

## 100 Pieces of Gobi Jade (金丝玉)

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**Maurice HT Ling**

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2018

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## Dedication

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To my family and friends.

Thank you for the patience when  
you are forced to see endless photos of my stones,  
having to feign interest or endure the long speeches on stones,  
and enduring the sight of seeing me playing with them all the time.

To other stone lovers.

I do not know who you are but you are there to share this interest.

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## Meaning of Stones

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古人云：“山无石不奇，水无石不清，  
园无石不秀，室无石不雅。”

又云：“赏石清心，赏石怡人，赏石益智，  
赏石陶情，赏石长寿。”

Each piece of stone is nature's work of art, lying there for millions of years bathing in the rays of the sun, moon and stars from above, and supported by the ground, water and wind from below; all waiting for the fated person to nourish it. Thereby, completing its transformation into a treasure. It reminded me of the Orb in Belgariad series by David Eddings where God Aldur picked up an ordinary looking stone at the creek and through centuries of playing and handling it, polished it into a magical object. Isn't this the shared dream of a stone and its owner? But on a human level, does it also tell us that we should look at stones from an affinity point of view rather than economic definitions of value. Nevertheless, the Orb of Aldur was from an ordinary stone from a creek rather than a gemstone to begin with. I have a fascination for stones since young and one of my childhood dreams was to be a geologist but there is no market or career prospects for it in Singapore. Hence, it can only be a hobby, which was buried for a long while until I went Taiwan with my family in March 2016.

每一块石都是大地的创作，在千万年吸取日月星辰之精华，山川风水之辅润，只为等待有缘人的呵护与盘玩。我在念初中时读过一部神幻小说。小说中有尊大神在溪边捡一块看似普通的石头。但在几百年不断的盘玩中负于灵气而成为小说中的无尚法宝。这不是一个玩石者与一块石头共同的梦吗？这是否也告诉我们一块石是该以缘的角度来看待而不是经济考量。毕竟小说中的大神捡的是块普通的河石而不是宝石。我其中的童年志愿是地理学家，但在新加坡没市场或就业机会。因此玩石已成为消遣，一个埋没依旧的消遣，直到在2017年三月我与家人到台湾旅游。

On the second day of the trip, we went to Rainbow Village (彩虹眷村) in Taichung where I saw a stones merchant selling a type of jade, called 年糕玉. In its raw form, it looks rather ugly – far from my impression of what jade supposed to look like. From then on, I asked myself, what makes a stone a jade? I recalled that day, I keep looking at some of the raw 年糕玉 photographs online and a question kept popping into my head

– if I see this stone on pavement, will I recognize that it is jade? I really cannot tell. Researching further, 年糕玉 is a sea-washed stone – a stone that had been washed in the sea for millions of years and as a result, some minerals had been infused while others had been leeched out; giving it a non-uniformed layered effect, which gives the “chewy” feel of steamed pastries – like 年糕 of different ages. Yet, it is this unevenness of colourings and texture and this chewy feeling that is the beauty of this stone – a stone that endures and encourages us to search for new feel, sensations, and even flavour. On a larger scale, this incident resurrected my interest in stones. I had written a poem on 年糕玉.

行程的第二天，我们到台中的彩虹眷村。那有个石商在卖一种玉，年糕玉，台中特产。对我而言，年糕玉原石相当不美。与我认识中“玉为美石”的定义偏差很多。因而自问，何为玉？记得那时，我上网查询了不少年糕玉原石的照片。看着看着，我有个疑问 – 假如今天在路旁看到这块石，我认得出那是块玉吗？我真的认不出。研究着，我知道了年糕玉也叫“台东老海石” – 千百年在海水的冲洗已至矿物的浸入与流失而形成不规则石质。这给人一种糕点的弹牙感，细腻感，咀嚼感；因而称之为年糕玉。这种多层次感负于年糕玉一种说不尽，耐人寻味的美感。这也掀开尘封已久的兴趣。我也为年糕玉写了一首诗。

年糕玉，老海石  
彩虹村，初相识  
去年三月访台湾  
二天早晨转东岸  
村内廊，有石摊  
摆鸟彩，接称宝  
单眼瞧去不识货  
此物称玉有迷惑  
何为玉，常言到  
是美石，中和斐  
海洗污浊有掺杂  
不解老海也为美  
从此遇，挑石味  
地舍利，寻姿魅  
金丝和田玉髓晶  
唯独不懂老海灵

它有润，耐寻味  
年糕质，咀嚼齿  
彩韵多，种类繁  
有米稠，有油乌  
红心脏，麦芽糖  
总多寻秘无头绪  
润味质齿四揭蒂  
各有立地在四方  
通为一处无中央  
四面八方疏不漏  
耐人寻味在圆融

To me, stones reminded me of endurance – it is there for millions of years enduring the natural elements. When I am disappointed, the stone in front of me reminded me of the years it endured. When I get ahead of myself or lose perspectives, the stone reminded me of the years it had been and the insignificance of the matter at hand in the long scheme of things. Yet, the human touch of a stone gives it age and maturity – when layers after layers of oil from the skin, or sebum, coat and oxidize on its surface; it forms a nice gloss of age (包浆). This is a timely reminder that we all need the support of friends and close ones.

对我而言，石表达了“耐”，在千百年中受尽风吹雨打。在我低落时，眼前的石以自身磨炼安抚我。在我迷失观点时，眼前的石提醒了我，以漫长的岁月看待这一切。但一块石必须经过长时的盘玩才能包浆。这也充分提醒了我，亲友的呵护。

## Gobi Jade – A New Type of Jade Stone

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I came a few pieces of these jade stones in one of the shops in Bugis. Over time, I bought a few pieces there but my main bulk were bulk purchased online. These stones originated from Gobi Desert in Xin Jiang; hence, they are also known as Gobi jade or 戈壁玉, other than 金丝玉。They are predominantly yellow; some are white; and even fewer are red; but most are mixtures or varying shades of different colours. The uniqueness is that most of these stones are not perfectly smooth like quartz but with minute sandblasted craters as a result of sand erosion in the desert.

Gobi jade is a relatively new form of jade stones. The story goes that in 2003, a jade merchant from Guangdong, China, was shopping and bought a piece of stone that he could not identify from a stone store for RMB 50. After handling, he found that this stone has jade-like qualities to it and subsequently spent RMB 200 to buy up about 5 kg.

When I first bought online in June 2016, they were sold at about SGD 15 per parcel of 800 grams, including shipping. Each parcel has about 5 to 10 medium sized stones (about 50-100 grams each). By about October 2016, they were sold at about SGD 18-25 per parcel. By mid-2017, many merchants online were selling at SGD 5 to 25 per piece. From the words of several merchants, most of the easily accessible stones in Gobi Desert had been picked. I was lucky to have purchased a fair bit (more than 100 pieces) before October 2016. I had written a poem on 金丝玉,

广东玉商逛石摊，  
买得玉质小石蛋。  
花了五十回家玩，  
零三那日立史栏。

润黄坚硬质地好，  
显漏田黄特籽高。  
十斤买下两百元，  
五彩层次金丝玉。

产地西北新疆漠，  
又名戈壁玉石获。  
戈壁也出五彩泥，  
玉石透光不可替。

玉肉细腻又润手，

沙吹毛孔包浆受。  
红透贵于黄和白，  
天使泪中宝石光。

戈壁方圆一百里，  
冬夏温差八十五。  
冷热风沙百万年，  
只代惜君一片天。

Jade has a unique position in Chinese culture – it represents 9 qualities of the gentleman (君子): benevolence (仁), wisdom (智), righteousness (义), propriety (节), purity (纯), courageous (勇), sincerity (诚), tolerance (容) and reasonable (理).

石之美者就是玉，玉含上品有九德。  
仁者温润光泽。智者清晰纹理。  
义者坚硬不屈。节者清正不伤。  
纯者清明不垢。勇者可折不屈。  
诚者优缺表外。容者美光不犯。  
理者音纯不乱。

九为极数道之顶。自古帝王君子命。  
玺仗斧钺示权贵。国胜君主惜玉之。  
国到顶胜玉也细，从此国运山水流。  
日升高清步春秋。

商有武丁伐玉门，千里行兵占石坑。  
妇好为武丁之后，妇好坟出玉七百。  
一件器皿一年工，四十工匠一身劳，  
只为妇好作遗裳。武丁之后汤商衰。

唐胜官配和田带，一品高官十二块。  
李柷登宣汉白石，可怜不及汉白玉。  
比起高宗李世明，官级三品带和田。  
可想景宗谥为哀。

明代宫廷皆和田，神宗万历无好玉。  
和田运输三千里，城城守吏窃皇玉。

治国何以治到此，守国变成盗国者。  
重八孝陵内哭泣。

清弘历爱玉无限，后人封他为玉痴。  
乾隆自犯乾上爻，又玩田黄又玩玉。  
大禹治水图玉山，五吨青白新疆来。  
劈山开路又建桥，三年运石两年雕。  
大清运衰乾隆起。

射箭玉谍免指伤，后代看指权贵寒。  
久用手把玉包浆，包浆扳指价值高。  
骑射带指谍必伤，无缺扳指包浆厚。  
只因盘玩废骑射，防守武技逐日退。  
亡国之日不久已，败衰预言在扳指。

颗颗玉石章章文，件件玉器篇篇论。  
考玉可见胜与衰。  
虽有德但也有九，乾卦谨慎必须考。  
九五不该盼上爻，飞龙在天上有悔。  
玉中之意在于此。  
虽有德而不可极，玉劝一切行中庸。

In nearly all imperial Chinese dynasties, jade is one of the ultimate luxury items. It is said that jade has 9 qualities which reflects the 9 qualities of a gentleman. The number 9 signifies the peak – peak of power, peak of achievements, and so on – because of that, all emperors, nobilities, and gentlemen loves jade. The rise and decline of dynasties can be seen from jade use. Jade-wear are artifacts with no real added purpose. For example, a jade sword cannot be used for war and a jade axe will shatter if used like an axe. The finest jade-wear originates at the peak of a dynasty; from then on, decline happens.

I listed 5 examples of such heights and decline of dynasties. Firstly, the 22<sup>nd</sup> king of Shang dynasty, 武丁, started a 3-year war in the northwest to secure jade; specifically, nephrite from Xinjiang (和田玉). 755 jade objects were excavated from his queen's tomb; his queen is by the name of 妇好. It is estimated that it will take a year for a craftsman to make a jade-wear. Hence, the lives of at least 40 craftsmen were spent on making jade-wear for her burial. Shang dynasty started to decline after 武丁.

Secondly, in the early part of Tang dynasty, many officials have pieces of nephrite on official belts as a sign of rank. Yet, the coronation tablet of the last Tang dynasty emperor (李柷) is not even jade but marble. Compared to perhaps just a hundred years before that a 3<sup>rd</sup> level official would have nephrite on his belt, no wonder 李柷 is the “*Pitiful Emperor of the Tang*” (唐哀帝).

Thirdly, Ming dynasty emperors used lots of jade-wear. By the time it reaches to 明神宗万历皇, 朱翊鈞 lamented that none of the jade that was shipped to Beijing was any good but he still had to use them. The reason was that it took 3000 kilometres journey to ship nephrite from Xinjiang to Beijing and along the way, guards and officials stole the good pieces from the imperial shipment. Instead of protecting the country, they stole from the country. Given that the first Ming emperor (朱元璋, original name was 朱重八) abhors corruption, he would have been crying in his tomb (孝陵) at the state of affairs.

Fourthly, Emperor Qianlong of Qing dynasty loves jade and a pretty rare type of stone called 田黄. He ordered to have a large piece of nephrite to carve into a sculpture. This piece of nephrite weighs 5 tons. It took 3 years to transport back to Beijing – roads were built, and forests were cleared just to transport this piece of jade. After which, it took 2 years to carve this sculpture, which is currently housed in Beijing Museum. Till today, nobody knows how this sculpture can be carved. Qing dynasty started to decline from Qianlong's reign.

Lastly, nobilities on horseback tend to wear a thick jade ring (玉扳指) to protect their thumb during archery. Hence, this ring has been used to symbolize status. When an animate object (be it stone or wood) is constantly handled, it will have a polished finish with a layer of waxy oxidation, formed from layers after layers of sebum coating and oxidation. This results in a unique polish known as 包浆, which increases the value of the artifact. As a protective ring, parts of the ring would be worn out from cuts and burns by the arrows. Hence, a good sebum polish on a perfect jade ring means that the owner had neglected his archery and his duty to carry arms for the country. Therefore, this ring foretold the decline of the dynasty.

Every piece of jade tells a story and often, the story of rise and decline. The number 9 is the peak and in Book of Change (易经), the hexagram of only nines represents heaven (乾卦). Even the emperor can only be at the 5<sup>th</sup> of 6 levels. Maybe this is the meaning of jade – to remind us that there is a seed of decline even in the best object.

## Photo Book of Gobi Jade

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Plate 1 – 145 grams

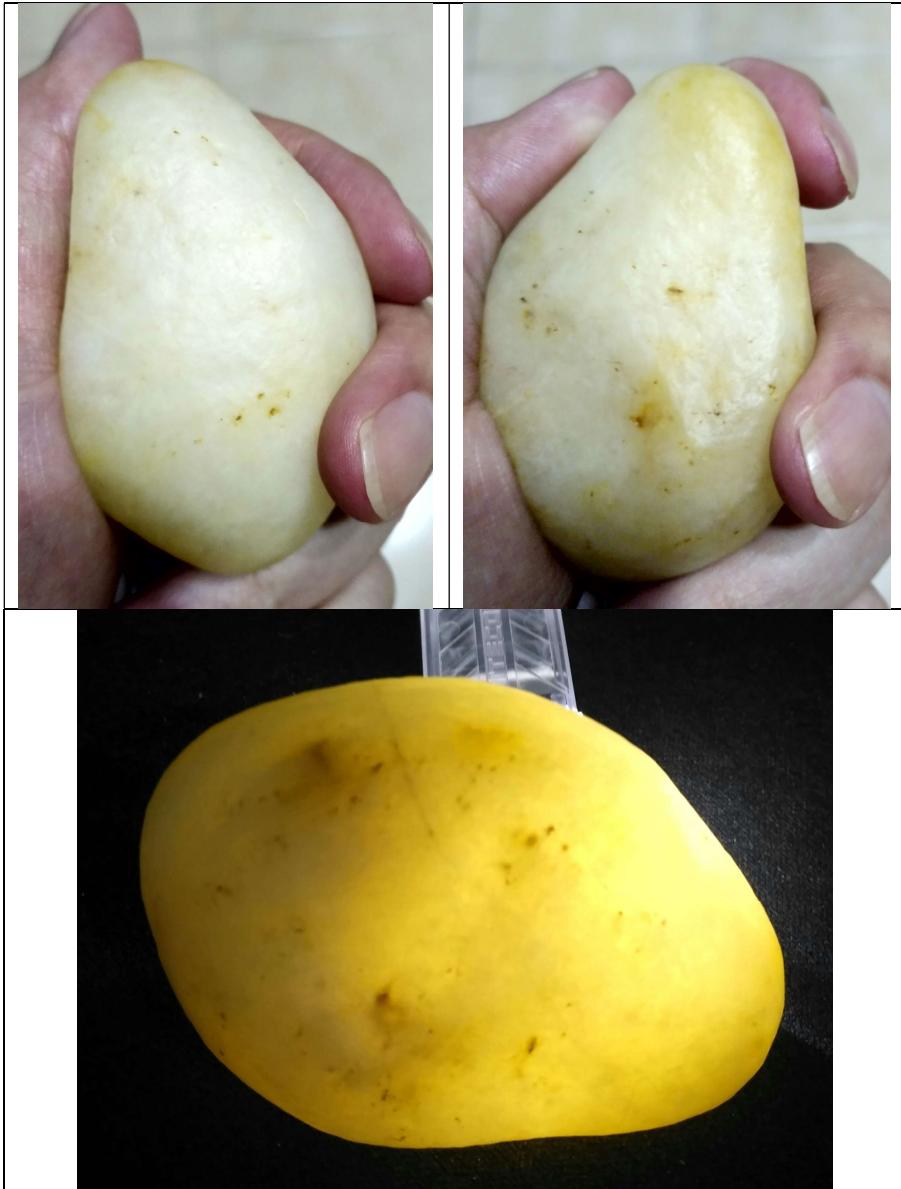


Plate 2 – 650 grams



Plate 3 – 75 grams



Plate 4 – 84 grams



Plate 5 – 74 grams



Plate 6 – 138 grams



Plate 7 – 152 grams



Plate 8 – 133 grams



Plate 9 – 76 grams



Plate 10 – 81 grams



Plate 11 – 121 grams



Plate 12 – 115 grams

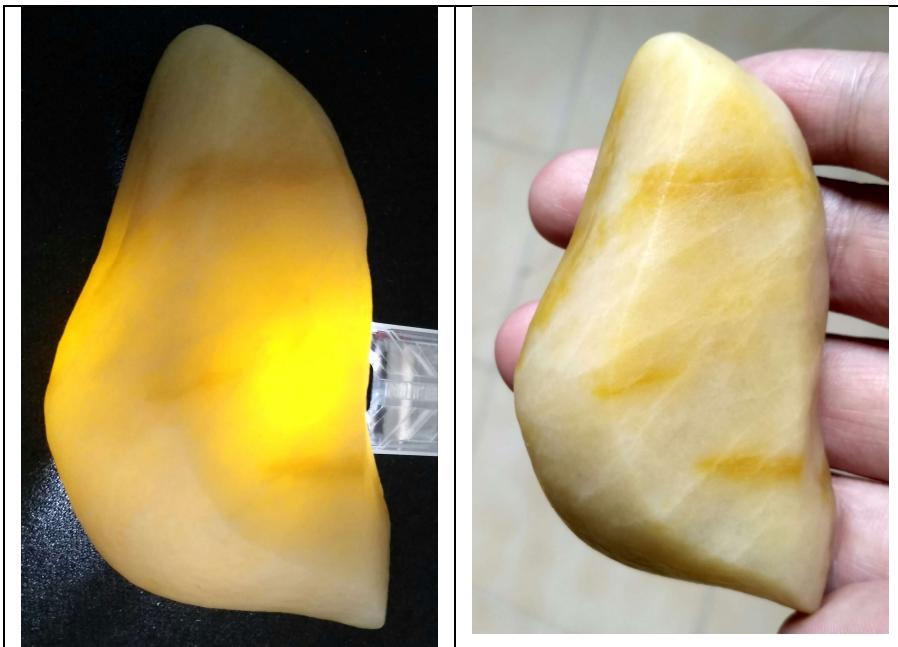


Plate 13 – 36 grams



Plate 14 – 94 grams



Plate 15 – 54 grams



Plate 16 – 171 grams



Plate 17 – 71 grams



Plate 18 – 152 grams



Plate 19 – 56 grams



Plate 20 – 120 grams



Plate 21 – 150 grams



Plate 22 – 69 grams

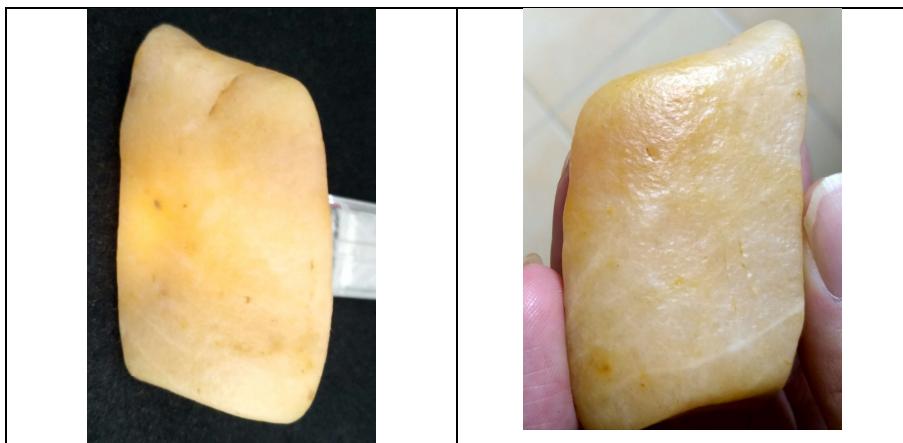


Plate 23 – 63 grams



Plate 24 – 128 grams



Plate 25 – 527 grams



Plate 26 – 258 grams



Plate 27 – 155 grams



Plate 28 – 49 grams

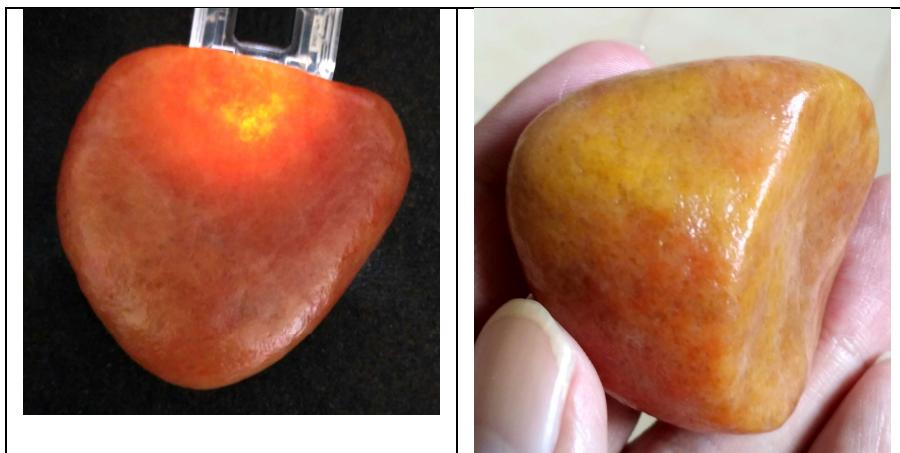


Plate 29 – 36 grams



Plate 30 – 80 grams



Plate 31 – 72 grams



Plate 32 – 108 grams



Plate 33 – 85 grams



Plate 34 – 77 grams



Plate 35 – 68 grams



Plate 36 – 179 grams



Plate 37 – 44 grams



Plate 38 – 47 grams



Plate 39 – 60 grams



Plate 40 – 83 grams



Plate 41 – 70 grams



Plate 42 – 131 grams



Plate 43 – 123 grams



Plate 44 – 136 grams



Plate 45 – 95 grams



Plate 46 – 71 grams



Plate 47 – 47 grams



Plate 48 – 43 grams



Plate 49 – 80 grams



Plate 50 – 103 grams



Plate 51 – 67 grams

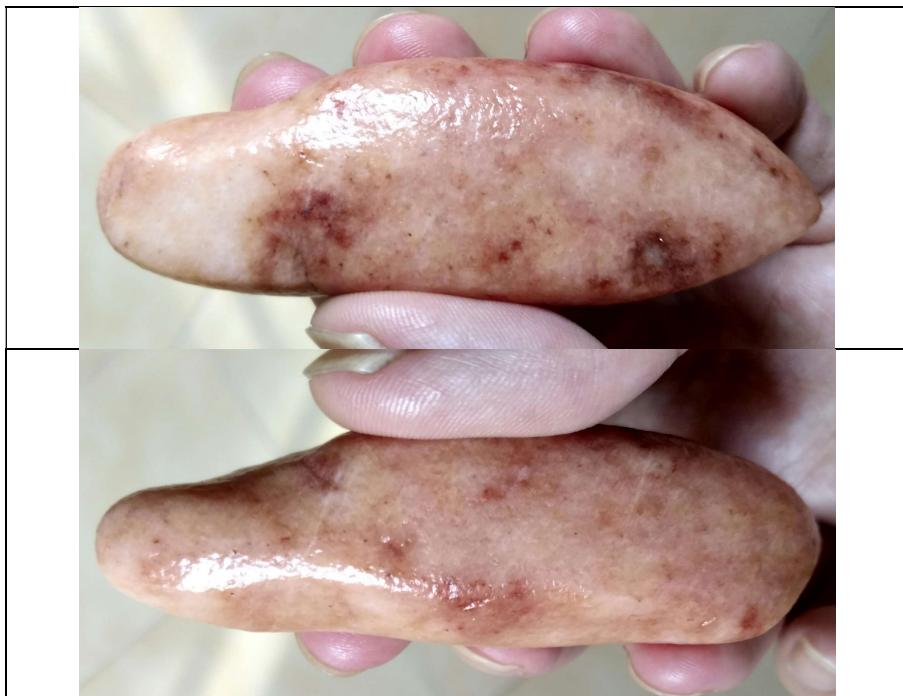


Plate 52 – 82 grams



Plate 53 – 74 grams



Plate 54 – 44 grams



Plate 55 – 46 grams



Plate 56 – 45 grams



Plate 57 – 79 grams



Plate 58 – 51 grams



Plate 59 – 107 grams



Plate 60 – 63 grams



Plate 61 – 50 grams



Plate 62 – 91 grams



Plate 63 – 51 grams



Plate 64 – 52 grams



Plate 65 – 56 grams



Plate 66 – 58 grams



Plate 67 – 64 grams



Plate 68 – 67 grams



Plate 69 – 52 grams



Plate 70 – 91 grams



Plate 71 – 81 grams



Plate 72 – 156 grams



Plate 73 – 68 grams



Plate 74 – 71 grams



Plate 75 – 92 grams



Plate 76 – 113 grams



Plate 77 – 70 grams



Plate 78 – 90 grams



Plate 79 – 140 grams



Plate 80 – 104 grams



Plate 81 – 189 grams



Plate 82 – 58 grams



Plate 83 – 94 grams

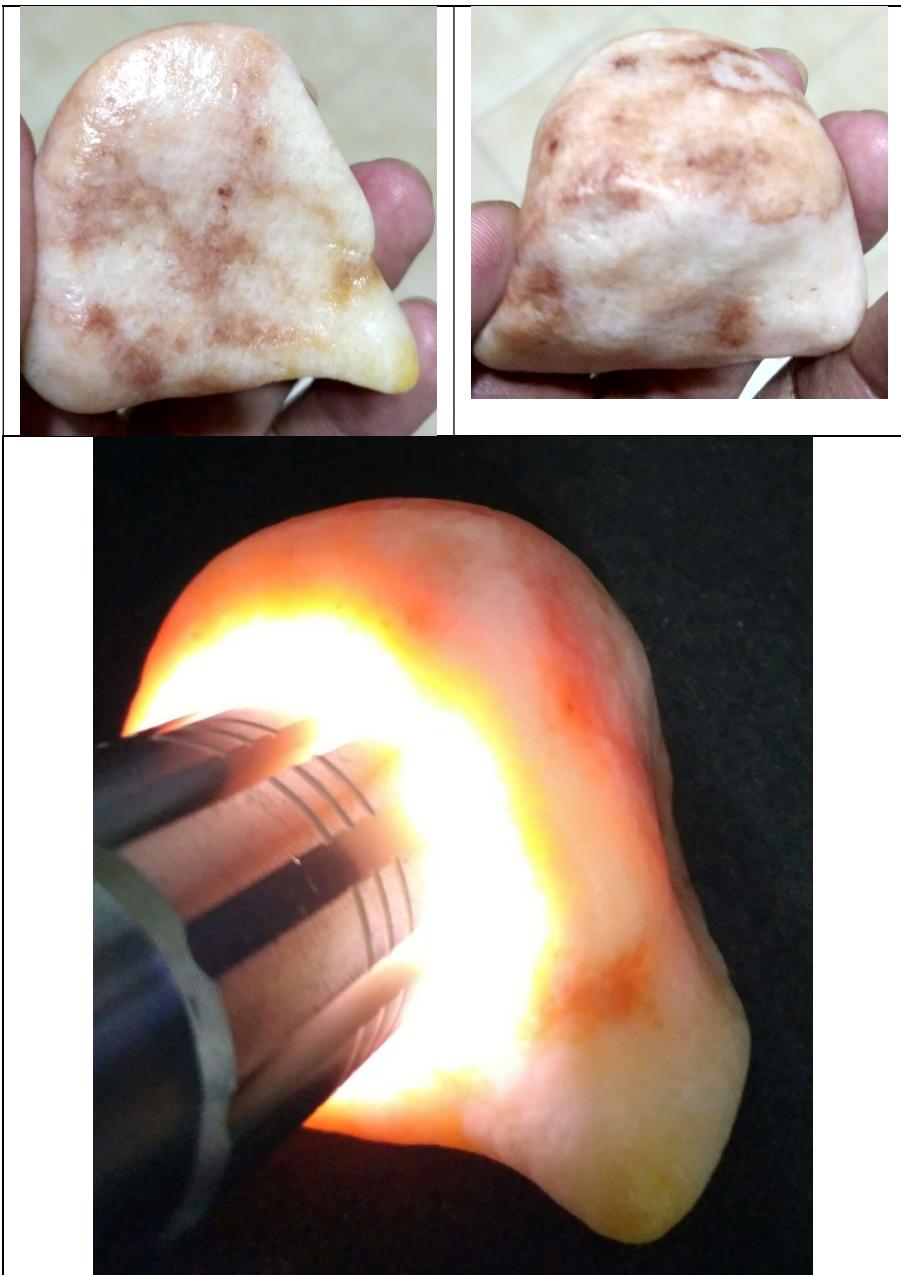


Plate 84 – 109 grams



Plate 85 – 173 grams



Plate 86 – 147 grams



Plate 87 – 308 grams



Plate 88 – 113 grams



Plate 89 – 72 grams



Plate 90 – 72 grams



Plate 91 – 80 grams



Plate 92 – 95 grams



Plate 93 – 36 grams



Plate 94 – 55 grams



Plate 95 – 76 grams



Plate 96 – 49 grams



Plate 97 – 64 grams

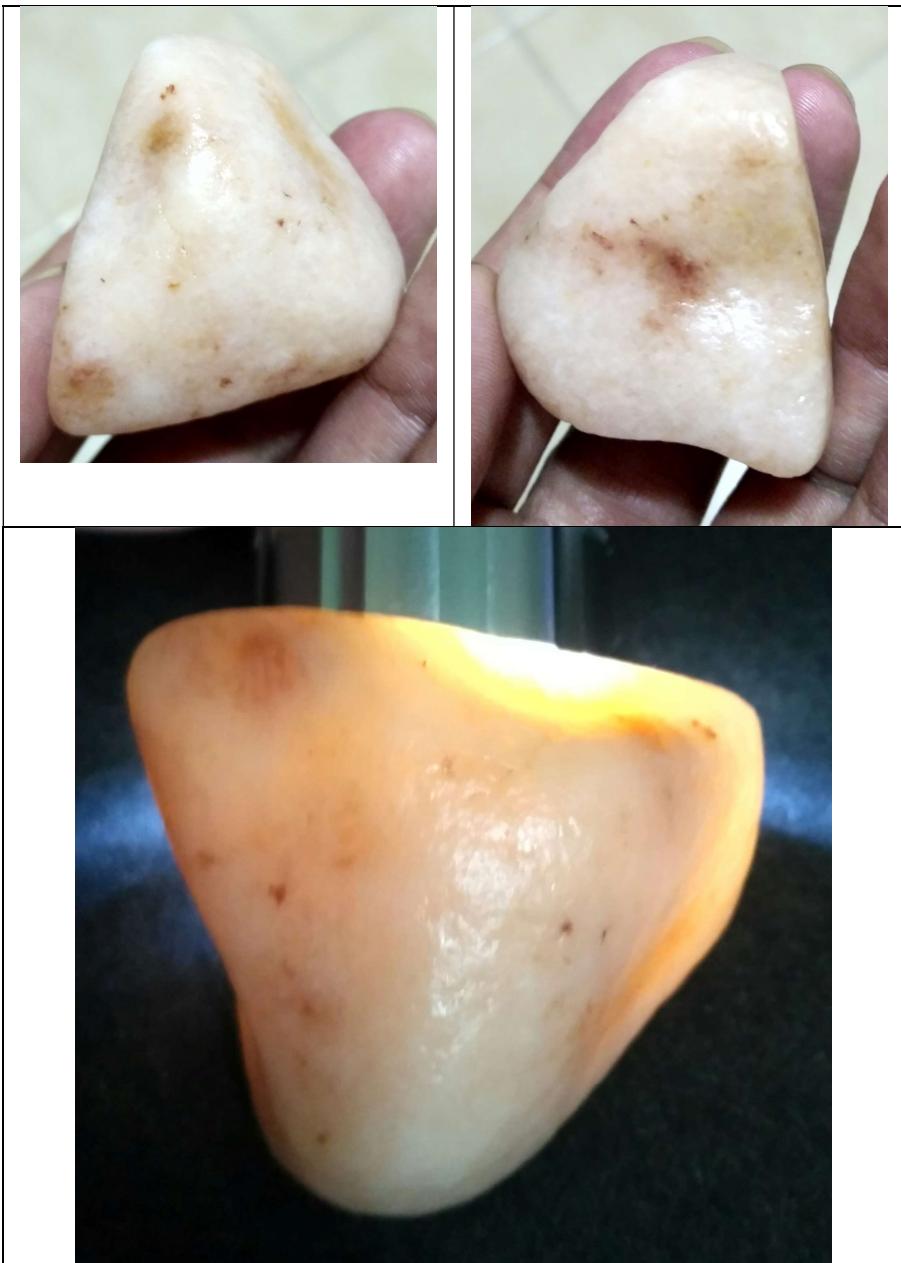


Plate 98 – 66 grams



Plate 99 – 82 grams



Plate 100 – 160 grams

