during the Han Dynasty, the Chinese people believed jade brought immortal life to anyone wearing the precious stone. The Han people believed that jade protected against disease, especially diseases of the groin and kidneys, an idea that is still believed by many. It was thought, because the stone was so hard, that it could break up any other foreign object in the body. Therefore it was also used as a prophylactic. The Chinese created what they called that “divine liquor,” which contained jade flakes. These flakes supposedly passed through the body and refreshed the blood, calmed the mind, enriched the spirit, soothed muscles, and nourished bones. The flakes of the jade passing through the intestines, allowed the “virtue” of the stone to be absorbed into the body (Zara, 21).

It was also believed that jade slowed the decomposition of the dead. The Han people believed that the burial shrouds made of jade protected the body from decomposing long enough for the immortal spirit to rise up and begin its wanderings. This belief is important for understanding the main purpose of the nine orifice plugs that I will discuss in greater depth later in this paper.

Jade also supposedly had the power to bring good fortune. The Han people wore jade pendants, rings, and other ornaments because they thought the stone would bring luck. According to surviving records, people owning jade said they felt better than before
the jade was in their possession. Wishing for good fortune, many people carried small jade objects from birth to death to bring better luck to themselves and their families (23).

Chinese History, Confucius, and Lao Tzu

China has a history longer than that of any other present day nation, and many legends have survived the ages. One of the most prominent is the creation of the earth by the god Pangu. According to legend, in the beginning there was only darkness and chaos, and out of this chaos came an egg. This massive egg was subjected to two opposing forces. The interaction of the two forces—yin, the passive or negative female principle, and yang, the active or positive male principle—caused the egg to break open, producing Pangu. The shell separated and the upper half formed heaven while the lower half formed the earth with Pangu in the middle. After his creation, Pangu grew rapidly, gaining six to ten feet daily. He labored for eighteen thousand years to separate heaven and earth, and when he was finished, he lay down upon the earth, and man, along with all other life, was created (Poon, 23).

Another major legend is the myth of the four directions, north, south, east, and west. These directions are represented by animals that also represent certain quadrants in the sky as well as elements and virtues. These animals are the phoenix, dragon, unicorn and tortoise (28). The animals and Pangu held great importance in the Han Dynasty. Many rituals focused on the legends of Pangu, and many jade ornaments and pendants were created to symbolize the four directions. The directions held mystical powers that could protect an individual, much like the mystical properties of the jade itself.
Confucius was born in 551 B.C. at a time when China was entering the Warring States Period (475 B.C. to 221 B.C.) Amidst the turbulence of this time there was a surge of new thoughts and ways. Great thinkers needed self-control and discipline to overcome the turmoil. Prevailing philosophies of the Warring States Period showed concern for mankind and the nature of man (Capon, 44). This new way of thinking spawned the subordination of the individual to the masses. Traditional ideas were not discarded, but influenced the development of Confucian and Tao thought.

Confucius was born in Shantung, a coastal province in a small feudal state of Lu. His family name was ‘K’ung,’ and the name Confucius is the Latin form of “Master K’ung.” He was born into poverty. His father died when he was very young. Confucius managed to educate himself, later holding a place in the feudal government. When he found this career unsuitable, he changed to teaching and began to travel around the country with as many as three thousand students at a time. He preached about a code of living based on moral principles within a traditional Chinese framework. Confucius was a great moralist and worked to propagate his ethical beliefs as fundamental components of Chinese society (45).

The Confucian ethical code was constructed around the “virtues” that should be possessed by the Chun-tzu, or “ruler’s son.” These virtues were wisdom, integrity, righteousness, conscientiousness, and loyalty, altruism, and, the most important, love and human-heartedness. It was Confucius’ view that all men are alike; learning and practice set them apart (46). Confucius also believed that jade contained the likeness of all the excellent qualities men should carry:

Soft and smooth like benevolence; fine, compact and strong, like intelligence; unyielding like righteousness, lowly, like humility, its flaws never conceal its beauty nor
does its beauty hid its flaws, like loyalty, its radiance glows from all sides, like faith, it
has a brightness like the rainbow, like heaven, its exquisiteness in earthly, like the earth,
it attracts attention, like virtue, and it is esteemed by everyone and everything under the
light of the sun (Zara, 26).

Because of all these things, jade became a symbol of beauty, physically as well as
spiritually. For the Han people, these qualities allowed for a a strong hierarchy within
society. From there, the virtues of Confucius were attainable only by the aristocracy. This
attitude changed around 200 B.C. when a Confucian follower, Mencius, proclaimed that
all men are fundamentally good, thus removing the barrier separating the aristocracy and
peasantry (49). Another Confucian follower around the same time as Mencius, Hsun Tzu,
had a more pessimistic view. He believed that humans had to work hard to achieve
overall goodness. Hsun Tzu held a position in the government, so his views took root in
Han government as well as other later Chinese governments. Hsun believed “rite,” or li,
rest on three bases: heaven and earth; ancestors; and sovereigns and teachers who are the
source of government (51). Hsun Tzu’s interpretation of Confucianism is
uncompromisingly authoritarian.

The Warring States Period introduced two other philosophies, Legalism and
Taoism. Legalists were very rigid in their ways and believed people had to be governed
and live in a community to achieve peace in life. On the other hand, the Taoists supported
the independence of the individual whose purpose in life was to find his/her place in
society and nature. According to legend, a mand named Li Erh, later known as Lao Tzu,
created Taoism. Lao Tzu was thought to be the keeper of the imperial courts archives.
When he was eighty, he set out for the border of China and Tibet. Saddened that men
were unwilling to follow the path to natural goodness, he stopped at the gate between the
borders of China and Tibet and wrote the Tao-te-ching, which became the traditional text
of Taoist thought (Majka, 1). To Taoists man-made society only caused conflict. Taoists sought a state of harmony for nature and mankind through the study and understanding of Tao. Tao means “road” or “way” and signifies the pattern or form of nature. The idea of Tao came from Confucianism, but was reinterpreted to suit the natural concepts of Taoism. The traditional Taoist text, Tao-te-ching, was created during the time of Confucianism and is attributed to the “Old Master” Lao Tzu. The text envisions a system of social structure and government, as a mystic and poetic solution (Capon, 54).

The central principle of Taoism is Tao, a source and controller of all life, human and natural, the fundamental force that resolves the problems of existence. Taoists believe “Do nothing, and nothing will be done.” And from this comes the idea that for one action, another is implied. In this belief in natural action, things occur spontaneously, giving acceptance to the simple, lazy lives sought by the Taoists also, understanding and truth come from meditation and relaxation. Taoists believe that man’s interference in nature only produces chaos, and brings about an almost primitive lifestyle (Capon, 56).

During the Warring States Period there was much growth in governmental and spiritual thought. Legalism, Taoism, and Confucianism coexisted. From these three spiritual thoughts came a new form of government, the creation of the Han Dynasty. Han government took most of its thought from Confucianism and lasted more than two hundred years.

Han Dynasty History

The Han Dynasty emerged in a time of turmoil and was established by a man of great power, Liu Pang. Liu Pang came from the peasant class and was a rebel mob leader
who challenged the Ch’in authority. The hard unyielding rule of the Ch’in dynasty brought
dissatisfaction to many people living under its iron fist and eventually led to cries for the
return of feudal government. Liu Pang was a highly uneducated and practical man who,
besides the destruction of the Ch’in Dynasty (221-206 B.C.), brought about the downfall
of many old institutions, ideas, literature, and philosophies. Due to his lack of education,
Liu Pang was very flexible in forming a new government and was influenced by
Confucian thought when he took the throne. Liu Pang established the capital of Han at
Ch’ang-an (modern Siam), and took the name Kao Tsu (Capon, 60). With his new empire
still weak and untrusting, Kao Tzu surrounded himself with jade as a symbol of his
power. He wore jade sandals, worshipped before a jade altar and carried a jade scepter.
His imperial seal and baton were also made of jade, which served as official symbols of
his imperial position (Zara, 29). Because of his auspicious use of jade, it became a
popular, valued, and rare commodity in Chinese society.

With the beginning of the Han Empire came new threats. Kao Tzu faced threats
from two main sources: first, the old Ch’in rulers and second, the threat of invading
barbarians, the Huns of the north. Huns during this time were known as “Hsiung-nu” by
the Chinese and were nomadic tribes from the northern steppes, generally Turkish-
speaking Mongolians. The Huns had been a threat during the Ch’in Dynasty as well,
attacking the middle kingdoms in times of food shortages. To combat the first threat, Kao
Tsu appointed his highly respected generals as feudal kings, but slowly degraded their
power to assure his right to the throne. He also created a decentralized government to
minimize the threat of revolt from within it (63). Kao Tsu’s last step in stabilizing his
government was to appoint an ‘official’ to handle the official business of government.
As for the role of other countries in the formation of the Han Dynast, Kao Tsu came into power at a time when the land was ravaged by war. Therefore, he took on a passive policy toward China’s neighbors to get his empire on its feet. Due to this policy Kao Tsu supported many unwanted treaties, especially with Hsiung-nu.

The lives of most Chinese citizens did not change substantially with the formation of the Han government. Their lives were not elegant like those of the emperor and his officials. Many lived in mud and straw huts with thatched roofs and beaten earth floors. Often, to protect against natural disasters and landlords, peasants would form cooperatives that helped the villagers as well as the government in tax collection. Some of the peasantry owned the land they farmed, but many were tenant farmers for the fiefs and were paid for their labor in produce and other non-monetary substances (Capon, 110-1).

As the general wealth of the Han Dynasty increased, a new class emerged of merchants, traders, and businessmen. As low socially as peasants in Han society, people of this class prospered during the Han Dynasty. Kao Tsu established a government run by different local government officials with the emperor as the central element. With the reign of the new emperor Wu Ti (140-87 B.C.), a modification to the Han government developed. Wu Ti served like a prime minister, taking many governmental actions into his own hands. After his reign, the role of the emperor fluctuated between bureaucratic rule and supreme power (66). Along with the governmental changes Wu Ti also expanded the Han army and territory near the Hsiung-nu. Wu Ti supported the views of Confucian scholars, who were influential in making Confucianism the official philosophy of the state.
Wu Ti’s modification of the Han government eventually led to its downfall. In 9 A.D. Wang Mang, a high ranking official, found a loop-hole in Han law and made the Han family give up its rule to Wang Mang. This phase of the Han period, the Former Han, ended with Wang Mang’s ascension to the throne. He created many new laws, including the introduction of coins of differing denominations, to support his claim to the throne. Under his harsh law, there were many small uprisings; one specifically, ‘Red Eyebrows,’ grew in power leading to the death of Wang Mang in 23 A.D. At this time the Liu family, the last strong heirs to the Han Dynasty, took rule and reestablished the Han Dynasty, initiating an era known as the Later Han Dynasty.

The Later Han grew and prospered under the rule of Emperor Ming. Much like what occurred during the Former Han, after the rule of Ming came a line of weak rulers and much court intrigue. By 180 A.D. there was so much trouble withing the imperial court that eunuchs were hired to assassinate the families. Once this was accomplished, the eunuchs were given governmental power, which led to the overthrow of the Liu family and the end of the Later Han Dynasty. The government fell from the uprisings of ordinary people, and a new leader emerged, Chang, who favored Taoist ways (Capon, 80-4).

The Han Dynasty did not die with the overthrow of the Liu family. The achievements of the Han Dynasty endured. Its system of government was so durable it was later instituted by the later T’ang, Sung, Ming, and Ch’ing Dynasties. Also, the concept of respect for one’s elders and the care of the aged is a basic concept handed down from the Han Dynasty social structure under Lao Tzu’s rule.
Art in the Han Dynasty took a drastic change when the empire expanded. New ideas were introduced through contact with Romans, Greeks, Central Asia, Russia, and Mongolia. Because of these influences Han art had more realism than previous Chinese art (Capon, 146). During the expansion of the empire, merchants and different classes of officials became patrons. Because of their patronage, change and the rising wealth of the empire, Han art gained a new appreciation and was no longer created solely for ceremony and ritual. The carving of jade and other materials during the Han Dynasty became less ornamental. Shapes were more basic than before and there was less concern for surface decoration. The same qualities can be seen in Han bronze pieces (Ayers, 10).

During the Han Dynasty the most widely used jade was Khotan nephrite. Jadeite, the more valuable of the two, is not found naturally in China. Because nephrite is a very hard stone there were many techniques employed in creating sculptures, disks, engravings and other objects. The people of the Han Dynasty used technology and techniques employed in the earlier Warring States Period to create their fine jade work. Some of these tools were saws and drills made from wood or bamboo, as well as, sand wheels and cloth wheels for creating a glasslike quality on the nephrite surface. The jade was ground down with abrasives such as, quartz powder, crushed garnets, and corundum, black sand (7). Another technique employed by the Han Dynasty was the reuse of jade fragments and old jade pieces. The Han people would take older jade pieces and create new pieces to suit their needs (Nai, 20). Identifiable characteristics of Han jade are most evident in their form and ornamentation.
There is a close relationship between Han shapes and their names and functions. There are few jades with inscriptions because of the hard nature of jade (Zara, 43). The names of jade are based on the shapes that were chosen. There are two ways to distinguish the names and functions of ancient jades, the Confucian approach and the archaeological approach. Confucians attempt to determine the names of jade by connecting them to jade names in Confucian classics on rituals, and then following the annotations of the texts, to deduce the forms of ancient jade from the meaning and etymology of their names (Nai, 21). However, this form of deduction is not very stable. Although Confucian rituals expand on the use of different jade forms, there were few jades from the Han dynasty that were created and used in the context of Confucian text. The archaeological approach is much more cautious and reliable. By comparing the excavated jade with other jade found in the area, ancient jades handed down, shape, stratification of culture deposits, and location, archaeologists can establish accurate identifications of work. Also, there is an abundance of records on Han history and jade that makes categorizing new found jade much simpler (22).

**Shapes and Functions of Han Jade**

The shapes and functions of Han jade can be broken down into four categories: ritual objects, burial pieces, ornaments, and sculptures. The first category, ritual jade, consists of six jades. These jades were used in the worship of the Heaven, Earth, and the Four Quarters: north, south, east, and west. According to historical texts, some of these ritual jades were used as insignias for different ranks of aristocracy while in audience with the emperor and when saluting each other. They can also serve as tokens for transmitting messages (Nai, 22). During the Han Dynasty however, only two of the ritual
jades were used for worship; the other forms became ornaments or no longer were made or used. The Han people used the two ritual jades, the bi-disc and the gui-tablet, as a basis for creating a systematization of geometric jades to signify Heaven, Earth, and the Four Quarters. From the bi-disc they created the half bi; from the gui-tablet the half gui, the original cong-tube and the hu, or tiger forms, were created to make up the “Six Auspicious Jades.” The hu form is the only jade form that does not follow the geometric pattern because the shape was added later to complete the ritual jades. Another popular shape from Chinese history is the dragon shape, which at one time signified one of the four directions or quadrants. The dragon was also an ancient symbol signifying water and fertility. The motif of the dragon before and after the Han is a scaly bestial looking motif, whereas the Han period, the dragon is a smooth newt-like reptilian form. This is a characteristic that is found in all Han jade. This smoothness is a characteristic that is found in all Han jade. Perhaps, this was due to extreme hardness of the stone which was quite hard to carve before the invention of strong tools (Savage, 17).

What are these shapes and what do they represent? The bi-disc is a jade-disc with a hole pierced through the center. There were four major kinds of bi in the Han period: plain undecorated, decorated with simple grain patterns, decorated animals intertwined and symmetrically arranged with grain patterns, and last, the decorated bi with one or more groups of open-work animal decoration. Of these, the latter three were influenced by artifacts from the Warring States Period (Nai, 25). Bi-discs were meant for ritual, but were also used as decoration. They served as ornaments hung from the belt, insignias for rank, and also as coffin decorations. More specifically, bis with surface decorations were influenced by the Chou Dynasty (1050 B.C. to 256 B.C.) and were used particularly in
jade pendants (Ayers, 45). The next shape is the gui-tablet. Gui is an elongated flat tablet with a pointed tip and sometimes a hole drilled through the base. These tablets were plain or decorated and used mainly used for telling time when placed in the ground. The last geometric shape, the jade-cong, is a thick tube with a square outside and a rounded inner hole. Actually, the jade-cong was not made in the Han period, but congés from ancient periods were still used for ritual purposes.

Burial jade, the second category, makes up the largest group of jade pieces from this time. These jades were used specially for the purpose of preserving the body and soul of the dead. There are four major kinds of burial pieces: suits, plugs, mouthpieces, and jades held in the hands of the dead. Twenty-two jade suits discovered from the Han Period. These suits cover the entire body from head to toe and consist of small jade pieces sewn together with gold, bronze, silver, or copper thread. Each suit consists of more than 2,000 jade plaques, which are generally square or rectangular shape. Jade suits were created before the Han period, but only the suits in the Han period cover the deceased completely. In 22 A.D., after the fall of the Han Dynasty, Emperor Wen of the Wei Dynasty outlawed the creation of jade suits because of the excessive amounts of gold being taken from the government treasury to create them. No jade suits have been found after Wen's reign (Nai, 27).

Mouthpieces and hand pieces were placed in the mouths and hands of the dead to provide safe passage to the underworld. The cicada, tongue-shaped jade mouthpiece symbolizes the life cycle and transformation and resurrection. These pieces were also used for ornamentation. This purpose is best seen in examples with holes drilled into their tops. Jade-huangs were also used as burial jades and placed in the hands of the dead. The
handheld pieces began as huangs and slowly evolved to images of the pig, symbolizing good fortune. Finally, the “nine orifice plugs,” were used to plug the body’s orifices to prevent the escape of vital essences (Nai, 31). Orifice plugs were created mainly for the aristocracy whereas mouthpieces were more common. It is thought that the jade cicadas sometimes replaced the jade mouth plug, which was one of the nine orifice plugs.

All of the jade burial pieces were meant to keep the dead from decaying and were simple, lacking great detail. The Han people believed jade to be the essence of the yang force in the yin-yang construct. It was thought that jade placed by or on the body would provide magical protection. In doing this, the body would be preserved until the immortal soul awoke and began its eternal wandering.

Han decorative pieces can be divided into two categories: personal ornaments and utilitarian ornaments inlaid on metal objects. Personal ornaments consist mainly of jade pendants, specifically girdle pendants to hang around the waist. A pendant consisted of one or more jades hanging in combination with beads and a decorative silk tassel. It was usually worn hanging from the waist, but was also used as part of household furnishings hanging from canopies or walls (Ayers, 43). Some of these pendants were in the shape of bi-discs and huang, an arc shape with one hole on the top and two on the sides. More specifically, central elements of shield-shaped ornaments were used during this period for some pendants (43).

Heart-shaped decorative jades from the Western Han Empire were considered a form of archer’s thumb ring, but were made specifically for decoration. Utilitarian ornaments were highly decorated and used for practical purposes. Claw-shaped pendants and hairpins were most often found in the Han period. Jade hairpins originated in the
Shang Dynasty (1766 to 1121 B.C.) but carried over to the early and late Han (Nai, 35). Jade ear ornaments in the Han period consisted of a plug-like rod which beads and other pendants were hung. Jade belt-hooks, which originated in the Warring States Period, were also common. These hooks were used to hang small pendants, swords, and other ornaments from the body. Jade seals and the jade gong-mau were also hung from belt hooks. Seals first were made mainly of bronze in the Warring States Period, but during the Han reign seals were created in jade. Han seals were small square shaped ornaments sometimes with a curled dragon or tiger on top. Gong-mau amulets were long square pieces with evil-dispelling lines carved on all sides and were popular before and during the Han period. This amulet was worn to ward off evil, not for decoration (39).

Jade was also used for reliefs and sculptures. There subjects followed the traditions of the pre-Han periods. Flowers, plants, and fruits were not depicted, nor were images of Buddhist or Taoist deities. Decorations on these sculptures can be separated into geometric and animal designs, which were both realistic and conventionalized. The popular ornamentations of the period were spirals or cloud patterns. Grain and rush patterns were found mainly on bi-discs (Nai, 39). Because of the tough nature of jade, much of the sculpture created during the Han period was sparsely decorated and abstract. Animal patterns showed the bodies of animals covered with scroll patterns. Earlier, in the Warring States Period, the animals were completely conventionalized, causing them to be practically indistinguishable from one another and were based on dragons and birds. They were sometimes shown as animal masks.

The focus on animals in sculptures was based on Chinese history and religion. The four directions I cited earlier were represented by four animals that also represented
four quadrants, constellations and the sky. These four animals were the dragon, tiger, tortoise, and phoenix.

The dragon is the symbol of the east. A very ancient mythological creature, the dragon represents the season spring, the color blue, the element water, and the virtue of propriety. The dragon often represents the emperors and is surrounded by clouds and water. There are five dragons in Chinese culture: the celestial dragons who guard the houses of the gods; the dragon spirits, who rule over wind and rain and cause floods, the earth dragons, who cleanse the rivers and deepen the oceans; the treasure-guardsing dragons; and the imperial dragons, those with five claws instead of the usual four (Savage, 24). The tiger is the symbol of the west. It is rarely seen in sculpture and art, and the earliest examples of this creature are found in Shang gravesites. The constellation of the tiger rules over the yin part of the year, whereas the dragon over the yang. The tortoise represents the northern quadrant and is a very ancient symbol. The tortoise is rarely in Han sculpture and practically never prior to that. The tortoise represents earth, the color black, winter, and the virtue faith. It is thought to be a good listener, and is considered a symbol of long life and happiness. The importance of the tortoise though, is found in the markings on its shell. These represent the eight trigrams, which were an early motif of ritual significance. The eight trigrams represent natural forces, the most well known being the yin-yang (18). The phoenix is the name for a mythical bird that resembles a pheasant. At the end of a phoenix’s life the bird bursts into flames and is reincarnated from the ashes. This symbol represents the empress and is found especially on girdle ornaments in the Han period. The phoenix corresponds to summer, the element fire, the color red, and only appears in times of good fortune. Generally, the phoenix is
seen paired with the dragon because together they represent conflict as well as wedded bliss (20).

The last animal, the unicorn or ch’i-lin, is both male and female. It is an extremely favorable symbol. The unicorn is an animal made of the body and hoofs of a deer and the head resembling a dragon but shown with a curled bushy tail. The unicorn is most commonly placed in tombs to ward off evil spirits during the Han Dynasty. From the unicorn comes the p’i-hsieh, which is another composite animal resembling the dragon and tiger. This animal serves the same purpose as the ch’i-lin, and can be seen frequently on girdle-hooks and belt-buckles during the Han Period (22). Also, the ch’i-lin is frequently related to the cat during the Han period. Cat imagery is found in amulets. Cats are thought to possess some of the spiritual power of the Ch’i-lin (23).

Doves became a strong symbol during the Han Dynasty. They were frequently thought of as symbols of longevity and acted as messengers of the goddess Xi Wang Mu, the Golden Mother who lived in the K’un-lun Mountains. Xi Wang Mu was the goddess of immortality. Her role changed throughout Chinese history. During the Han Dynasty she became the goddess of immortality because she was thought to control the flow of jade from the K’un-lun Mountains.

Horses were a major sculptural form during the Han Period and first appeared at this time. Their influence on Chinese culture and society can be seen in much Han art and jade work. After the introduction of the hourse, good roads were built, inns were established at shorter distances, and a postal service was started (Savage, 30). The sculptures of horses in the Han period have gracefully arched necks and proud carriages typical of the Ferghana horses.
During the Later Han Period jade work began to take new shapes and the old traditions were left behind. Ritual jades were rarely found after the Early Han Dynasty. Ornamental jades decreased as burial jades increased considerably and realistic representation gained prominence. These changes were important because they showed the change from the old traditions to new. In this context, the Han Period is very important because of its role as a transitional period in Chinese history.

Without the Han Empire, the significance of jade would not be as powerful as it is today. The Han people passed on a working governmental structure which helped the Chinese people grow to the thriving country they are today. Jade had a great impact on the way the Han people lived their lives. Therefore, studying the impact of jade in the Han Dynasty is an important key to discovering this ancient people.

As an enthusiastic art historian and designer, I decided to create a book that would convey the feeling and mystery of the Han Period. The book dimensions are six by four inches. I made it unusually small so it has a comforting personal feel. I want the readers to be able to cradle the book in their hands and relax into the history. I gave the book a traditional feel by creating a hand-stitched cover of moss green and a beige textured spine. The cover is accented by 80 lb weight linen pages that have an old manila coloring. I used the sans serif font “Helvetica” throughout the book to keep a balance between the art and text. Each page has a personal text design and an image demonstrating Han jade work. I designed each page so that negative space was an active part of the compositions. The interplay of text, art, and negative space hopefully will be exciting for readers. Each image was hand-selected to demonstrate the techniques and styles of the art. Also, the omission of page numbers helps the reader focus on the book as a whole. I maintained a
black and white color scheme to create continuity and to minimize distractions. I felt color was unnecessary because Han jade was made of colors that were available at the time. In addition, this book is important to my graphic design career. It demonstrates my ability to research, organize, and design a project of broad scope. It created many challenges for me to solve. What I learned will be of great use to me in my future career.

This paper was a great educational experience for me. It allowed me to study a specific period and society and expanded my knowledge of history and art. It has helped free me from the Eurocentric view that dominates art history. It has inspired me to research topics I virtually knew little about. This project has also aided me in developing my independent learning skills such as focusing on specific areas and researching them efficiently. This project and the skills I have gained from it have helped me grow personally and professionally.
Works Cited


