

"Color Acts as a Symbol"

-- From kingfisher to jadeite

Wenjun Chang*

Academy of Fine Arts, Shanxi University, Taiyuan, China

* Corresponding author: Wenjun Chang

Abstract: In ancient China, "jadeite" originally referred to a type of beautiful bird. Over time, with the development of craftsmanship and technology, the feathers of these birds became prized materials for adorning jewelry and textiles. With the unique aesthetics and culture of the Chinese people, "jadeite" was also used as an adjective to describe the beautiful colors of landscapes and objects. During the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, jade stones from Yunnan and Burma entered China. By the Qianlong and Jiaqing periods, the term "jadeite" became exclusively associated with the gemstone as we know it today. The transformation of the name "jadeite" reflects the Chinese pursuit of beauty.

Keywords: Jadeite; Evolution; Perception of Color.

1. Introduction

When modern people mention jadeite, they immediately think of a valuable gemstone characterized by its vibrant green hue and lustrous texture. As a high-end gemstone and craft material, jadeite enjoys global popularity. Today, its primary production area is located in the Myitkyina region of northern Burma. The English term for jadeite, "jadeite," translates to "green gemstone." However, the Chinese term "翡翠" (jadeite) has historically encompassed various meanings. Originally, this beautiful name described a type of bird, and over the centuries, it evolved through changes in craftsmanship, technology, and the distinctive aesthetic preferences of the Chinese people to become the exclusive name for Burmese jade.

2. Love for Feathered Garments

Jadeite and feicui ("翡" and "翠") are both characters that incorporate the radical for "feather" (羽), referring to a type of bird. According to Yi Wu Zhi (Records of Exotic Creatures), the male bird was called "fei" (翡) and the female "cui" (翠), marking a distinction between the two genders. As recorded in Shuo Wen Jie Zi (Explaining and Analyzing Characters), red feathers are referred to as "fei," while blue feathers are called "cui," differentiating the two by color. Bo Wu Zhi (Records of Broad Learning) describes, "The 'fei' bird is larger than a swallow but smaller than a crow, with an entirely black body except for its red feathers on the chest, back, and rear of the wings. The 'cui' bird is entirely greenish-yellow, except for the six feathers on its wings which are longer than an inch. When flying, their feathers make the sound 'cui-cui' and 'fei-fei,' which gave rise to their names" (Wen Xuan Jian Zheng annotated by Hu Shaoying during the Qing Dynasty, Juxuexuan Series Edition, p. 366). According to Qin Jing (Bird Classic), the jadeite bird "drinks and pecks by clear rippling waters, particularly cherishing its feathers, which it washes daily in the water. Today, the feathers are used by noble families for women's hair accessories, valued at a thousand gold pieces" (Yuanjian Leihan, compiled by Zhang Ying in the Qing Dynasty, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 18419).

Additionally, Yuanjian Leihan notes, "The smaller ones are called 'cuibi,' also known as 'fish tiger' or 'fish master,' named for their fishing prowess. The King of Jing used its feathers to decorate robes, as mentioned in Zuo Zhuan, referring to 'robes adorned with feathers and leopard-hide shoes.' Nowadays, florists also use them as women's facial ornaments" (Gu Jin Tu Shu Ji Cheng, Vol. 46, Section 6).

To summarize, jadeite birds are waterfowl adept at fishing, slightly larger than swallows, with vividly colored feathers on their chest, back, and wings. They typically inhabit waterside areas. Due to their stunningly bright and beautiful plumage, they were used early on by nobles and the wealthy to decorate garments and jewelry.

The Rites of Zhou: Spring Official records that musicians wore "huangwu" (a dance costume), which Zheng Sinong explains: "The 'huangwu' involves covering the head with feathers and adorning clothing with jadeite feathers" (Gu Jin Tu Shu Ji Cheng, Vol. 369, Section 8). As early as the Zhou Dynasty, which emphasized rites and music, musicians adorned their headdresses and garments with jadeite feathers.

A well-known story from Han Feizi: Outer Storage, Upper Left-"buying the case and returning the pearl"-describes a wooden box for pearls. The description mentions, "A cabinet of magnolia wood, perfumed with cassia and pepper, inlaid with pearls and jade, decorated with roses, and adorned with jadeite feathers" (Han Feizi, Hanfenlou Edition, p. 112). The word "adorned" (辑) in this context implies gathering and combining, though the specific technique for attaching jadeite feathers to the box is unclear. However, it is evident that jadeite feathers were already used to decorate jewelry boxes, ranked alongside pearls, jade, and roses as precious materials.

In Chu Ci: Summoning the Soul, the luxurious interior decoration is described: "Polished chambers with jadeite finials and curved walls adorned with jadeite feather blankets, shining brightly" (Gu Jin Tu Shu Ji Cheng, Vol. 1214, Section 12). Jadeite feathers were used to decorate bedding.

By the Han Dynasty, Hou Han Shu: Carriage and Clothing recorded: "Six auxiliary hairpins with animal shapes, all adorned with jadeite feathers; golden frames, white pearl decorations, surrounded by jadeite flowers" (Gu Jin Tu Shu Ji Cheng, Vol. 318, Section 24). The "auxiliary" refers to false

hair buns worn by women, with jadeite feathers embellishing the hairpins inserted into the buns. Similarly, Song Shu recounts that during Han Dynasty imperial rituals, empresses' headdresses included jadeite feathers as part of their decorative ornaments.

During the Three Kingdoms period, Bian Lan's Xu Chang Palace Ode mentions, "Intricate patterns exude brilliance, as jadeite shines with radiance" (Seventy Masters' Anthology, edited by Zhang Huiyan during the Qing Dynasty, Daoguang Edition, p. 191). Due to their vibrant colors and natural texture, jadeite feathers reflected different lusters under varying light conditions, allowing authors to praise their brilliance alongside fine silk textiles.

In the Southern and Northern Dynasties, Xie Tiao's poem "Ode to Falling Plum Blossoms" states, "Used to adorn cloud-like buns, jadeite compares in brilliance. As evening falls, it wilts and fades, like the irrevocable favor of a monarch" (Collected Works of Xie Tiao, Hanfanlou Edition, p. 57). Fresh plum branches used as hairpins were compared in beauty to jadeite.

During the Tang Dynasty, Su E's Miscellaneous Notes of Du Yang recorded the grand spectacle of Princess Tongchang's wedding in the ninth year of the Xiantong reign, featuring "partridge pillows, jadeite boxes, and divine silk embroidered blankets. The pillow, shaped like a partridge, was crafted from seven precious materials, and the jadeite box was adorned with gathered feathers" (Zuiweng Talk Records, Song Edition, p. 13). Similarly, Li Shangyin's poem In Imitation of Xu Ling's Style-To the Attendant mentions, "Pearl curtains intricately strung, warm chambers adorned with jadeite" (Gu Jin Tu Shu Ji Cheng, Vol. 375, Section 17), describing jadeite feather-decorated curtains.

By the Song Dynasty, Chao Buzhi's Tune of Joking mentions, "The guest sang, the lady was silent; jadeite-adorned hairpins hung from caps, her turmoil unknown as dusk approached" (Yuefu Elegance, Hanfanlou Edition, p. 10). Jadeite-adorned hairpins, decorated with bird feathers, were still in use.

In the Yuan Dynasty, Zhao Mengfu's poem states, "To brush coral pillows, first adjust jadeite skirts. Smiling by the riverbank, welcoming the gentleman, phoenixes gather in flocks" (Gu Jin Tu Shu Ji Cheng, Vol. 232, Section 2). The jadeite skirt mentioned here, paired with coral pillows, might refer to either a skirt woven with jadeite bird patterns or one decorated with jadeite feather threads.

During the Hongwu reign of the Ming Dynasty, regulations for ceremonial rites specified: "Returning to the palace with music played to the tune of 'Ding An Zhi Qu,' they sang: 'The sacred dragon soars, nations revere in awe. Whips crack thrice in unison, courtiers and officials resound with harmony, fans shelter the imperial visage. The central harmony song, with deep tones, accompanied by jadeite brocade, returns to the imperial palace under the canopy'" (Ming Shi, compiled by Zhang Tingyu and others, Wuyingdian Edition, p. 770). The "jadeite brocade" here refers to brocade adorned with jadeite feathers.

From the Zhou to the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the use of jadeite feathers in clothing, accessories, and decorations by noble families was evident.

3. Feathers Worth Their Weight in Gold

3.1. Production and Tribute

The primary source of jadeite bird feathers was undoubtedly the kingfisher itself. As mentioned earlier, jadeite birds often inhabit areas near winding streams. This raises questions: where were they native, how were they caught, and through what channels did they enter the courts and wealthy households to become a luxury item, worth "its weight in gold"?

The Gu Jin Tu Shu Ji Cheng: Zhi Fang Dian records local regions where jadeite birds (翡翠) were native products, including Xin'an County of Baoding Prefecture, Jinan Prefecture, Lueyang County of Hanzhong Prefecture, Shaanxi Xingdu Si, Huai'an Prefecture, Fengyang Prefecture, Jianchang Prefecture, Hangzhou Prefecture, Quzhou Prefecture, Chuzhou Prefecture, Fuzhou Prefecture, Jianning Prefecture, Yuezhou Prefecture, Hengzhou Prefecture, Chenzhou Prefecture, Guangzhou Prefecture, Huizhou Prefecture, Zhaoqing Prefecture (specifically listing jadeite feathers), Gaozhou Prefecture, Lianzhou Prefecture, Leizhou Prefecture, Pingle Prefecture, and Yao'an Prefecture. These areas were primarily located in Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Hunan, Guangdong, Guangxi, and Yunnan.

According to Yi Zhou Shu: Wang Hui Jie, "The tribes of Manyang and Cangwu offer jadeite feathers, which are used to collect the plumage" (Yi Zhou Shu, annotated by Kong Chao of Jin and supplemented by Lu Wenchao of Qing, Baojingtang Edition, p. 112). Kong Chao explains, "Cangwu is also a southern tribe, and jadeite feathers are blue with a hint of yellow." Cangwu initially referred to a southern tribe and its territory, generally corresponding to the southern Yue regions.

The Wenxian Tongkao notes, "Tang Dynasty: Qinzhou was part of the Lingnan Dao; under the Song Dynasty, it belonged to Guangxi Lu; it paid tribute in galangal and jadeite feathers" (Wenxian Tongkao, by Ma Duanlin of Yuan, Ming Edition, p. 11334). Qinzhou, also part of the southern Yue territory, contributed jadeite feathers as tribute.

The Nanzhong Zhi states, "Jadeite birds are found in the extreme southwest of Ningzhou; jadeite is also found in Nanli County" (Gu Jin Tu Shu Ji Cheng, Vol. 46, Section 4). Both Ningzhou and Nanli correspond to areas in present-day Yunnan.

The Treasury of Famous Mountains mentions, "Annam contributes orangutans, baboons, jadeite, white deer, white pheasants, ant egg paste, amla, and borassus fruit" (The Treasury of Famous Mountains, by He Qiaoyuan of Ming, Ming Chongzhen Edition, p. 3187). Annam, now Vietnam, also contributed jadeite as tribute.

In the feather-related sections compiled in the Taiping Yulan:

1) Zhou Shu: During King Cheng's reign, Cangwu presented jadeite.

2) Han Shu: Governor Wei Tuo offered Emperor Wen a thousand kingfishers.

3) Guang Zhi: Feathers of "fei" are red, and "cui" are blue; both originate from Xianggu County in Jiaozhi.

4) Jiaozhou Zhi: Jadeite birds come from Jiuzhen; their heads are black, undersides red, and bodies a greenish blue, resembling partridges.

(Taiping Yulan, by Li Fang et al. of Song, Ming Wanli Edition, pp. 13197–13198).

In summary, while place names varied across dynasties, jadeite birds were primarily found in southern, southwestern, and southeastern China.

Jadeite feathers were mainly obtained through tribute. The Records of the Three Kingdoms provides an example from 221 CE, when Emperor Wen of Wei sent emissaries to Eastern Wu to request rare items such as "sandalwood, giant shells, pearls, ivory, rhinoceros horns, tortoiseshell, peacocks, jadeite, fighting ducks, and long-crowing chickens." Eastern Wu officials replied that Jingzhou and Yangzhou had annual tribute quotas for such treasures and that Wei's request for these southern products was impolite and unnecessary. The Wei state lacked these treasures and therefore sought them from Wu, which itself relied on local tribute.

Wu Zhi records that Shi Xie, the governor of Jiaozhi (northern Vietnam), would bring a variety of tropical goods, including spices, fine fabrics, pearls, shells, crystal, jadeite, tortoiseshell, ivory, and exotic fruits such as betel nuts and longans, as tribute whenever he visited Sun Quan. During the Tang Dynasty's Tianbao period, records show that the Protectorate of Annam annually provided 200 bundles of jadeite feathers, while Yushan Prefecture of Lingnan Dao supplied 300 bundles (Crafts of Chinese Ancient Blue Kingfisher Feather Inlay, Xu Xiaodong and Tong Yu, Palace Museum Journal, 2018, Issue 1). These small jadeite feathers illustrate the trade and diplomacy of the time.

3.2. Feathers Worth Their Weight in Gold

Two intriguing accounts describe the difficulty of capturing jadeite birds. Zhenla Fengtu Ji states that catching jadeite birds was highly challenging. One needed to wait by jungle streams with fish and conceal oneself with leaves. A cage containing a female bird was placed by the water as bait, and a small net was used to seize the opportunity when the jadeite bird emerged to feed. On good days, three to five birds could be caught, but sometimes none were captured all day.

The second account, from Ming scholar Gu Shanjie's Haicha Yulu, notes that jadeite birds inhabited dense forests, rarely seen by people. It was said that these birds did not move on cloudy days and only came out to forage on sunny days. Capturing them required setting nets near their nests.

Plucking feathers, however, was another matter. Typically, the process involved live plucking, after which jadeite birds often died within hours. Feathers from birds that were already dead or had died unnaturally could not be used to make high-quality ornaments. In some cases, the birds were shot first, as noted in the Tang Dynasty's Yi Wu Zhi: "Southern tribes live in nests and drink through their noses; they shoot jadeite birds to collect feathers" (Taiping Huanyu Ji, by Le Shi of Song, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 2449). This gruesome process explains why scholars lamented, "Jadeite birds die for their beauty," "Pity the jadeite feathers decorating hair buns," and "Jadeite falls for its plumage."

According to Xu Xiaodong and Dong Yu's research, during the Tang and Song Dynasties, jadeite feathers were measured in bundles (合). Two feathers from a jadeite bird's back constituted one bundle. In the Southern Song Dynasty, one bundle of jadeite feathers sold for 3,000 coins, while ten bundles made a strand, mixing six superior-quality bundles with four of lower quality (See citation above).

Despite their luxurious allure, jadeite ornaments were often criticized for their extravagance and cruelty. For example, Salt and Iron Discourses of the Western Han Dynasty condemned the decadence of the era, criticizing the wasteful

pursuit of jadeite and other precious items. It advocated for "restraining profits and curbing waste" (Salt and Iron Discourses, by Huan Kuan of Han, Jingchangsha Ye's Ming Edition, p. 15). The Southern Dynasties' New Prefaces also rebuked behaviors such as "collecting pearls, seeking jade, exploring sands, and catching jadeite birds," branding them as mere indulgences of vanity (New Prefaces, by Lu Jia of Han, Hanfanlou Edition, p. 31).

During the Song Dynasty, Emperor Zhenzong banned the use of jadeite feathers. When Censor Cao Xiugu criticized the court's lavish use of jadeite accessories, he called for an end to such practices, deeming them wasteful and cruel. In 1125, during Emperor Huizong's reign, Guo Tianxin again petitioned to prohibit jadeite decorations. Although multiple bans were enacted, jadeite feathers remained highly popular, as evidenced by records from the 23rd year of the Shaoxing era noting that women still used jadeite in their garments, described as "enchanted attire" (Song History, by Toqto'a et al., Wuyingdian Edition, p. 1835). Four years later, when Jiaozhi sent hundreds of jadeite feathers as tribute, they were burned as part of the law enforcement efforts.

Such repeated bans reflect the enduring popularity of jadeite adornments during the Song Dynasty.

4. The Renowned Name "Jadeite"

During the Kaiyuan era of the Tang Dynasty, Yang Guifei loved jadeite birds. Eunuchs would travel to the Jiangnan region each spring to capture kingfishers, mandarin ducks, and other rare birds to raise in the palace gardens. The jadeite bird, small enough to fit in the palm of one's hand, captivated hearts with its dazzling, colorful feathers. Over time, objects and natural landscapes with a similar luster were likened to "jadeite." This practice of applying prominent features of the natural world to daily life exemplifies the interaction and dialogue between humanity, nature, and society. This dynamic process drives technological innovation and aesthetic evolution.

4.1. Using "Jadeite" to Symbolize Ornamental Beauty

4.1.1. Jadeite Hairpins, Ornaments, and Gold-Jadeite Combinations

Excerpts from Tang and Song poems describe women's hair accessories with phrases such as "jadeite-inlaid peacock ornaments," "breeze swaying jadeite hairpins," "jadeite combs adorning cloud-like buns," "carelessly adjusting golden jadeite hairpins," "makeup boxes still holding golden jadeite hairpins," "neglecting pearl jadeite on high platforms," and "heavy jadeite decorations on her head." These jadeite ornaments were primarily hairpins and hairpieces used to secure women's hair. As previously noted, the earliest documented use of jadeite feathers was in women's jewelry.

The earliest record of jadeite craftsmanship appears in the anecdote Buying the Case, Returning the Pearl, where the wooden box was "adorned with jadeite feathers." The adhesive used to attach the feathers to the wood could be natural lacquer derived from tree sap. During the Tang and Song Dynasties, adhesives likely similar to those used in women's cosmetic "flower appliqué" were employed. Historical texts mention: "Ha glue comes from the north and is suitable for attaching feathers to arrows and for women's flower appliques. It melts when blown upon, hence the name 'ha glue'" (Sea Records, Volume 14, cited in Sheshan Poetry

Talk by Chen Jiru of Ming, p. 34). This adhesive's strong bonding properties made it ideal for feather ornamentation.

"Gold-jadeite" referred to ornaments combining gilding or gold frames with jadeite. "Pearl-jadeite" denoted decorations incorporating pearls alongside jadeite feathers. According to researcher Yang Zhishui, the technique known as "paved jadeite" during the Song-Yuan period likely evolved into the "dotted jadeite" technique that flourished during the Ming-Qing period (A Record of Qing Dynasty Jewelry and Clothing in the National Museum of China, National Museum of China Journal, 2018, Issue 10)(See Figure 1-2).



Figure 1. Qing Dynasty Court Collection of Pearl and Jadeite Jewelry



Figure 2. Warring States Period Feather-Appliqué Silk Fabric

4.1.2. Jadeite Quilts, Jadeite Blankets, and Jadeite Skirts

These terms frequently appear in poems on the theme of women's longing and melancholy, such as Bai Juyi's *The Song of Everlasting Regret*: "The cold jadeite quilt, with whom can it be shared?" or Dai Shulun's *Song of Longing*: "Resentment fills the jadeite quilt by the bedside." Other examples include Yan Deyin's *The Marriage Procession of Prince Xue*: "Jadeite blankets heavy with aloeswood incense," Wen Tingyun's *Tune of the Southern Song*: "No need to stitch the jadeite skirt," and Chen Xiang's *Night Sentiments*: "The piercing cold rises from the jadeite quilt."

In these poems, jadeite often accompanies textiles such as blankets, skirts, or robes. The term "jadeite" could refer to garments or bedding embroidered with kingfisher bird

patterns, woven with bird-feather threads, or crafted using the feather-appliqué silk technique. "Jadeite" symbolized both literal bird feathers and the opulence they implied.

Bird-Feather Thread:

Bird-feather thread is produced by wrapping silk threads with bird feathers, creating a material with natural sheen and resilience. The use of bird-feather thread is illustrated in a Warring States tale from Quezi: "Rope of jadeite feathers dangled for fishing." Here, "rope" refers to a coarse fishing line made of jadeite bird feathers, highlighting the material's rarity and luxurious nature. During the Southern Qi period, Crown Prince Wen Hui's "jade-feather cloak" and Princess Anle's "hundred-bird feather skirt" were likely woven with bird-feather thread.

Feather-Appliqué Silk:

Silk refers to plain-woven textiles, while feather-appliqué silk involves polishing the fabric and coating it with a paste before applying colored feathers to create decorative patterns. The Hunan Provincial Museum houses a piece of "feather-appliqué silk" excavated from the Mawangdui Tomb, dating to the Warring States period. According to research reports, the feathers were indeed kingfisher feathers (Study on Decorative Silk in the Mawangdui No. 1 Tomb, Zhou Zhiyuan, National Museum of China Journal, June 30, 2000). This finding substantiates the poetic descriptions of jadeite skirts, robes, and quilts.

Weaving Jadeite Patterns:

In the Song Dynasty, Zhang Jiucheng's poem describes exquisite craftsmanship: "Heavenly craft creates a new pattern; in jadeite looms, emerald threads fly" (Collected Works of Hengpu, Volume 49). This references the intricate production of Shu brocade, weaving lively jadeite-like designs.

4.1.3. Jadeite Curtains, Drapes, Canopies, and Screens

Curtains, drapes, canopies, and screens were essential interior furnishings, combining utility with aesthetic appeal. Numerous literary works mention items bearing the name "jadeite," such as "Shadows flitting through the jadeite curtain," "The autumn moon hangs over the jadeite curtain," "The phoenix tower lightly veiled by jadeite drapes," "Cool breezes lift the jadeite drapes," "Jadeite canopies bloom with spring," and "Jadeite screens with scattered hairpins."

These furnishings were often made from soft silk textiles, adorned with jadeite-colored feather appliqué. For example, "The jadeite curtain opens with a hook from above" suggests the fabric's lightness, while "Candlelight flickers behind the jadeite screen" implies translucent silk used for the screen panels.

A notable example is the Bird-Feather Standing Screen housed in Japan's Shosoin North Repository. Dating to the mid-8th century, it was used by Emperor Shomu and his consort. While its exact origin remains uncertain, it likely reflects Nara-period imitation of Tang Dynasty trends. Reconstruction diagrams reveal a painted silk front and a greenish-blue silk back, with bird feathers attached to the surface. This technique aligns with the description of "jadeite screens," which may not have exclusively used kingfisher feathers but often featured them due to their brilliance. The name "jadeite" naturally became synonymous with such decorations(See Figure 3).

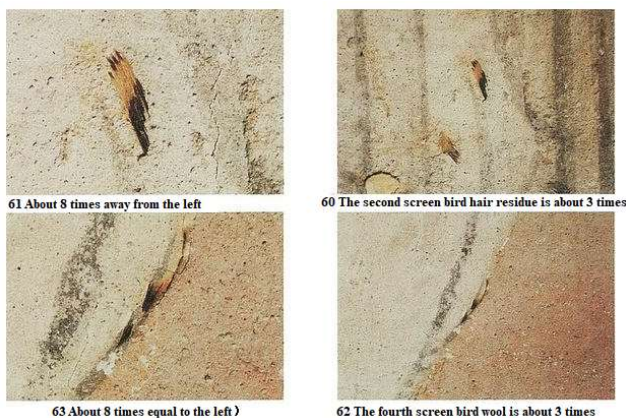


Figure 3. Jadeite Screen

4.1.4. Jadeite Towers, Jadeite Houses, and Jadeite Rooms

Historical records also mention palace structures or architectural components carved in the shape of jadeite, reflecting the admiration for this precious bird. For instance, Han Wo's poem *Yuan Zhong Shi* describes: "Golden steps cast lions standing, jade columns carved with jadeite birds chirping" (*Tang Poetry Anecdotes*, by Ji Yougong of Song, Hanfenlou Edition, p. 1046). Similarly, *Reminiscences of the Forbidden City* notes that in the Yuan Dynasty's Forbidden City, "Each pillar on the balustrade was adorned with jadeite birds" (*Imperial Compilation of the Old Chronicles of the Capital*, by Yu Minzhong and Dou Guangnai of Qing, Qing Dynasty Manuscript, p. 815). These examples highlight the fascination with the jadeite bird.

The term "jadeite tower" or "jadeite house" also appears as a metaphor for luxurious women's chambers. For example: "First, pass through the jadeite treasure room, then enter the golden hall of mandarin ducks" (*Compilation of Tang Poetry*, by Gao Bing of Ming, Hongzhi Edition, p. 442). It was even used to refer to brothels in Qinhuai: "In the early days of the dynasty, female performers were still listed as official musicians for high-ranking officials... At that time, the twenty-four towers of rouge, powder, jadeite, and mandarin ducks lined the Qinhuai market" (*Gu Jin Tu Shu Ji Cheng*, Vol. 820, Section 20). Additionally, Qingpu County in Songjiang Prefecture was home to a scenic site called the Jadeite Tower.

These various items and places named after jadeite—whether jewelry, clothing, interior decorations, or architectural names—demonstrate the widespread popularity of jadeite as an adornment. The imagery associated with jadeite often intersects with women's daily lives, subtly reflecting themes of longing, solitude, and grace, such as women embroidering, picking up fallen hairpins, or exhibiting moments of shy vulnerability.

4.2. Using the Name "Jadeite" to Describe Natural Landscapes

Due to its vivid blue-green color and captivating luster, "jadeite" became a metaphor for verdant mountains, clear waters, and green plants in literary works.

Examples include:

Tang Dynasty: "Bamboo like jadeite invades the curtain's shadow, moss like glazed tiles spreads patterns on the ground" (*Bailian Collection*, by Qi Ji, Hanfenlou Edition, p. 131).

Tang Dynasty: "Layers of mandarin-duck flowers, jadeite leaves spreading in four rows" (*Collected Works of Meng Dongye*, by Meng Jiao, Ming Edition, p. 80).

Song Dynasty: "Mountains soar in a thousand layers of green jadeite, streams flow like ten thousand acres of emerald

glass" (*Ten Books on Cultivation*, by Bai Yuchan, Hanfenlou Edition, p. 41).

Song Dynasty: "Streams under the dwelling flow like the color of grapes, mountains pile up like mounds of jadeite on earth" (*Supplement to the Historical Records of Song Poetry*, by Lu Xinyuan of Qing, p. 1130).

Song Dynasty: "Mountain mists reveal jadeite, lake reflections steeped in glass" (*Stone Warehouse Anthology of Poetry Through the Ages*, by Cao Xuequan of Ming, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 3525).

Yuan Dynasty: "Leaves dense and round like jadeite, roots ancient and coiled like dragons" (*Huangyang Collection*, by Hua Youwu, Ming Edition, p. 75).

Ming Dynasty: "Ancient locust and tall cypress, jadeite bamboo among them, clear morning sun and mist rise over the jadeite mountain" (*Collected Works of Yuan Zhonglang*, by Yuan Hongdao of Ming, Ming Edition, p. 708).

These descriptions vividly portray the lush greenery of mountains, the play of sunlight, and the richness of verdant landscapes, capturing the beauty and vitality of nature.

4.3. Using "Jadeite" to Describe Similar-Colored Treasures

In addition to the decorative items mentioned earlier that used jadeite bird feathers, Tang and Song literature frequently mentions objects such as "jadeite bottles," "jadeite trays," "jadeite goblets," and "jadeite cups." Clearly, these are not feather-decorated crafts. Some scholars argue that the "jadeite" utensils appearing during the Tang and Song dynasties were made of certain minerals. Dr. Wang Chunyun from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences suggests that "jadeite" in this context likely referred to lapis lazuli. However, from historical records, the "jadeite" presented as tribute by the Kingdom of Khotan during the Northern Song Dynasty was undoubtedly a gemstone, likely similar to today's Hetian green nephrite, rather than modern Burmese jadeite or lapis lazuli. It wasn't until the late Ming Dynasty that "cui sheng shi" (翠生石), originating from Yunnan, began evolving into the jadeite (翡翠) we recognize today from Myanmar.

4.3.1. Tang Dynasty

In the Tang dynasty, jadeite was often used as a descriptive term for color rather than material. For instance, in Lu Zhaolin's *Ancient Thoughts of Chang'an*, the phrase "jadeite Tusu wine in parrot cups" uses "jadeite" to describe the greenish hue of the wine, rather than bird feathers or gemstones.

Other examples include Emperor Zhaozong of Tang gifting Li Cunxu a "jadeite tray" (*Gu Jin Tu Shu Ji Cheng*, Vol. 77, Section 71, p. 32), Qin Wang Li Maozhen presenting Li Cunxu with a "jadeite goblet" (*Gu Jin Tu Shu Ji Cheng*, Vol. 186, Section 24, p. 24), and Liu Chongjin discovering a "jadeite bottle" in Yongning Palace in the third year of Xiande (*Gu Jin Tu Shu Ji Cheng*, Vol. 197, Section 21, p. 21). These mentions of jadeite lack specific descriptions of the material, but based on the frequent poetic use of "jadeite" as a descriptor for textiles and ornaments, it is plausible that here "jadeite" refers to a color—a beautiful embellishment. The actual materials of these objects were likely glass or jade.

Glass as a Possibility:

The term "glass" prior to the Song-Yuan period had a broad scope, encompassing traditional Chinese glazed ceramics, imported Roman glass, and various unidentified gemstones.

The shapes and luster of glass artifacts unearthed at the Famen Temple align with descriptions in Tang literature. Thus, it is plausible that the jadeite trays and bottles were elegantly named glassware.

Jade as a Possibility:

China has a long history of jade craftsmanship, with intricate and exquisite jade artifacts dating back centuries. It is also possible that the jadeite referenced here was a description of beautiful jade with a greenish hue.

4.3.2. Song Dynasty: Jadeite as the National Stone of Khotan

The Song History records that:

"Since the reign of Emperor Shenzong, distant tributes arrived once every one or two years, sometimes twice a year. Tributes included pearls, coral, jadeite, ivory, frankincense, sandalwood, amber, floral fabrics, sal ammoniac, dragon salt, Western brocades, autumn-bitten horses, musk glands, gold-star stones, mercury, and spikenard. No accompanying documents were presented; rewards included patterned silk robes, gold belts, vessels, and coins, while ministers received brocade-laden balls" (Wenxian Tongkao, Vol. 11782).

In this passage, "jadeite" is clearly distinct from the "jadeite bird" originating from southern China. Listed alongside "gold-star stones," it refers to a material. According to Song medical texts like Kou Zongshi's Expanded Materia Medica and Tang Shenwei's Collected Materia Medica, "gold-star stones" were cold, non-toxic medicinal stones used to treat illnesses. However, some varieties of gold-star stones-deep blue with gold flakes-were not medicinal but ornamental (Expanded Materia Medica, Vol. 41; Collected Materia Medica, Vol. 386).

The Cloud Forest Stone Catalogue by Du Wan of the Southern Song identifies two types of stones from Khotan:

1) Gold-Star Stone: Deep blue with gold specks, named for its color.

2) Jadeite: Deep green, lustrous, and capable of scraping gold without sound. Due to its rarity and flawlessness, it was highly prized in Khotan (Cloud Forest Stone Catalogue, Qing Edition, p. 24).

These descriptions clarify that jadeite and gold-star stones were distinct, both originating from Khotan. The jadeite of Khotan, deep green and radiant, aligns more with modern Hetian green nephrite rather than lapis lazuli.

The "Gold-Scraping Jadeite" Experiment:

Ouyang Xiu once wrote about a family possession—a jade jar—believed to be green jade. However, an elder court official identified it as "jadeite," a rare treasure stored in the imperial treasury. Curious, Ouyang conducted an experiment by rubbing the jar with a gold ring, observing fine gold dust falling from the jar (Collected Works of Ouyang Xiu, Hanfenlou Edition, p. 1984). This "gold-scraping jadeite" puzzled scholars into the Ming Dynasty.

Zhang Maoxiu of the Ming Dynasty clarified the mystery in Moqing Talks: "The 'gold-scraping jadeite' is not bird feathers but a stone from Khotan. Flawless stones of deep green luster were highly valued in Khotan. Modern misconceptions equate it with kingfisher feathers, but this is incorrect" (Moqing Talks, Ming Edition, pp. 295–296).

Based on current evidence, during the Tang and Song Dynasties, "jadeite" used for textiles likely referred to bird feathers, as demonstrated by the repeated bans on feathered ornaments during the Song. The "jadeite" mentioned in utensils of the Tang period likely described color. By the Song Dynasty, however, "jadeite" also referred to deep green

gemstones from Khotan, likely Hetian nephrite, rather than the lapis lazuli some scholars speculate. This indicates a gradual evolution in the term's usage, foreshadowing its eventual association with modern Burmese jadeite in the late Ming period.

4.3.3. The Name "Jadeite" Referring to Cui Sheng Shi of Southern Yunnan in the Late Ming and Early Qing

During the late Ming Dynasty, "jadeite" was still used primarily as a descriptor of color. For instance, Ming scholar Cui Yu, in his poem *The Ancient Mirror of Mang Mountain*, used the phrase "stains forming jadeite-like patterns, round and translucent" (Henan Gazetteer, by Zou Shouyu and Li Lian, Ming Edition, p. 4821), where "jadeite" described the color of rust spots. In the seventh year of Chongzhen, the Gazetteer of Daye County recorded a story about ancient coins from the Song Dynasty with inscriptions of "Chong Ning Tong Bao." The coins were described as having hues such as cinnabar red, jadeite green, and azurite blue, indicating that "jadeite" was still an adjective describing color.

It was not until the late Ming Dynasty that Xu Xiake's Travel Diaries mentioned a substance resembling today's jadeite, referred to as "Cui Sheng Shi." During his travels in present-day Yunnan, he wrote:

"Later, I parted with Lu and observed merchants in Yongchang trading gemstones, amber, and Cui Sheng Shi, but none of the items were exceptional. ... There was a certain Mr. Gu, a friend of Cui, who led me to a jade workshop to craft seals and cups from Cui Sheng Shi. ... This stone, gifted by Mr. Pan, was mostly white with green flecks, and the green color was vibrant, surpassing ordinary stones. Yet, people discarded it for having too little green. Occasionally, it was sent to higher officials, but they did not value it. However, I appreciated the way its green stood out against its white base and chose it. Pan remarked that the stone was useless and later brought me a piece of pure green, claiming it was exquisite. Yet, I found it dull and lackluster. Now, I have instructed artisans to craft two seal trays from the white-based stone, while the pure green piece will be used to make a cup" (Xu Xiake's Travel Diaries).

The account places Yongchang (modern-day border area between Yunnan and Myanmar) as the source of this Cui Sheng Shi, which featured alternating green and white. This corresponds to the jadeite from Myanmar known today.

By the sixteenth year of Qianlong's reign (1751), Records of the Imperial Court noted the tribute of "a rosary of Cui Sheng Shi beads" presented for the Empress Dowager's 60th birthday. At this time, the stone was still officially referred to as "Cui Sheng Shi" (Records of the Imperial Court, Qing Edition, p. 742).

During the Jiaqing period, Chen Cong's Tobacco Manual mentioned:

"Household jade engraved with the character 'Langgan,' jadeite hues shine faintly in the smoke. Recently, the finest bamboo carvings from Jiading feature rims inlaid with Yunnan jadeite" (Tobacco Manual, by Chen Cong, Qing Edition, p. 111).

Here, the material was explicitly referred to as "Yunnan jadeite." The name had evolved, and the stone was no longer called Cui Sheng Shi but rather jadeite stone, marking its transition toward the term used today.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates several key points:

1) Before the Song Dynasty, "jadeite" referred to bird feathers used in decoration.

2) Beginning in the Song Dynasty, textual references to "jadeite" began to denote a type of mineral, specifically the "Khotan stone."

3) For a long period after the Song Dynasty, jadeite as a stone did not gain widespread popularity.

4) In the late Ming period, Cui Sheng Shi from Myanmar emerged, corresponding to the jadeite we know today.

5) The term "jadeite" officially came to refer to Burmese jade during the Qianlong and Jiaqing reigns of the Qing Dynasty.

This journey begins with a bird, whose beauty captivated humanity and inspired cultural creation and daily use. Jadeite's vibrant plumage won the enduring admiration of the Chinese people. Decoration reflects humanity's primal pursuit of beauty: initially, feathers were used to adorn the most conspicuous parts of attire, gradually transitioning to abstract descriptors for other beautiful objects. With the emergence of new materials and concepts, the term's original meaning was

redefined.

It is difficult to determine whether aesthetics drive technology or vice versa, as their relationship is fundamentally interactive. As techniques grow more refined and sophisticated, aesthetics diversify and evolve. While humanity is the central force in society, human culture and society are co-created with other species, showcasing the profound interconnectedness of life.

References

- [1] Zhang Huiyan. *Seventy Masters' Anthology*. Edited during the Daoguang era of the Qing Dynasty, engraved by Hehe Kang's Private Academy, 1821. p. 191.
- [2] Xie Tiao. *Collected Works of Xie Xuancheng*. Southern Qi Dynasty. Handwritten copy from the Ming Dynasty, preserved in Shanghai Hanfenlou Library. p. 57.
- [3] Luo Ye. *Talks of the Drunken Gentleman*. Song Dynasty. Song Dynasty engraved edition. p. 13.