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ENGRAVING IDENTITIES IN STONE: STONE MORTUARY EQUIPMENT OF THE
NORTHERN DYNASTIES (386-581 CE)

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ABSTRACT

The Northern Dynasties (386-581 CE) marked a turning point in Chinese history. After the collapse of the Han Empire in 220 AD, the native Han Chinese were never again able to establish an enduring unified dynasty again. Consequently, the Northern Dynasties represented the final stage of the longstanding political division between dynasties in the south, ruled by Han aristocrats and generals, and the kingdoms in the north, founded by various peoples of nomadic origins. From the Northern Wei (386-534 CE) to the Northern Zhou (557-581 CE), nomadic Xianbei rulers created and consolidated a ruling coalition composed of multiple cultural and ethnic groups, which paved the way for the reunification of China in 589 CE and the emergence of the so-called golden age of Chinese civilization.

The interaction between diverse cultural and ethnic groups that characterized the Northern Dynasties was especially intense among the uppermost echelon of the society. The key to understanding the dynamism of this interaction is a careful consideration of the colorful ways in which people of the period defined themselves politically, culturally, and personally. To this end, this dissertation addresses the question of how the elites of the Northern Dynasties used stone mortuary equipment to express their identity. Eschewing the hackneyed analytical paradigm of sinicization (or desinicization), this dissertation draws attention to political, communal, and individual identity through a series of case studies. By so doing, it also reveals the intersection of identities during the Northern Dynasties.

This dissertation is comprised of three chapters and chiefly uses visual analysis to account for the material properties, spatial strategies, and narrative images of mortuary stones. The first chapter investigates the mortuary stones of three groups of people: the Tuoba royalty of

the Northern Wei, Sogdian immigrant merchants, and Han scholarly officials. It demonstrates how these people articulated their distinct political, communal, and cultural identity by taking advantage of the ritual significance, versatility, and natural beauty of the material of stone. Concentrating on the Shi Jun sarcophagus, the second chapter reveals the dualistic identity (secular and spiritual) of a Sogdian immigrant merchant. Shi Jun's tomb brings together two distinct spaces — a physical space of ancestor worship constructed according to Confucian ritual protocols and a virtual space of paradisiac afterlife invoked by religious visual devices. The third chapter focuses on the narrative engravings of mortuary stones and demonstrates that artists of the Northern Dynasties tended to customize standardized illustrations in such a way that they could capture the personal identity of the tomb owner. This chapter first discusses how artists transformed filial son illustrations into mortuary symbols or allegorical portraits of the deceased. Secondly, this chapter shows how the artists that created the Shi Jun sarcophagus composed a pictorial biography of the deceased by deploying the illustrations of the Buddha's life.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores how people used stone mortuary equipment to define themselves during the Northern Dynasties (386-581 CE). In this period, China proceeded from a “dark age” of division and chaos toward a unified cosmopolitan empire. While the Xianbei people conquered North China, founding their own dynasties and subjecting the Han Chinese under their rule, the Sogdian merchants, who traveled extensively along the Silk Road, brought about contacts and collisions of cultures across the vast Eurasian continent. The indigenous Chinese elites had to reconcile their belief in Confucianism and Daoism with Buddhism and other foreign religions. Facing such a diverse and multicultural history, scholars have been fascinated with the question of how different peoples and classes constructed their political, cultural, religious and personal identities during the Northern Dynasties. This dissertation addresses this question by focusing on mortuary stones, with emphasis on their material properties, spatial arrangements, and pictorial narratives.

1. Historical Background

The Northern Dynasties represented the final stage of early medieval China, a period spanning from the disintegration of the Han Empire (220 CE) to the establishment of the unified Sui Dynasty (589 CE).¹ Also known as the Age of Great Division, the Northern Dynasties refer to a series of regimes established in North China between 386 and 581 C.E., mostly by a proto-

¹ For the history of the Northern Dynasties, see Mark Edward Lewis, *China between Empires: the Northern and Southern Dynasties* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

Turkic people called Xianbei.² The first regime of the Northern Dynasties was the Northern Wei (386-534 CE). From Pingcheng, their old capital city on the southern edge of the Mongolian steppes, the Northern Wei emperors successfully conquered a number of competing kingdoms, and by the end of the fifth century the entirety of North China was under their control.³ During the reign of Emperor Xiaowen (467 – 499 CE), the seat of the throne moved to Luoyang, the deserted capital city of the preceding Chinese dynasties of Eastern Han (8 – 220 CE) and Western Jin (265 – 316 CE).⁴ Following this strategic relocation of the political center, the Northern Wei rulers promulgated Chinese language and customs among the Xianbei people, attempting to model the dynasty on the glorious Han Empire. Pingcheng and Luoyang thus marked two distinct stages of the Northern Wei.

The Luoyang period under the reign of Emperor Xiaowen represented the apogee of the Northern Wei. But only two decades after his death, the empire collapsed due to political struggles within the court and the ensuing rebellions from disaffected soldiers left behind at the old capital. In 534, two principal regents, Yuwen Tai and Gao Huan, divided the Northern Wei into the Western Wei (535-557 CE) and the Eastern Wei (534-550 CE), which would become, under the reign of their sons, the Northern Zhou (557-581 CE) and the Northern Qi (550- 577 CE) Dynasties. While both Yuwen and Gao families were of Xianbei or Xianbei-ized origin, the ruling classes of the two states comprised an amalgamation of Xianbei and Han officials.⁵ Based

² For the origin of the Xianbei people, see Ma Changshou 马长寿, *Wuhuan yu Xianbei* 乌桓与鲜卑 (Nanning: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2006).

³ For the history of the Pingcheng period, see Li Ping 李凭, *Beiwei pingcheng shidai* 北魏平城时代 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2011).

⁴ See Lu Yaodong 逯耀东, *Cong Pingcheng dao Luoyang: Tuoba Wei wenhua zhuanbian de licheng* 从平城到洛阳: 拓跋魏文化转变的历程 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006).

⁵ See Chen Shuang 陈爽, *Shijia dazu yu Beichao zhengzhi* 世家大族与北朝政治 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1998).

at Chang'an, the Northern Zhou eventually annexed its rival in the east. In 581, a Han general called Yang Jian usurped the throne of the Northern Zhou and founded the Sui Dynasty. In 589, the Sui conquered the state of Chen (557-589 CE) in South China and made itself the first unified empire on Chinese soil since the fall of the short-lived Western Jin Dynasty in 316.⁶ This unification marked the end of early medieval China. The Sui Dynasty lasted only 37 years, but it represented a turning point in Chinese history; the unification of the different cultures of the Northern and Southern Dynasties under a single regime laid the political, economic and cultural foundation for the following Tang Dynasty (618-906 CE), a dynasty widely regarded as the golden age of the Chinese civilization.⁷

2. Origin of Stone Mortuary Equipment

It is against this historical background that stone mortuary equipment emerged and flourished.⁸ Except for Buddhist and Daoist cave temples and stone monuments, few aboveground structures survive to today from the Northern Dynasties.⁹ However, numerous tombs of this period have been uncovered since the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁰ Frequently decorated with exquisite mural paintings and filled with rich grave artefacts, these tombs have become the

⁶ For the history of the Sui Dynasty, see Arthur Wright, *The Sui Dynasty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1978).

⁷ See James C. Y. Watt and Prudence Oliver Harper, eds. *China: Dawn of a Golden Age, 200-750 AD* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004).

⁸ He Xilin 贺西林, "Beichao Huaxiang Shizangju De Faxian Yu Yanjiu 北朝画像石葬具的发现与研究," in Wu Hung ed. *Han Tang Zhijian De Shijue Wenhua Yu Wuzhi Wenhua 汉唐之间的视觉文化与物质文化* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2003), 341-377.

⁹ For the art history of the Northern Dynasties, see Sofukawa Hiroshi 曾布川寛 ed. *Sekai bijutsu daizenshu, toyo, vol.3 Sangoku Nanbokucho 世界美術大全集・東洋編 [三国・南北朝]* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2000).

¹⁰ See Albert Dien, *Six Dynasties Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

primary source of our knowledge of the art and architecture of the Northern Dynasties. As the most expensive and highly valued kind of funerary object, stone mortuary equipment was engraved according to the taste of the upper echelon of the society, and thereby epitomizes the visual and material culture of the time.

Unlike civilizations in other parts of the ancient world, the Chinese civilization did not feature many stone monuments until the times of the First Emperor (259-210 BCE).¹¹ The stone funerary structure became popular during the Han Dynasty, especially toward the end of the Eastern Han.¹² Many scholars have attributed the appearance of these monuments to the influence of nomadic cultures in Central Asia, as the contact between China and its western regions increased during the Han period.¹³ In any case, when the Han Empire collapsed in 220, stone funerary monuments such as *bei* steles, stone statues, stone shrines, and gate towers had already been encoded by Confucian scholars into orthodox ritual protocols, esteemed by later Chinese elites as an integral part of the indigenous cultural tradition.¹⁴

In spite of their prevalence in the second century, the use of stone funerary structures declined rapidly after the fall of the Han Empire in 220 and eventually disappeared due to strict sumptuary laws imposed by the subsequent regimes. It was not until the fifth century that aristocrats in North China revived this tradition, starting to use stones in their tomb constructions again.¹⁵ During the fifth and sixth centuries, funerary stones took three basic forms: sacrificial

¹¹ See Bonnie Cheng, "Exchange and a Renewed Perspective on Stone (in Chinese)," in Wu Hung and Zheng Yan eds., *Gudai muzang meishu yanjiu* 古代墓葬美术研究 1 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2011), 191-218.

¹² See Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

¹³ See Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 121-142.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 189-280.

¹⁵ Cheng, "Exchange and a Renewed Perspective on Stone," 191-218.

structures above ground, including memorial steles and statues; subterranean architecture, like tomb gates and chambers; interred mortuary equipment, such as sarcophagi and stone couches. In contrast to Han stone burials, which comprise a great variety of stone components, those of the Northern Dynasties focus primarily on stone mortuary equipment.¹⁶ Except in royal mausoleums, stone chambers and graveyard monuments seldom emerged.¹⁷

The reappearance of stone mortuary equipment was closely related to the revival of sumptuous burials during the Northern Wei Dynasty. First of all, stones were more expensive than conventional building materials like bricks and wood. Thus, most stone mortuary equipment belonged to noblemen or high-ranking officials of the Northern Dynasties.¹⁸ Functioning primarily as imperial gifts, the Northern Wei mortuary stones signaled above all the owner's political standing.¹⁹ After the Northern Wei, these mortuary stones might also have been used to show the heir's devotion to Confucian teachings about filial piety, which always encouraged the decent burial of parents.²⁰

Secondly, as some scholars have pointed out, stone mortuary equipment reflected an archaistic tendency.²¹ Many Han Dynasty stone funerary shrines and monuments still stood above ground during the Northern Dynasties. Both Xianbei and Han elites visited and celebrated

¹⁶ See Huang Minglan 黄明兰, *Luoyang Beiwei shisu shike xianhua ji* 北魏洛阳世俗石刻线画集 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1987).

¹⁷ See Dien, *Six Dynasties Civilization*, 182-86.

¹⁸ See Zhao Chao 赵超, "Shitan Beiwei muzhi de dengji zhidu 试谈北魏墓志的等级制度," *Zhongyuan wenwu* 1(2002), 56-63.

¹⁹ See Zou Qingquan 邹清泉, *Beiwei xiaozi huaxiang yanjiu* 北魏孝子画像研究 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2007), 30-40.

²⁰ Pu Muzhou 蒲慕州, *Muzang yu shengsi: Zhongguo gudai zongjiao* 墓葬與生死: 中國古代宗教之省思 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 1989), 247.

²¹ Wu Hung, "A Case of Cultural Interaction: House-shaped Sarcophagi of the Northern Dynasties," *Orientalism* 5 (2002):34-41; Lin Sheng-chih 林聖智, "Beiwei Ning Mao shishi de tuxiang yu gongneng 北魏寧懋石室的圖像與功能," in *Meishushi yanjiu jikan* 美術史研究集刊 18 (2005): 1-74.

these remains as sacred relics from the formative stage of Confucian ideology, or in other words, material counterparts of the literary classics handed down from the Han scholars.²² Such reverence for the Han culture explains the emergence of sarcophagi shaped like Han offering shrines. As scholars have noticed, the pictorial program of these house-shaped sarcophagi often drew directly on their Han predecessors.²³

Third, stone mortuary equipment provided newly arrived foreign immigrants with a burial form acceptable to their cultural and religious customs. The best example is Sogdian stone mortuary equipment, which offered the Central Asian immigrants a ritual option that neither violated the Zoroastrian proscription against earth burial nor offended local Chinese elites intolerant of alien burial practices.²⁴ In a word, stone mortuary equipment re-appeared in the Northern Dynasties not only as a symbol of political status, but also as a way for the non-Han Chinese to negotiate their diverse cultural and religious identities.

3. Types of Stone Mortuary Equipment

This dissertation discusses three major types of stone mortuary equipment that emerged during the Northern Dynasties: (1) stone coffins (2) house-shaped sarcophagi (3) mortuary couches.

²² Michael Nylan, "Wandering in the Land of Ruins: the *Shuijing zhu* 水經注 (Water Classic Commentary) revisited," in Alan K.C. Chan ed., *Interpretation and Literature in Early Medieval China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 63-102.

²³ Lin, "Beiwei Ning Mao shishi;" Kathryn M. Linduff and Mandy Jui-man Wu, "The Construction of Identity: Remaining Sogdian in Eastern Asia in the 6th Century," in *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 52 (2006): 219-46.

²⁴ Judith A. Lerner, "Aspects of Assimilation: The Funerary Practices and Furnishings of Central Asians in China," *Sino-Platonic Papers* 168 (Philadelphia: Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania, 2005).

Stone coffins adopt the box-shaped form of wooden caskets whose origin can be traced back to the Neolithic period.²⁵ During the Han Dynasty, stone coffins became widespread in the Jiangsu and Shandong area of North China and the Sichuan region in the Southeast.²⁶ They disappeared between the third and fifth centuries, and reappeared in Luoyang after the Northern Wei relocated its capital in 494.²⁷ During the sixth century, stone coffins appeared almost exclusively in metropolitan centers of the Northern Wei and Northern Zhou, mainly in their capital cities of Luoyang and Chang'an. The connections between these coffins and their Han predecessors seem obvious, especially considering their common use of animal symbols of the four cardinal directions.²⁸ But more evidence is needed to fully illustrate the links between the two groups of objects with distinct dates and provenances. It is important to note that most Northern Wei stone coffins belonged to members of the ruling house; examples include the Yuan Mi coffin in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and the coffin in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art at the Kansas City.²⁹ One interesting exception is the Yushe coffin in the Shanxi Provincial Museum, which was unearthed at a place about 200 miles north of Luoyang.³⁰ Executed in a crude and immature fashion, the coffin suggests the spread of metropolitan art into neighboring rural areas. After the fall of the Northern Wei, stone coffins continued to proliferate in Chang'an, the capital city of the Northern Zhou, but disappeared in the Northern Qi territories. The reason

²⁵ Dien, *Six Dynasties Civilization*, 194-207.

²⁶ Luo Erhu 罗二虎, *Handai huoxiang shiguan* 汉代画像石棺 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2002).

²⁷ Huang, *Luoyang Beiwei shisu*.

²⁸ He, "Beichao Huaxiang Shizangju," 345-347.

²⁹ R. S. Davis, "A Stone Sarcophagus of the Wei Dynasty," *The Bulletin of the Minneapolis Institute of Art* 23 (1948): 110-16; Laurence Sickman, "The Sarcophagus of Filial Piety: Its Date and Iconography," in E. Chaney and N. Ritchie eds. *Oxford, China, and Italy: Writings in Honour of Sir Harold Acton on His Eightieth Birthday* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 71-79.

³⁰ Wang Taiming and Jia Wenliang 王太明 贾文亮, "Shanxi Yushe xian faxian Beiwei huangxiang shiguan 山西榆社县发现北魏画像石棺," *Kaogu* 8 (1993): 767.

for this might be that the Northern Zhou adhered to the artistic heritage of the Northern Wei while the Northern Qi began to embrace new forms and styles of art. Such disparate artistic choices, as some scholars have pointed out, are reflected not only in funerary art but also in the fields of architecture, calligraphy, music and Buddhist sculpture.³¹ In contrast to Northern Wei stone coffins, which were mainly used by the royal family members as a symbol of Tuoba supremacy, the coffins of the Northern Zhou belonged primarily to high-ranking officials. Examples include the Li Dan 李诞 coffin in the Xi'an Municipal Museum and two others excavated in Xianyang.³² The iconography and style of these coffins manifest a strong connection with Northern Wei antecedents.

Like stone coffins, house-shaped sarcophagi imitate traditional timber constructions. Most of them are composed of a set of separate stone parts, probably assembled within the tomb chamber during the funeral. The earliest known examples of this type of mortuary equipment, dating to the second half of the fifth century, come from Pingcheng, the old capital of the Northern Wei. Notable examples include those from the tombs of Song Shaozu 宋绍祖 and Yuchi Dingzhou 尉迟定州, and an anonymous tomb at Zhijiapu.³³ House-shaped sarcophagi

³¹ Yu-Min Lee 李玉珉, *Zhongguo fojiao meishushi* 中國佛教美術史 (Taipei: Dongda tushu, 2001), 73.

³² Cheng Linquan 程林泉, "Xi'an Beizhou Li Dan mu de kaogu faxian yu yanjiu 西安北周李诞墓的考古发现与研究," *Xibu kaogu* 1 (2006): 391-400; Cheng Linquan, Zhang Xiangyu, and Zhang Xiaoli 程林泉 张翔宇 张小丽, "Xi'an Beizhou Li Dan mu chutan 西安北周李诞墓初探," in *Yishushi yanjiu* 8 (2005): 299-308; Shaanxi sheng Kaogu yanjiuyuan 陕西省考古研究院, "Beizhou Guosheng mu fajue jianbao 北周郭生墓发掘简报," *Wenbo* 5 (2009), 3-9; Yang Junkai, Xin Long, and Guo Yongqi 杨军凯 辛龙 郭永淇, "Xi'an Beizhou Zhang shi jiazou mu qingli fajue shouhuo 西安北周张氏家族墓清理发掘收获," *Zhongguo wenwu bao* (Beijing), 2013-08-02 (8).

³³ Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo and Datong shi kaogu yanjiusuo 山西省考古研究所 大同市考古研究所, "Datong shi Beiwei Song Shaozu mu fajue jianbao 大同市北魏宋紹祖墓发掘简报," *Wenwu* 7 (2001):19-39; "Datong nanjiao Beiwei muqun fajue jianbao," *Wenwu* 8 (1992): 1-11;

were continuously produced in Luoyang, the capital city of the Northern Wei after 495, but the only known example is the Ning Mao sarcophagus.³⁴ As far as we know, all the owners of this type of mortuary equipment seem to be officials of moderate ranks. After North China divided into the Eastern and the Western parts in 534, house-shaped sarcophagi appeared almost exclusively in tombs of Sogdian immigrants, exemplified by the Shi Jun 史君 and Yu Hong 虞弘 sarcophagi.³⁵ Curiously, during the Sui Dynasty this type of sarcophagus became a privileged mortuary item reserved for royal members, and continued to be so throughout the following Tang Dynasty.³⁶ The first example in this case appeared in the tomb of a nine-year-old girl from the Sui royal house called Li Jingxun 李静训.³⁷ As to the origin of house-shaped sarcophagi, many scholars have noticed their link with stone offering shrines popular during the Eastern Han Dynasty, many of which still stood during the Northern Dynasties, like those recorded in Li Daoyuan's sixth-century text *Commentaries on the Classic of Waterways*.³⁸ In the case of the Ning Mao sarcophagus, its similarities with Han sacrificial shrines are so striking that some scholars even suggest it was a stone shrine erected above ground instead of a sarcophagus.³⁹ It is also noteworthy that Li Daoyuan and his contemporaries often attributed Han mortuary remains

Wang Yintian and Liu Junxi 王银田 刘俊喜, "Datong Zhijiabao Beiwei mu shiguo bihua 大同智家堡北魏墓石槨壁画," *Wenwu* 7 (2001): 40-51; Liu Junxi 刘俊喜, "Shangxi Datong Yanggao Beiwei Yuchi Dingzhou mu fajue jianbao 山西大同阳高北魏尉迟定州墓发掘简报," *Wenwu* 12 (2011): 4-12.

³⁴ Huang, *Luoyang Beiwei shisu*.

³⁵ Yang Junkai and Shaanxi Sheng kaogu yanjiu suo 杨军凯 陕西省考古研究所, *Beizhou Shi Jun mu* 北周史君墓 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2014); Boris Marshak, "The Sarcophagus of Sabao Yu Hong, a Head of the Foreign Merchants," *Orientalism* 7 (2004): 57-65.

³⁶ Li Jie 李杰, *Leshi yu goumiao: Tangdai shiguo renwu xianke de huihua fenggexue yanjiu* 勒石与勾描: 唐代石槨人物线刻的绘画风格学研究 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2012).

³⁷ Tang Jinyu 唐金裕, "Xi'an xijiao Sui Li Jingxun mu fajue jianbao 西安西郊隋李静训墓发掘简报," *Kaogu* 9 (1959): 471-472; Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan 中国社会科学院 ed., *Tang Chang'an chengjiao Sui Tang mu* 唐长安城郊隋唐墓 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980).

³⁸ Nylan, "Wandering in the Land of Ruins."

³⁹ Lin, "Beiwei Ningmao shishi de tuxiang yu gongneng."

to legendary filial paragons of the Han Dynasty, who had been revered as personifications of the quintessential morality of Confucianism.⁴⁰ Therefore, the transformation of the Han stone shrine into mortuary equipment in the Northern Wei, as Huang Minglan suggests, may embody the impact of the state policy of sinicization.⁴¹

Stone mortuary couches, especially those equipped with screen panels, were unseen before the fifth century. At Pingcheng, stone couches were simple in shape and plain in decoration, usually serving as the platform for wooden coffins.⁴² The most notable example is the Sima Jinlong 司马金龙 couch of the late fifth century.⁴³ During the Luoyang period, screen panels were added to stone couches, providing more space for pictorial decorations. It is during this period that the stories of filial sons became prevalent, engraved on the paneled screens of several notable cases, e.g. those in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas, and the Art Institute of Chicago.⁴⁴ After the division of North China, the stories of the filial son gave way to other figural representations, like gatherings of nobility or immortals. A related phenomenon is the reappearance of the frontal portrait of the deceased, seldom seen during the Luoyang period of Northern Wei.⁴⁵ There are a number of examples from this period, including a set of screen panels preserved separately in the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco,

⁴⁰ Nylan, "Wandering in the Land of Ruins."

⁴¹ Huang, *Luoyang Beiwei shisu*; Wu, "A Case of Cultural Interaction."

⁴² Wei Zheng 韦正, "Beichao gaozu weiping chuanga de xingcheng 北朝高足围屏床榻的形成," *Wenwu* 7(2015): 59-68.

⁴³ Datong Municipal Museum of Shanxi Province and Shanxi Provincial Committee of Cultural Relics Preservation, "Shanxi Datong Shijiazhai Bei Wei Sima Jinlong mu 山西大同石家寨北魏司马金龙墓," *Wenwu* 3 (1972): 20-33, 64.

⁴⁴ Zou, *Beiwei xiaozi huaxiang yanjiu*.

⁴⁵ Zheng Yang 郑岩, *Shizhe de mianju* 逝者的面具 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2013).

and Tenri Museum, Japan;⁴⁶ the couch published by Wang Ziyun (only rubbings exist in Wang's *Chinese Stone Line Carvings*);⁴⁷ the Luoyang couch in the Luoyang Municipal Museum;⁴⁸ the stone couch excavated from Gu'an, Henan;⁴⁹ the Virginia couch in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts;⁵⁰ the Qinyang couch in the Qinyang County Museum, Henan.⁵¹ Like the house-shaped sarcophagus, stone couches from the Northern Zhou seem prevalent primarily among Sogdian immigrants. Two such couches were found at Chang'an (the An Jia 安伽 couch in the Shaanxi Provincial Museum and the Kang Ye 康业 couch in the Xi'an City Museum), and another two at Tianshui, both cities serving as major settlements of Sogdian immigrants.⁵² The Sogdian couches exhibit a strong tendency to synthesize motifs from different cultural and religious traditions.⁵³

⁴⁶ Lin Sheng-chih 林聖智, "Beiwei Luoyang shiqi zangju de fengge, zuofang, fengge yu tuxiang: yi yitao xin fuyuan shiguanchuang weiping weizhu de kaocha 北魏洛陽時期葬具的風格、作坊與圖像：以一套新復原石棺牀圍屏為主的考察," *Taida Journal of Art History* 9 (2015): 49-126.

⁴⁷ Wang Ziyun 王子云, *Zhongguo gudai shike xianke xuanji* 中国古代石刻线刻画选集 (Beijing: Zhongguo gudian yishu chubanshe, 1957).

⁴⁸ Huang, *Luoyang beiwei shisu*.

⁴⁹ Henan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo 河南省文物考古研究所, "Henan Anyang Gu'an mudi kaogu fajue shouhuo 河南安阳固岸墓地考古发掘收获," *Huaxia Kaogu* 3 (2009): 19-23.

⁵⁰ Annette Juliano and Judith Lerner, *Ritual Objects and Early Buddhist Art* (Belgium: Gisele Croes, 2004), 14-23.

⁵¹ Deng Hongli and Cai Quanfa 邓宏里 蔡全法, "Qinyang xian Xixiang faxian Beichao mu ji huaxiang shiguanchuang 沁阳县西向发现北朝墓及画像石棺床," *Zhongyuan wenwu* 1 (1983): 4-13.

⁵² Shaanxisheng Kaogu yanjiusuo 陕西省考古研究所, *Xi'an Beizhou An Jia mu* 西安北周安伽墓 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2003); Xi'an shi wenwu baohu kaogusuo 西安市文物保护考古所, "Xi'an Beizhou Kang Ye mu fajue jianbao 西安北周康业墓发掘简报," *Wenwu* 6 (2008): 14-35; Li Ningming 李宁民, "Tianshui chutu pingfeng shiguanchuang zaitantao 天水出土屏风石棺床再探讨," *Zhongyuan wenwu* 3 (2013): 85-91.

⁵³ Frantz Grenet, "Religious Diversity among Sogdian Merchants in Sixth-century China: Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Manichaeism, and Hinduism," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 2 (2007): 463-478.

Consequently, these couches shed light on our understanding of the Sogdians, a unique group of immigrants active in early medieval China whose lives are scarcely recorded in received texts.⁵⁴

4. Historiography and Methodology

The discovery and study of stone mortuary equipment from the Northern Dynasties began as early as the 1910s, when the looting of tombs and other cultural relics in North China became widespread. One of the historic cities that suffered most was Luoyang, the ancient capital of several Chinese dynasties, including the Northern Wei.⁵⁵ Local robbers broke into numerous tombs of Northern Wei nobility, selling their finds to domestic and foreign antique dealers. Since native Chinese collectors were interested mainly in inscribed tombstones, most stone mortuary equipment found before 1949 went to museums and private collections in the West. Of these, the best-known and most discussed pieces are the Ning Mao sarcophagus, the Yuan Mi coffin, and the sarcophagus in the Nelson-Atkins Museum (known as the “filial son” sarcophagus or the Kansas sarcophagus). Another city that suffered badly from such robberies was Anyang, the capital of the Eastern Wei and Northern Qi. Stone carvings removed from the imperial cave temples near Anyang and artefacts from local tombs were sold overseas, including a stone mortuary couch decorated with Sogdian motifs, its components now preserved in museums in DC, Berlin, Boston and Paris.⁵⁶

The first scholar who studied the stone mortuary equipment of the Northern Dynasties

⁵⁴ Frantz Grenet, “The Self-image of the Sogdians,” in E. de la Vaissière and E. Trombert eds., *Les Sogdiens en Chine* (Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 2005), 305-322.

⁵⁵ Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Brysac, *The China Collectors: America’s Century-Long Hunt for Asian Art Treasures* (New York: St. Martin’s Press), 81-102.

⁵⁶ Gustina Scaglia, “Central Asians on a Northern Ch’i Gate Shrine,” *Artibus Asiae* 1 (1958):9-28.

was the Swedish archaeologist and art historian Osvald Siren. In his groundbreaking magnum opus *Chinese Sculpture from the Fifth to Fourteenth Century* (London, 1925), he published the Sogdian stone couch from Anyang and used it to illustrate the foreign influences on the artistic style of early medieval China.⁵⁷ In 1937, Okumura Ikuro 奥村伊九良, a Japanese scholar of Chinese art, studied the “filial-son” sarcophagus.⁵⁸ He was the first scholar who paid attention to the iconography of the sarcophagus, especially the filial son stories. In 1939, he published another article on the iconography of filial piety illustrations on the Yuan Mi coffin now preserved in the Minneapolis Institutes of Arts.⁵⁹ In China, the most important early publication related to stone mortuary equipment was Guo Yutang’s 郭玉堂 *Dateable Stone Carvings Excavated at Luoyang* (1941). The author tried to track the provenance of the stone carvings catalogued in his book, mostly tombstones unearthed during the robbery frenzy of the early twentieth century.⁶⁰

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, for some 30 years it was impossible for foreign scholars to carry out field research in China. Most scholars abroad had to rely on Western collections to study Chinese art, including stone mortuary equipment of the Northern Dynasties. Japanese scholars, such as Mitsuno Seiichi 水野清一 and Nagahiro Toshio

⁵⁷ Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Sculpture from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century: Over 900 Specimens in Stone, Bronze, Lacquer and Wood, Principally from Northern China* (London: E. Benn, Limited. 1925), 120-22.

⁵⁸ Ikuro Okumura 奥村伊九良, *Kosetsu shubi: Shina bijutsushi no shoso* 古拙愁眉: 支那美術史の諸相 (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobo, 1982).

⁵⁹ Ikuro Okumura 奥村伊九良, “Tokin Koshiden sekkan no kokuga ni tsuite 鍍金孝子伝石棺の刻畫について,” *Koku* 5 (1939), 359-382.

⁶⁰ Guo Yutang 郭玉堂, *Luoyang chutu shike shidi ji* 洛阳出土石刻时地记 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chuban she, 2005).

長広 敏雄, advanced the iconographical studies of mortuary equipment during this time.⁶¹ In the West, Gustina Scaglia for the first time noticed Sogdian elements on a pair of *que* gateposts from the Anyang sarcophagus, identifying the human figures as central Asians or Sogdians.⁶² Apart from the aforementioned articles, there was not much writing on the stone mortuary equipment after 1949. However, the refined line carvings on some sarcophagi were often cited as premier examples of early medieval Chinese painting. In Ludwig Bachhofer's *A Short History of Chinese Art* and Laurence Sickman's *The Art and Architecture of China*, the illustrations of filial sons on the Kansas sarcophagus are speculated as having been adapted from scroll or mural paintings of the time.⁶³ To Michael Sullivan, the natural background of the Kansas coffin sheds a rare light on the origin of Chinese landscape painting.⁶⁴

After 1949, the government of the PRC began to exert tighter control over its cultural heritage and sponsored scientific excavations of ancient tombs throughout China. Before the opening-up of China to the West in 1979, a couple of sarcophagi had been excavated in Xi'an, the capital of the Northern Zhou and Sui. One of the most important discoveries is the Li Jingxun 李静训 sarcophagus.⁶⁵ Because of the severe looting that occurred before 1949, the Luoyang area yielded few remarkable finds between 1949 and 1979, but local museums did manage to collect several stone coffins with excellent line carvings that had survived the earlier smuggling activities. Some of these coffins are decorated with immortals and sacred beasts related to the

⁶¹ Nagahiro Toshio 長広 敏雄, *Rikuchō jidai bijutsu no kenkyū* 六朝時代美術の研究 (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppansha, 1969), 165-227.

⁶² Scaglia, "Central Asians on a Northern Ch'i Gate Shrine."

⁶³ Lawrence Sickman and Alexander C. Soper, *The Art and Architecture of China* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1956), 134; Ludwig Bachhofer, *A Short History of Chinese Art* (New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1946), 96.

⁶⁴ Michael Sullivan, *An Introduction to Chinese Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 103.

⁶⁵ Tang, "Xi'an xijiao Sui Li Jingxun mu."

four cardinal directions, and such iconography does not appear in overseas collections of stone mortuary equipment.⁶⁶ However, it was not until the 1980s that Chinese scholars began to study these discoveries. Local scholars in Luoyang, including Huang Minglan and Gong Dazhong, reexamined the sarcophagi found before 1949 in light of the new finds from Luoyang; they tried to piece together a more comprehensive picture of stone mortuary equipment produced during the Northern Wei Dynasty.⁶⁷ American scholar Elinor Pearlstein attempted to reconstruct some stone couches in Western collections based on these new discoveries.⁶⁸

After 1979, stone mortuary equipment from the Northern Dynasties came to light in two ways: ongoing archaeological excavations and revived tomb robbery. Both types of activities have been going on with great intensity because of the radical urbanization of Chinese cities over the past fifteen years. Discoveries made during the 2000s were particularly groundbreaking. First, archaeologists discovered a group of stone mortuary equipment commissioned by Sogdian immigrant merchants, the most notable being those excavated in Xi'an, Tianshui, and Taiyuan.⁶⁹ Beyond discoveries made through scientific excavation, there were a number of robbed stone couches: one from Tianshui, smuggled to Europe and once on display in the Guimet Museum; the Miho couch in Japan and a gorgeous marble couch base preserved in a private museum at Xi'an, both of which are reputed to be from the Anyang region.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Huang, *Luoyang Beiwei shisu shike*.

⁶⁷ Gong Dazhong 宫大中, "Mangluo Beiwei xiaozi huaxiang shiguan kaoshi 邙洛北魏孝子画像石棺考释," *Zhongyuan wenwu* 2 (1984): 48-53; Huang, *Luoyang Beiwei shisu shike*.

⁶⁸ Elinor Pearlstein, "Pictorial Stones from Chinese Tombs," *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 9 (1984): 302-31.

⁶⁹ Patrick Wertmann, *Sogdians in China: Archaeological and Art Historical Analyses of Tombs and Texts from the 3rd to the 10th Century AD* (Darmstadt: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2015).

⁷⁰ Musée Guimet, *Lit de pierre, sommeil barbare: présentation, après restauration et remontage, d'une banquette funéraire ayant appartenu à un aristocrate d'Asie centrale venu s'établir en Chine au VI^e siècle, Musée Guimet, 13 avril-24 mai 2004* (Paris: Musée Guimet, 2004); Ge Chengyong 葛承雍, "Xianjiao shenghuo yishu de xinfaxian 祆教圣火艺术的新发现—隋代安

The scientific excavations of four Sogdian tombs at Xi'an and Taiyuan between 1999 and 2004 brought about some momentous changes in the study of early medieval Chinese history and culture. Thanks to the rich and intricate images on the sarcophagi from these tombs, scholars outside the field of art history began to take mortuary images as “visual texts” complementary to historical records about Chinese Sogdians. Since these sarcophagi often feature Zoroastrian motifs such as fire altars and priest figures with human heads and bird bodies, many scholars also believe that the stone carvings reflect the Zoroastrian belief system that the tomb occupants subscribed to. The book *Zhongguo Xianjiao yishushi yanjiu* 中国祆教艺术史研究 (*The History of Zoroastrian Art in China*) by Jiang Boqin is the best example of this approach.⁷¹ Relying on Zoroastrian texts and visual evidence from Central Asia, the author tries to use images on the Sogdian sarcophagi to establish an iconography of Chinese Zoroastrianism, which focuses primarily on Zoroastrian deities and related religious narratives. However, not all scholars agree with this approach. The French Sinologist Frantz Grenet, for example, proposes a synthesizing view of the religious content of the sarcophagi. In his article about the Shi Jun sarcophagus, the author points to elements from all the major religions active on the Silk Road around the sixth century, including Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and most curiously, Manichaeism. Grenet argues that Sogdian immigrants' spiritual life was not dominated by a single religion; as the middlemen between different cultures and customs, Sogdian immigrants opted for an eclectic belief system.⁷²

备墓文物初探,”*Meishu yanjiu* 3 (2009):14-18; Annette Juliano and Judith Lerner, “Cultural Crossroads: Central Asian and Chinese Entertainers on the Miho Funerary Couch,” *Orientalism* 9 (1998): 72-78.

⁷¹ Jiang Boqin 姜伯勤, *Zhongguo Xianjiao yishushi yanjiu* 中国祆教艺术史研究 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2004).

⁷² Grenet, “Religious Diversity among Sogdian Merchants.”

In addition to discussing the religious aspects of Sogdian sarcophagi and mortuary couches, many historians have taken keen interest in the biographic elements of such equipment. While scholars like Jiang and Grenet look for illustrations of religious doctrines, other scholars tend to read the secular scenes that appear on the sarcophagi as illustrations of the lives of the tomb occupants. Rong Xinjiang, for example, uses traveling scenes to discuss the constituency of Sogdian caravans along the Silk Road.⁷³ In a similar vein, Grenet looks at the Sogdian figures on the sarcophagi as the self-portraits of this unique immigrant community in China.⁷⁴ The farthest step taken in this direction is to interpret a sequence of scenes, such as those on the Shi Jun sarcophagus, as the pictorial biography of the tomb occupants.⁷⁵ However, these studies are based on a precarious premise that pictorial representations are faithful depictions of historical realities. As some art historians like Zheng Yan have pointed out, many motifs and scenes from Sogdian tombs look very generic and are shared widely among non-Sogdian arts in early medieval China.⁷⁶

Unlike scholars of cultural and religious history, art historians do not take images as “visual texts.” Rather, they contextualize images in visual traditions. Noticing the unique representation of architectural space on the Yu Hong sarcophagus, Annette Juliano makes a convincing argument for the tie between some Sogdian images and the spatial strategy in

⁷³ Rong, “Sabao or Sabo: Sogdian Caravan Leaders in the Wall-Paintings in Buddhist Caves,” in E. de la Vaissière and E. Trombert ed., *Les Sogdiens en Chine* (Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 2005), 207-30.

⁷⁴ Grenet, “The Self-image of the Sogdians.”

⁷⁵ Albert Dien, “The Tomb of the Sogdian Master Shi: Insights into the Life of a *sabao*,” *The Silk Road* 7 (2009): 42-50; Frantz Grenet and Pénélope Riboud, “A Reflection of the Hephtalite Empire: The Biographical Narrative in the Reliefs of the Tomb of the Sabao Wirkak (494–579),” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 17 (2003): 133-143.

⁷⁶ Zheng Yan, “Notes on the Stone Couch Picture from the Tomb of Kang Ye in Northern Zhou,” in Institute of Archaeology CAAS ed., *Chinese Archaeology* 9 (2009): 39-46.

contemporary Buddhist art.⁷⁷ Similarly, Judith Lerner's article suggests that the seemingly alien images on the Yu Hong sarcophagus were adapted from indigenous artistic traditions rather than brought to China from Central Asia, where archaeologists so far have found few artistic parallels.⁷⁸ Lin Sheng-chih provides a more telling case in which he compares the Sogdian sarcophagi with indigenous Chinese mortuary structure and imagery.⁷⁹ As his study shows, the core compositions and major motifs of the Sogdian sarcophagi do not differ fundamentally from their Chinese counterparts. Focusing on the Kang Ye mortuary couch, Zheng Yan demonstrates the indigenous origin of the portraits of the deceased on the Sogdian mortuary equipment, yet without neglecting its specific function and symbolic meaning in Sogdian cultural context.⁸⁰

Discoveries of non-Sogdian stone mortuary equipment also tremendously enrich our understanding of early medieval Chinese art. For the first time in history, archaeologists at Datong uncovered a series of house-shaped sarcophagi owned by residents of the old Northern Wei capital. These sarcophagi are often composed of multiple stone parts. With various sizes and functions, they mimic timber constructions above ground both in appearance and in technique. The Song Shaozu sarcophagus, for example, consists of 109 pieces of stone components.⁸¹ Noting the architectonic nature of these sarcophagi, Lin Sheng-chih considers them as

⁷⁷Annette L. Juliano, "Chinese Pictorial Space at the Cultural Crossroads," in Matteo Compareti, Gianroberto Scarcia, Boris Jlić Maršak, and Paola Raffetta, eds. *Ērān ud Anērān: Studies Presented to Boris Il' ič Maršak on the Occasion of His 70 Birthday* (Venezia: Cafoscarina, 2003).

⁷⁸Judith Lerner, "Aspects of Assimilation: The Funerary Practices and Furnishings of Central Asians in China," *Sino-Platonic Papers 168* (Philadelphia: Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania, 2005).

⁷⁹Lin Sheng-chih 林聖智, "Boku cho jidai ni okeru kizoku no boso no zuzo — Hokusei sai fun haka o rei toshite 北朝時代における貴族の墓葬の圖像——北齊崔芬墓を例として," in Sofukawa Hiroshi ed. *Chugoku bijutsu no zuzo to yoshiki: kenkyu hen* 中国美術の図像と様式: 研究篇 (Tokyo: Chuo koron bijutsu shuppan, 2006), 27-95.

⁸⁰Zheng, "Notes on the Stone Couch Picture."

⁸¹Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo, "Datong shi Beiwei Song Shaozu mu."

byproducts of the grand Buddhist projects undertaken during the Pingcheng period, which brought together the most skilled masons and artisans in North China at the time.⁸² People of non-Han origin owned many of these house-shaped sarcophagi. Their choice of a typical Chinese structure, as Wu Hung suggests, reflects their effort to integrate indigenous cultures and customs into their own.⁸³ Most importantly, the discovery of this group of house-shaped sarcophagi lends insight into the well-known Ning Mao sarcophagus and the Sogdian stone coffins, the origin of which has so far been attributed directly to the influence of Han relics. As a consequence, we must query how the Datong finds complicate our narrative about the importance of Han culture.

A considerable number of the stone couches in Chinese and Western collections do not display any foreign elements, they include the famous group decorated with filial son stories. However, it was not until 2006 that for the first time (and so far the only time) archaeologists found such a stone couch *in situ*, equipped with screen panels and a pair of *que* gateposts.⁸⁴ Around the same year, more stone couches emerged in antique markets, some of which went to museums overseas and private collections, making stone couches the largest existing group of the three major types of stone mortuary equipment. The majority of these unprovenanced stone couches incorporate portraits of the tomb owners into illustrations of filial sons. One of the most notable cases is the stone couch purchased by the Kuboso Museum in Japan, allegedly accompanied by a tombstone inscribed with the tomb occupant's name Kuang Seng'an 匡僧安, and his burial place and date (524 C.E., Luoyang).⁸⁵ In his study of the filial son stories on this

⁸² Lin Sheng-chih 林聖智, "Bei Wei Pingcheng shiqi de zangju 北魏平城時期的葬具," in Wu Hung, Zhu Qingsheng, and Zheng Yan, eds., *Gudai muzang meishu yanjiu 古代墓葬美術研究 2* (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2013), 191-215.

⁸³ Wu, "A Case of Cultural Interaction."

⁸⁴ Henan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo, "Henan Anyang Gu'an mudi."

⁸⁵ Izumishi Kuboso Kinen Bijutsukan 和泉市久保惣記念美術館, *Hokugi kanbsho no kenkyu: Izumishi kuboso kinen bijutsukan sekizo jinbutsu shinjuzu kansho kenkyu 北魏棺床の研究: 和泉*

stone couch, Kuroda Akira carries on the tradition of iconographic study of this subject matter launched by Okumura and Nagahiro.⁸⁶

As stated above, scholars have adopted a more interpretative and analytic approach to the stone mortuary equipment since the 1990s. Some scholars began to look at these objects in relation to broader visual, cultural and political contexts of early medieval China. In 1994, Wu Hung published an article focusing on three pieces of stone mortuary equipment from Luoyang, including the Ning Mao sarcophagus. In this article, he raises the concept of “binary imagery,” referring to the depiction of a pair of figures facing each other in a similar posture. This pictorial mode is featured not only in funerary art, but also in contemporary court paintings, reflecting an aesthetic taste popularized among different levels of the society.⁸⁷ In Wu’s *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture*, the author elaborates on the concept of “binary imagery,” using it to elucidate the emergence of spatial illusionism in the art of early medieval China.⁸⁸ If Wu is the first scholar to consider the mortuary equipment from the perspective of visual culture, Eugene Wang is one of the first to consider the ideological connotations of the images on the sarcophagi. In his short article titled “Coffin and Confucianism,” he ascribes the intermingling of Daoist paradise scenes, a conventional mortuary subject, and filial son illustrations on the Yuan Mi coffin to the infiltration of Northern Wei rulers’ sinicization policy into the funerary culture.⁸⁹ Following Wang’s idea, Zou Qingquan argues that the filial son stories in the Northern

市久保惣記念美術館石造人物神獣図棺床研究 (Osaka: Izumishi Kuboso Kinen Bijutsukan, 2006).

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Wu Hung, “The Transparent Stone: Inverted Vision and Binary Imagery in Medieval Chinese Art,” *Representations* 46 (1994): 58-86.

⁸⁸ Wu, *Monumentality*, 261-80.

⁸⁹ Eugene Wang, “Coffins and Confucianism: The Northern Wei Sarcophagus in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts,” *Orientalism* 6 (1999): 56-64; “Refiguring: the Visual Rhetoric of

Wei mortuary art were endorsed directly by the dowager empress regents Feng and Hu toward the end the Late Northern Wei, who intended to indoctrinate the juvenile emperors with the Confucian value of obedience to their mother.⁹⁰ Zheng Yan further interprets the function and meaning of the filial son stories in the context of ritual practice in the Northern Dynasties.⁹¹ Because of these scholars' effort, the stone mortuary equipment of the Northern Dynasties has proved to be equally important, if not more important than religious art and secular paintings, in terms of our understanding of the visual and material culture of early medieval China.

This dissertation contributes to the study of stone mortuary equipment of the Northern Dynasties in two aspects. Firstly, it is the first monograph taking into account all the three types of stone mortuary equipment as an interrelated body of objects produced in a common visual, cultural, and social environment. Moreover, the focus on the concept of identity serves as an analytic framework which allows me to examine mortuary stones beyond their conventional categorization; although there is much scholarship on stone mortuary equipment, most studies are confined to either a single case (e.g. the Shi Jun sarcophagus), a specific motif (e.g. filial piety illustrations), a certain type (e.g. stone mortuary couches), or a special group of owners (e.g. the Sogdian sarcophagi). This dissertation aims to break the boundaries of these categories.

Secondly, my dissertation examines some important mortuary stones that have either been recently discovered or long been neglected. Recent scholarship has not given enough attention to mortuary stones that display no or few narrative elements. While the stories of filial sons and the depictions of the Sogdian life attract the most attention from scholars, images of

the Sixth-Century Northern Wei 'Filial Piety' Engravings," in Shane McCausland ed., *Gu kaizhi and the Admonitions Scroll* (London: British Museum Press, 2003), 101-121.

⁹⁰ Zou, *Beiwei xiaozi huaxiang*.

⁹¹ Zheng Yan 郑岩, "Beichao zangju xiaozi tu de xingshi yu yiyi 北朝葬具孝子图的形式与意义," *Meishu xuebao* 6 (2012):42-54.

celestial beings and demonic figures have only occasionally been mentioned. Due to this bias, a group of stone coffins that feature sacred beasts and immortals has until now been overlooked. My dissertation reveals the significance of this group of objects by focusing on their differences from and connections to other mortuary structures. Furthermore, I study several pieces of stone mortuary equipment discovered in recent years, notably two stone couches now preserved in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Art Institute of Chicago. In these cases, my dissertation offers the first study of these mortuary stones after their discovery.

5. Scholarship on Stone Mortuary Equipment and Identity

This dissertation deepens our understanding of the ways in which people constructed their identities using materials, spaces, and pictorial narratives; in particular, it explores the issue of identity against the holistic visual and material context of early medieval China. Mortuary stones have been a central part of scholarly discussions on the ethnic, cultural, religious, political, and individual identities of people in early medieval China for some time. The scholarship in this regard has been dominated by three analytical paradigms: sinicization, desinicization, and cultural synthesis.

Sinicization

The ruling classes of the Northern Dynasties descended from non-Han peoples on the steppes, and the major trendsetters of early medieval art were immigrants from Central Asia. To these people of foreign origin, adaptation to the indigenous Chinese culture, a process often called

sinicization or sinification, seemed not only advisable but also inevitable. Scholars have devoted great effort to studying the role played by arts in the process of sinicization. The best-known writings in this case are concerned with the change of the Buddha's costumes from a foreign aesthetic to a Chinese style at the turn of the fifth century. As Su Bai has famously proposed, this shift of costumes was a direct result of Emperor Xiaowen's sinicization reforms, a critical step toward the transformation of the Northern Wei from a nomadic regime to an empire founded on Chinese civilization.⁹² Similarly, scholars like Huang Minglan and Zou Qingquan suggest that the prevalent illustrations of filial sons on stone mortuary equipment evince the Tuoba rulers' promulgation of Confucianism in the Late Northern Wei period.⁹³ Especially when it comes to Sogdian sarcophagi, many scholars tend to stress the Chinese elements of their styles and themes, associating them with Sogdian immigrants' endeavor to blend into local society.⁹⁴

In addition to Confucianism and the historical Chinese tradition, sinicization to the Northern Dynasties rulers also meant accepting the art and culture of the contemporary Southern Dynasties, founded by the Han Chinese in South China. As Zou Qingquan has observed, images on stone mortuary equipment discovered at Luoyang demonstrate a salient influence from the South both in style and subject matter.⁹⁵ Related to this phenomenon is the appearance of other Southern fashions in tombs. The foremost example in this regard is the use of the paneled screen on Sogdian mortuary couches. As Lin Sheng-chih and Wei Zheng have pointed out, the form of

⁹² Su Bai 宿白, "Yungang shiku fenqi shilun 云冈石窟分期试论," *Kaogu xuebao* 1 (1978): 25-38; Katherine Tsang, "A Case of Cultural Interaction: House-shaped Sarcophagi of the Northern Dynasties," *Orientalism* 5 (2002): 34-41; Stanley Abe, *Ordinary Images* (The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 173-259.

⁹³ Zou, *Beiwei xiaozi huaxiang*; Huang, *Luoyang Beiwei shisu xianke*.

⁹⁴ Zhang Xiaogui 张小贵, *Zhongguo huahua xianjiao kaoshu* 中古华化袄教考述 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2010); Wang Rui 王睿, *Tang dai sute ren huahua wenti lunshu* 唐代粟特人华化问题论述 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2016).

⁹⁵ Zou Qingquan 邹清泉, *Xingwei shifan: Beiwei xiaozi huaxiang yanjiu* 行为世范: 北魏孝子画像研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2015), 43-55.

paneled screen first became popular among the Southern elites, who celebrated it as a prestigious art medium standing for status and cultivation.⁹⁶ Focusing on the mortuary couch of Kang Ye, Zheng Yan further observes that the Sogdian occupant took on the appearance of a Southern scholarly gentleman on the paneled screen, transfiguring himself from a foreigner to a Chinese cultural elite.⁹⁷

Desinicization

The early medieval period of China is an age of great migrations. Due to the changing political landscape, the period witnessed one of the largest-scale dislocations of population in Chinese history: non-Han people moved to North China from the Mongolian steppes and Tibetan plateau, and the Han Chinese fled to the south or migrated back to the Chinese heartland from frontier regions, creating an ever-shifting geographic boundary between the Han and the non-Han. Meanwhile, the vibrant trade on the Silk Road brought Sogdian merchants and other foreign immigrants to China, their culture and religion exerting a far-reaching impact on Chinese arts. Given the fact that these migrations transformed the trajectory of Chinese history and reshaped Chinese art and culture, many scholars adopt the perspective of desinicization in their study of

⁹⁶ Lin, “Boku cho jidai ni okeru kizoku no bosō no zuzō;” Wei, “Beichao gaozu weiping chuangta.”

⁹⁷ Lin Sheng-chih 林聖智, “The Icons and the Function of the Sarcophagus in the Northern Dynasty: A Study of the Portraits of Tomb Occupants and the Images of Filial Paragons in Stone-Screen Beds 北朝時代における葬具の圖像と機能—石棺床圍屏の墓主肖像と孝子傳圖を例として,” *Bijutsushi* 154 (2003): 207-226.

mortuary stones, stressing the visual expression of non-Han elements and their influence on indigenous funerary art.⁹⁸

While the tendency of desinicization is hard to discern on the Tuoba mortuary stones, their Sogdian counterparts suggest a refusal to yield completely to the dominant Chinese culture. In fact, the abundant foreign motifs on Sogdian mortuary stones prompt many scholars to make the connection with Sogdian immigrants' ethnic, religious and cultural identities. In my review of the historiography and methodology, I have mentioned several scholars whose works treat Sogdian mortuary stones as examples of the Sogdian belief in Zoroastrianism. Following this line of inquiry, Shi Anchang makes a bold move to identify some motifs on non-Sogdian mortuary stones as Zoroastrian symbols, notably the so-called "ferocious beasts" on imperial monuments of the Liang Dynasty and tombstones of Northern Wei aristocrats, implying a level of Persianization of Chinese art and culture during the early medieval period.⁹⁹

Cultural Synthesis

The evidence of sinicization and desinicization often coexists on a single stone mortuary object. To justify their reasoning, proponents of either theory often turn a blind eye to the other side or at least play down its significance. Dissatisfied with this binary approach, some scholars advocate examining mortuary stones against a broader historical and cultural context, looking at their material and visual elements from a more synthetic perspective. Bonnie Chen, for example, draws our attention to the versatile usage of stone material in different cultures across the

⁹⁸ Zhang Naizhu 张乃翥, "Luoyang xinchu Beiwei shiguanchuang yu Sute wenhua 洛阳新出北魏石棺床与粟特文化," *Gansu minzu yanjiu* 1 (2011): 47-62.

⁹⁹ Shi Anchang 施安昌, *Huotan yu jisi niaoshen: Zhongguo gudai Xianjiao meishu kaogu shouji* 火坛与祭司鸟神: 中国古代祆教美术考古手记 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2004).

Eurasian continent, thus championing an open and diverse view of mortuary stones.¹⁰⁰ Focusing on the head panel of the Yuan Mi sarcophagus, He Xilin suggests that the gate-like panel incorporates auspicious motifs from Daoism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism, together intended to guide the dead soul to a universalized happy afterlife.¹⁰¹

Katheryn Linduff and Mandy Jui-man Wu's research best exemplifies a synthetic perspective on mortuary stones. In their study of the An Jia sarcophagus, a stone mortuary couch owned by a Sogdian *sabao* leader, they note the multilayered cultural references of the sarcophagus, associating them with the diverse cultural environment of North China during the sixth century.¹⁰² Moreover, discontented with the reductive paradigm of sinicization versus desinicization, they begin to address the Sogdian occupant's individual identity in relation to his cross-cultural experiences. In her dissertation and articles, Wu further practices this multidimensional analysis on several Sogdian mortuary stones and her studies demonstrate the thoroughly hybrid ways in which identities were negotiated and expressed in early medieval China.¹⁰³

6. Chapters

Despite the abundant scholarship on the relationship between mortuary stones and identity, many questions have not yet been sufficiently addressed. Whereas scholars have given much attention to the bureaucratic hierarchy reflected in tomb constructions, few have considered how mortuary

¹⁰⁰ Cheng, "Exchange and a Renewed Perspective on Stone."

¹⁰¹ He, "Beichao Huaxiang Shizangju."

¹⁰² Linduff and Wu, "The Construction of Identity."

¹⁰³ Mandy Jui-Man Wu, "Art and Identity: Tombs of Elite Foreigners in China during the Northern Zhou Period (557–581 CE)," PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2010.

stones served a similar function and reinforced political identities. Moreover, how did Sogdian immigrants negotiate their merchant identity and their multicultural experiences? What was the reaction of the Chinese cultural elite to the heterogeneous implications of mortuary stones? How did they articulate their cultural identity through mortuary stones? If Sogdian sarcophagi synthesize multiple cultural traditions and customs, how did they resolve the conflict and collision brought about by such a synthesis? Regarding individual identity, what narrative strategies did artists employ in order to represent the personal lives of the deceased? This dissertation aims to give answers to these questions.

The first chapter of the dissertation investigates the ways in which the material of stone was used to express political, communal, and cultural identity. It is comprised of three case studies, one having to do with ritual stone, another with natural stone, and a third with transfigured stone. The first case study, having to do with ritual stone, discusses the differentiation and integration of political identities by focusing on stone mortuary equipment of the Late Northern Wei dynasty. Granted by the Northern Wei rulers to their subjects as mortuary gifts, these stones served both ritual and political functions. Whereas the receivers of stone coffins were exclusively Tuoba royal members and their Han royal predecessors, those who received stone couches and house-shaped sarcophagi seemed to be predominantly Han Chinese elites from a variety of family backgrounds. Consequently, mortuary stones provided Northern Wei rulers an effective way to justify and reinforce the political hierarchy between the Tuoba royalty and their Han Chinese associates.

Furthermore, though the types of mortuary stones corresponded to and reinforced the political hierarchy or divisions of the Late Northern Wei, the filial piety illustrations engraved on these objects helped to cultivate a sense of loyalty among the Chinese subjects toward their

Tuoba rulers. This section reveals that in contrast to the motifs of directional deities, emblems of royal standing which appeared only on stone coffins during the early medieval period, filial piety illustrations can be found on all the three types of mortuary stones. Epitomizing the core value of Confucian teaching, these illustrations break the boundary between the Tuoba royalty and their Han Chinese affiliates, contributing to a shared ideology among the heterogeneous upper class of the Late Northern Wei dynasty. Stone mortuary equipment, in a word, both articulates a royal identity and integrates it into a broader Han-Chinese ideological identity.

The second case study is concerned with the relationship between the literati identity and natural stone. It centers on two stone slabs from a mortuary couch, now preserved in the Art Institute of Chicago. My study first dates the mortuary stones to the Late Northern Wei period and conjectures their provenance to be Luoyang. To ascertain the source of the stone, I did a field survey in Luoyang and discovered the stone to be a special local material called “Blue Flowery Stone;” the surface of this kind of stone is characterized by purple-tone patterns that look like amorphous clouds and flowers. On the AIC stones, these patterns suggest a landscape that echoes the landscape background engraved on the stone surface. Moreover, the line-carvings were made in a spontaneous cursive style seemingly inspired by patterns on the natural stone. This sort of dialogue between nature and art reflects a critical moment in the literati culture of the early medieval period when Chinese scholars pondered the natural landscape and reinvented the notion of art in relation to nature. The AIC stones highlight the Chinese literati’s pursuit of nature and naturalness and probably served to announce a literati identity of the owner of the mortuary stones.

The third case study focuses on the manner in which mortuary stones of the Sogdian immigrant merchants take on the appearance of “Persian brocade,” a sign of the tomb owners’

self-identification as a member of a unique group of migrants active on the Silk Road during the early medieval period. Sogdian migrants created “Persian brocade,” a luxury silk product that became widespread from Japan to Egypt. “Persian brocade” synthesized motifs from multiple cultural sources, reflecting Sogdian merchants’ cosmopolitan vision of the world. Moreover, Sogdian artists translated the material properties of “Persian brocade” into mural paintings, Buddhist statues, and above all mortuary stones, creating a type of brocade-body composite that served as a signifier of Sogdian merchants’ collective identity. Incorporating portraits and life scenes of Sogdian merchants, “Persian brocade” interweaves the Sogdian visions of world, community, and self into a single piece of fabric.

My second chapter investigates how a Sogdian merchant leader and his sons used space to express their dualistic identity as both Confucian officials and religious devotees. The sarcophagus of Shi Jun, a merchant from Central Asia and a *sabao* leader of the immigrant community, is arguably the most significant piece of stone mortuary equipment discovered over the past half century. It is one of the few mortuary stones excavated by archaeologists *in situ* and the only extant case of a sarcophagus being accompanied by a bilingual epitaph, engraved in both Chinese and Sogdian scripts. Since its discovery in 2003, the Shi Jun sarcophagus has been studied extensively by scholars across countries and disciplines. However, most of the scholarship focuses on one or two specific aspects of the sarcophagus — these studies might examine particular motifs, its illustrations, and its architectonic form, but they do not provide a holistic interpretation of the monument in its spatial context.

Starting from the inscriptions, I argue that the Chinese and Sogdian terms used to describe the sarcophagus indicate two disparate spatial strategies related to the tomb owner’s binary identity as both a Chinese official (*sabao* leader) and a religious practitioner. The

designation “stone hall,” which appears in the Chinese inscription, is a historical name for stone offering shrines once popular during the Eastern Han Dynasty. This archaic designation informs the sarcophagus’ house-like shape and the unfurnished tomb chamber which was intended to evoke the open space associated with stone offering shrines erected above ground. Analyzing the etymological, ideological and historical origins of the “stone hall,” I further situate the sarcophagus in its proper cultural context at the intersection of Confucian teachings on filial piety, the funerary practices of the Han Dynasty, and the ritual codes of ancestor worship. I argue that Shi Jun and his family constructed the house-shaped sarcophagus as a “stone offering shrine” in the first place to present the deceased as a revered ancestor and the descendants as his filial offspring. In traditional Chinese society, such a devotion to filial piety has always been regarded as the foremost quality of a civil official.

If the Chinese name of the sarcophagus points to the Sogdian immigrant merchants’ subscription to the dominant political ideology in China, the Sogdian name speaks to the identification of the deceased as a spiritual saint. Experts in the field of Sogdian language translate the Sogdian title of the sarcophagus into English as “god’s house,” a term without direct counterparts in either Sogdian or Chinese texts from the early medieval period. However, by surveying contemporary visual and inscriptional evidence, I speculate that the Sogdian title is a translation of the Chinese term *tiangong* 天宮 or “heavenly palace,” a designation frequently appearing in popular Buddhist and Daoist texts during the sixth century and often associated with a physical structure, like a pagoda, or with a visual representation of a hall. In this case, the sarcophagus proves to be a direct product of the religious culture in six-century China instead of a historical anomaly or a foreign import.

The coexistence of “stone offering shrine” and “heavenly palace” in a single structure reflects Shi Jun and his family’s effort to reconcile their political obligation with their spiritual pursuits. Drawing on David Summer’s concepts of “physical space” and “virtual space,” I observe that while the “stone offering shrine” materializes in the physical layout of a shrine-stele complex, stretching from the burial ground to the tomb chamber, the vision of the “heavenly palace” takes shape on the planar surface of the sarcophagus, which represents an illusionistic celestial space. The former spatial strategy, I argue, is rooted in the Confucian way of constructing ritual spaces using physical markers, and the latter reflects the Buddhist practice of visualizing paradisiacal spaces in two-dimensional mediums. Notably, the physical space of the “stone shrine” and the virtual space of the “heavenly palace” constitute a dichotomy between outside and inside spaces divided by the surface of the sarcophagus, which corresponds to the dichotomy between the “outer (Confucian)” and “inner (Buddhist)” teaching, devised by Chinese intellectuals to reconcile the native ideology with a foreign religion. The Shi Jun sarcophagus translates this intellectual strategy into a spatial construct.

The third chapter of my dissertation investigates the artist’s role in the articulation of personal identity by focusing on pictorial narratives engraved on mortuary stones. This chapter consists of two sections. Firstly, I study filial piety illustrations, revealing the artist’s freedom to rearrange didactic illustrations according to funerary contexts, thereby translating them into pictorial programs concentrating on the deceased. Secondly, building on the observations of the first section, I argue that on the Shi Jun sarcophagus, the artist created a pictorial biography of the Sogdian leader and his wife by adapting the narrative illustrations of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. Thus, the construction of the deceased’s personal identity involved the

collaboration of multiple parties, including the deceased themselves, their family members, and most importantly, the artists, who gave the final form to the image of the deceased.

The first section of the third chapter looks specifically at four famous objects with filial piety illustrations: the Yuan Mi sarcophagus at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the stone mortuary couch at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and the “filial-son” or Kansas sarcophagus, along with the stone couch housed at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Scholars have extensively studied the filial piety illustrations on these mortuary stones, but no one has explained the meaning of the sequence in which these illustrations are displayed. I reveal that the artists organized the sequences according to two principles: “family member” and “life-death.” The former principle focuses on ancestral protagonists and the latter on the nature of the filial deed. Following these two principles, the artists innovatively translated didactic illustrations of filial piety into allegorical portraits of the deceased, allowing them to function either as the focal point of ancestor worship within the tomb chamber, or as Ying-yang symbols intended to benefit the afterlife of the deceased and the fortune of the family.

By investigating the pictorial biography of the Shi Jun sarcophagus, the second section reveals in detail the way in which artists translated Buddhist Jataka paintings (tales about the Buddha) into the narrative of an individual Sogdian merchant. The biographical illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus are the most hotly debated subject in the field of mortuary stones from the Northern Dynasties. Although scholars generally agree on the biographical nature of the illustrations, almost everyone has their own theory regarding individual scenes. Such interpretive disagreements, I argue, stem from a scholarly overreliance on the textual source of the illustrations, namely the epitaph of the deceased. Because of this, the abundant supernatural elements of Shi Jun’s pictorial biography, barely addressed by his predominately secular epitaph,

are largely treated as subjects of imaginative speculation. Refusing this textual approach, I suggest that the narrative structure of Shi Jun's pictorial biography draws mainly on the popular illustrations of the life of the Buddha. Modeling Shi Jun's life on that of the Buddha, the artists presented the Sogdian merchant as a Buddhist saint, a spiritual identity probably espoused by the deceased himself as well as his offspring.

CHAPTER ONE
MATERIALITY AND IDENTITY:
RITUAL STONES, “PERSIAN BROCADE,” AND NATURAL ROCKS

In early medieval China, stone had multiple functions and meanings. It could simultaneously be a sumptuous material for a funerary project, a popular medium for carving, and a subject of aesthetic appreciation. This chapter addresses how these functions and meanings were correlated with the political, communal and cultural identity of three groups of early medieval people: the ruling class of the late Northern Wei, Sogdian immigrant merchants, and the scholarly officials of the sixth century. While previous scholarship has tended to look at the relationship between mortuary stones and identity within a Han/non-Han dichotomy, this chapter shows that the expression of identity often went beyond ethnic or even cultural categories.

The first section of this chapter explains the ways in which stone was used as a ritual material that reinforced the political hierarchy between the Tuoba royalty and their Han officials. In terms of building tombs, the material of stone had been both celebrated and denounced since the Eastern Han Dynasty. Proponents of mortuary stones esteemed them as counterparts of the bronze vessels used in ancestor worship, resistant to both the elements and the passage of time, whereas opponents condemned them as costly and extravagant, violating the frugal ideal of burial championed by ancient sages. Both proponents and opponents drew on Confucian teaching to justify their positions; for them, stone was a material charged with ritual significance. Because of this ritual function, the Tuoba rulers during the late Northern Wei gave mortuary stones as imperial gifts to royal family members and Chinese Han officials, using different types

of stones to mark the hierarchy between the two classes while at the same time bringing them together by applying filial piety illustrations on all types.

Stone was arguably the most popular and versatile medium of the sixth century. Due to the popularity of Buddhism, stone monuments and images appeared everywhere. Natural cliffs and rocks were turned into temples and chapels; stone pagodas and statues were erected in public spaces; Buddhist stories were illustrated on stone steles, and gilded or painted statuettes were worshiped at home or carried around. As a medium, stones were very versatile. They could be transformed into wooden structures, didactic paintings, or sacred icons. Without the medium of stone, our knowledge of early medieval Chinese art would have been considerably limited. The second section, therefore, focuses on a case in which stone is visually transformed into brocade. By adopting the appearance of “Persian brocade,” the sarcophagus from Anyang interweaves the multifaceted identity of its owner, a Sogdian immigrant merchant, into a single piece of fabric.

During the early medieval period, in their pursuit of the Daoist ideal of nature and spontaneity, scholarly officials in the South appreciated stones and rocks for their often curious shape or texture. These scholars’ rocks, as a result, stood for the identity of the educated elites, who placed their love of nature above their political or familial obligations. Despite their ritual function, some late Northern Wei mortuary stones nonetheless exhibit aesthetic qualities associated with their natural texture, which could have been the artist or the tomb occupant’s intentional choice to signal a cultural prestige and an elite identity. The third section deals with two such mortuary stones, preserved now in the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC). Made of a particular type of stone from Luoyang, these mortuary objects exhibit a natural landscape on their surface that interacts with the engraved landscape and also informs the cursive style of the

line carving. The manner in which nature overrides rituality on the AIC stones might reflect the deceased's scholarly identity.

I. Negotiating Hierarchy and Loyalty:

Stone Mortuary Furniture with Filial Piety Illustrations from the Late Northern Wei Dynasty (494-534 CE)

Filial piety illustrations form a critical part of early medieval Chinese art.¹ Historical records show that stories of filial paragons were a popular source of subject matter for screen and scroll paintings during the fifth and sixth centuries.² However, the majority of visual evidence of such paintings is found on mortuary stones of three different types: stone coffins, stone couches, and house-shaped sarcophagi. Although scholars have studied these stones extensively, no one has yet been able to answer the question of why these three different types existed. Were they created just for the sake of variety? Or could they have served disparate ritual functions?

The question concerning the different types of mortuary stones seems even more significant if we consider Chinese scholars' proposal that all three were mortuary gifts given by emperors to their followers. Focusing on entombed epitaphs and historical records, He Xilin and Zou Qingquan suggest that mortuary stones found in Luoyang played an integral part in the Northern Wei gift politics, belonging to *dongyuan miqi* 东园秘器, or "secret objects of the Eastern Garden," a type of funerary gift made by the imperial workshop.³

Moreover, archaeological and visual evidence demonstrates that a single workshop often produced more than one type of stone mortuary furniture. For example, the so-called "Ascent to

¹ Keith N. Knapp, *Selfless Offspring: Filial Children and Social Order in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 46-82.

² Zou, *Xingwei shifan*, 21-22.

³ *Ibid.*, 37-56.

Heaven” coffin, excavated in 1978, recycled a fragment from a stone couch as its end panel.⁴

Likewise, my study of the Boston couch highlights its close stylistic and thematic resemblance to the Yuan Mi coffin, which prompted me to suggest that the two objects were created by the same workshop.⁵

Why might the Northern Wei emperors have employed different types of mortuary stones to show favor toward their subjects? And was it left to the workshops to decide which types of such stones to produce? This section reveals that dividing mortuary stones into three types indexed and reinforced differences in hierarchy between the Tuobo royalty and Han elites, a status difference that profoundly shaped the politics of the Late Northern Wei.⁶ By closely analyzing extant inscriptional evidence, I argue that among the three types of mortuary stones, coffins signaled the most prestige and were reserved for people of royal blood. In contrast, stone couches and house-shaped sarcophagi were given to Han officials and relatives of the royal family. In addition to exploring the significance of these mortuary stones, I further explore the function of their filial piety illustrations. Engraved on all the three types, these illustrations, I suggest, were intended to cultivate a sense of loyalty among the Han elites. Mortuary stones therefore helped both to consolidate hierarchy and to facilitate loyalty in the Late Northern Wei politics.

⁴ Huang, *Luoyang Beiwei shisu shike*.

⁵ Xu Jin, “Rediscovery and Reconstruction of a Northern Wei Stone Mortuary Couch with Filial Piety Illustrations at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston,” in Wu Hung, Zhu Qingsheng, and Zheng Yan eds., *Studies on Ancient Tomb Art 3* (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2015), 119-140.

⁶ Zhang Jinlong 张金龙, *Beiwei zhengzhishi* 北魏政治史 (Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2008).

Part One: Types and Hierarchy

Stone Coffins

Among the three types of stone mortuary furniture, stone coffins seemed to have been the most prestigious. Their shape resembles that of wooden casket prevalently used during the Northern Wei dynasty.⁷ To date, eight stone coffins of the Northern Wei Dynasty have been discovered in the Luoyang region: the Kansas sarcophagus; the Yuan Mi sarcophagus; the Yuan Wei sarcophagus; two in the Luoyang Museum; one in the Kaifeng Museum; the Cao Lian sarcophagus; the one excavated at Qianduloucun.⁸ Three are accompanied by tombstones, which identify the owners as Yuan Mi (元谧 ?-523), Yuan Wei (元暉 ?-523) and Cao Lian (曹连 ?-528).

It is noteworthy that all the three of the identified figures were of royal blood: Yuan Mi was the grandson of Emperor Xianwen; Yuan Wei was the sixth-generation grandson of Emperor Daowu; Cao Lian was the descendant of Cao Cao, founder of the Wei Kingdom from which the Tuoba dynasty inherited its name and legitimacy. In addition to these three cases, we know of the existence of two other unidentified Northern Wei stone coffins, which were excavated from the cemetery of the imperial family of the Northern Wei.⁹ These findings suggest

⁷ Dien, *Six Dynasties Civilization*, 198.

⁸ Sickman, "The Sarcophagus of Filial Piety;" Davis, "A Stone Sarcophagus of the Wei Dynasty;" Huang Minglan 黄明兰, "Xijin Pei Zhi he Beiwei Yuan Wei liangmu shiling 西晋裴祗和北魏元暉两墓拾零," *Wenwu* 1 (1982): 70-73; Huang, *Luoyang Beiwei shisu shike*; Luoyang shi di'er wenwu gongzuo dui 洛阳市第二文物工作队, "Yanshi Qiandulou Beiwei shiguan mu fajue jianbao 偃师前杜楼北魏石棺墓发掘简报," *Wenwu* 12 (2006): 37- 51.

⁹ Luoyang shi di'er wenwu gongzuo dui, "Yanshi Qiandulou Beiwei shiguan mu."

that stone coffins were a privilege probably only granted to royal members of the Northern Wei.¹⁰

The prestige associated with stone coffins did not diminish in the later Northern Zhou and Sui Dynasties. During this period, stone coffins were no longer a privilege of the imperial family.¹¹ However, their owners continued to be top ranking officials, including Li He, Zhang Zheng, and Pilou Huan.¹² Interestingly, while a number of Sogdian immigrants' sarcophagi have been excavated over the past several decades, not a single one has been found in the form of a stone coffin. This could be due to their more modest political ranks.¹³ There is only one known case in which a stone coffin belongs to a person of Hindu descent (Li Dan in Chinese).¹⁴ Nevertheless, the epitaph accompanying the coffin tells us that the Northern Zhou emperor had granted gifts to Li Dan multiple times, and therefore might have sent the coffin to Li Dan as a mortuary gift.¹⁵

It is only during the Sui Dynasty that house-shaped sarcophagi began to supersede stone coffins as the most prestigious piece of mortuary furniture. House-shaped sarcophagi resemble timber constructions in appearance and might also have imitated the stone offering shrines popular during the Eastern Han dynasty. Before the Sui, such sarcophagi appeared only in low-

¹⁰ In Yuan Wei's case, the stone coffin bears no engravings at all. The reason for this exclusion of images is hard to know, but it suggests that even an undecorated coffin sufficed to function as an imperial gift to a royal family member.

¹¹ Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiuyuan 陕西省考古研究院, *Tongguan Shuicun Sui dai bihua mu* 潼关税村隋代壁画墓(Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2013).

¹² Yang, Xin, and Guo, "Xi'an Beizhou Zhang shi jiazhu mu."

¹³ Jiang boqin 姜伯勤, "Sabao fu zhidu yuanliu lunlue – hanwen Sute ren muzhi kaoshi zhiyi 萨宝府制度源流论略——汉文粟特人墓志考释之一," *Huaxue* 3 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 1998): 290-308.

¹⁴ Cheng, "Xi'an Beizhou Li Dan mu."

¹⁵ Ibid.

ranking or Sogdian immigrants' tombs.¹⁶ The sarcophagus of Li Jingxun, a Sui princess who died at the age of eight, is the first known case in which a royal family member used a house-shaped sarcophagus.¹⁷ During the Tang Dynasty, it became the norm for royalty and high-ranking officials to use such sarcophagi instead of stone coffins.¹⁸

Couches and House-shaped Sarcophagi

Given the royal privilege linked to stone coffins in the Northern Wei, it is not difficult to deduce that stone mortuary couches and house-shaped sarcophagi functioned as imperial gifts for non-royal figures. The most telling example is the Ning Mao sarcophagus, a house-shaped piece of mortuary furniture now preserved in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Ning Mao, a low-ranking official, died nearly three decades before the sarcophagus was made. Thus, the sarcophagus could not have been given to him as an imperial gift. Instead, as the epitaph indicates, the sarcophagus was created at the time of the death of Ning Mao's wife, a member of the Zheng family clan at Xingyang. Since the Zheng clan played an active role in the court politics of the Late Northern Wei through its intermarriage with the royal family, the house-shaped sarcophagus was probably an imperial gift to Ning Mao's wife.¹⁹

Like the Ning Mao sarcophagus, stone mortuary couches might also have been imperial presents to non-royal members, and current evidence suggests above all to Han officials. In Guo Yutang's notes on the stone carvings unearthed in Luoyang before 1949, the author records four

¹⁶ Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo and Datong shi kaogu yanjiusuo, "Datong shi Beiwei Song Shaozu mu;" Wang, and Liu, "Datong Zhijiabao Beiwei mu."

¹⁷ Tang, "Xi'an xijiao Sui Li Jingxun mu."

¹⁸ Li, *Leshi yu goudiao*.

¹⁹ Kong Xiangjun and Li Zhuping 孔祥军 李朱平, "Xingyang Zhengshi yu Beiwei zhengzhi 荥阳郑氏与北魏政治," *Lantai shijie* 2 (2010): 70-71.

sarcophagi with identifiable owners.²⁰ Among them, two were royal family members (the Yuan Wen sarcophagus discovered in 1920 and the Yuan Rong one in 1935), while the other two were non-royal officials (Wang Yue and Qin Hong). According to Guo Yutang, except for Yuan Rong's sarcophagus, the other three were sold to antique dealers in Beijing or Shanghai. Given the size and durability of mortuary stones, it seems rather unlikely that these sarcophagi have disappeared from the public domain. As a result, many scholars speculate that these four sarcophagi are housed in museums in China and abroad.²¹

Since Yuan Wen and Yuan Rong were royal family members, their sarcophagi are most likely stone coffins. In fact, the Kansas sarcophagus, famous for its filial piety illustrations, might be one of them. Besides this Kansas sarcophagus, the only other Northern Wei stone coffin found before 1949 is now preserved in the Kaifeng Museum in Henan. It is decorated with immortals ascending to heaven, and could have belonged to another royal family member noted by Guo Yutang. Three sets of Northern Wei stone mortuary couches came out of China before 1949, now respectively preserved in the Asian Art Museum, the Boston Museum, and the Nelson-Atkins Museum. It is likely that Wang Yue's and Qin Hong's sarcophagi are among them.

Interestingly, during the Northern Qi and Northern Zhou Dynasties, stone couches and house-shaped sarcophagi were found only in Sogdian tombs, whose occupants seemed mostly to

²⁰ Guo, *Luoyang chutu shike shidi ji*, 14, 44, 30, 46.

²¹ Huang, *Luoyang Beiwei shisu shike*; Roger Covey, "Canon Formation and the Development of Western Chinese Art History," in Nick Pearce and Jason Steuber eds., *Original Intentions: Essays on Production, Reproduction, and Interpretation in the Arts of China* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 39-73.

be *sabao* leaders of Sogdian or foreign immigrant communities in China.²² The stone couches include those of An Jia and Kang Ye, two unidentified couches from Tianshui, one from Anyang and one in the Miho Museum; the house-shaped sarcophagi include the Shi Jun sarcophagus, as well as an unidentified sarcophagus in the National Museum in Beijing and one excavated from Qingzhou.²³ Considering the function of stone mortuary furniture as imperial gifts during the Late Northern Wei Dynasty, we have reason to believe that these stone couches and house-shaped sarcophagi from Sogdian tombs were created with an imperial endorsement, if not directly gifted by the emperors.

In conclusion, the differentiation among the three types of stone mortuary furniture was not a random choice made by artisans; instead, it played a role in imperial gift politics. During the Late Northern Wei Dynasty, for instance, the stone coffin was a type of mortuary gift reserved for royal family members of the dynasty. Even after the Northern Wei collapsed, stone coffins continued to be a privileged object used predominantly by high-ranking officials. In comparison, during the Late Northern Wei, stone mortuary couches and house-shaped sarcophagi were granted to non-royal figures, mostly the emperors' Han associates. In the following dynasties, they appeared predominantly in Sogdian leaders' tombs, probably as an

²² The form of stone mortuary couches underwent drastic changes during the Northern Zhou Dynasty, when the gateposts disappeared and the enclosing screen rose in height. Unlike house-shaped sarcophagi, stone couches fell out of favor entirely after the Sui Dynasty.

²³ Shaanxisheng Kaogu yanjiusuo, *Xi'an Beizhou An Jia mu*; Xi'an shi wenwu baohu kaogusuo, "Xi'an Beizhou Kang Ye mu;" Scaglia, "Central Asians on a Northern Ch'i Gate Shrine;" Juliano and Lerner, "The Miho Couch Revisited;" Zhang Huiying 张卉英, "Tianshui shi faxian Sui Tang pingfeng shiguanchuang mu 天水市发现隋唐屏风石棺床墓," *Kaogu* 1 (1992): 46-54; Xia Mingcai 夏名采, "Yidu Beiqi shishi mu xianke huaxiang 益都北齐石室墓线刻画像," *Wenwu* 10 (1985): 49-54.

indicator of imperial recognition of this immigrant community. In short, as a product of imperial gift politics, stone mortuary furniture reinforced the political hierarchies structuring both the Northern Wei and subsequent dynasties.

Part Two: Images and Loyalty

Most extant mortuary stones from the Northern Wei Dynasty are decorated with engraved images, notably directional deities and filial son stories. If the types or shapes of these stones signify the political hierarchy distinguishing the Tuoba royalty from their Han associates, we may wonder whether the engravings performed a similar function. Part Two notes that while the directional deities, particularly the Dragon of the East and the Tiger of the West, appear exclusively on stone coffins, filial son illustrations can be found on all three types of mortuary furniture. Consequently, whereas the former motifs might function as signifiers of political status, the latter might instead function to cultivate a sense of loyalty among the Tuoba rulers' Chinese officials and affiliates.

Among Northern Wei stone mortuary furniture, the deities of the four cardinal directions invariably appear on stone coffins, usually with the Dragon and the Tiger stretching across the respective horizontal side panels (Fig.1.1). The origin of the four-deity coffin can be traced back to the Eastern Han Dynasty.²⁴ The foremost example is the Wang Hui coffin.²⁵ In the Southern Dynasties, the Dragon and Tiger are characteristic of royal mausoleums, where they adorn the

²⁴ For stone coffins in the Han Dynasty, see Luo, *Handai Huaxiang Shiguan*.

²⁵ He, "Beichao Huaxiang Shizangju," 344-46.

side walls of the tomb chamber in the form of a molded brick relief.²⁶ It is probably due to southern influence that the Northern Wei court adopted these motifs as emblems of royal status.

Whereas the Dragon and Tiger are only depicted on stone coffins and associated exclusively with royal privilege, filial son stories can be seen on all three types of mortuary furniture. On stone coffins, they are sometimes combined with the directional deities, located in the landscape beneath those figures, which soar in the sky (e.g. the Yuan Mi and Cao Lian coffins); sometimes they appear without any celestial deities, dominating the entire composition of each side panel, such as on the Kansas sarcophagus. On stone mortuary couches from the Northern Wei, filial son stories either adorn each panel of the screen, as on the Kansas couch, or a selection of panels, as on the Boston couch. The Ning Mao sarcophagus is the only house-shaped type surviving from the Late Northern Wei. Here the filial son stories are carved on the two outer side walls of the stone house.

Instead of signifying hierarchy, the filial piety illustrations were more likely conceived by Northern Wei rulers as a symbol binding the Tuoba royal class and their Han Chinese associates. First of all, as many scholars have pointed out, the emergence of filial piety illustrations was a result of the Late Northern Wei sinicization policy, a top-down reform initiated by Emperor Xiaowen to reinforce the Xianbei rule of North China. As Keith Knapp has noted, these illustrations epitomize the Confucian ideology promulgated by the Northern Wei rulers.²⁷ By including them in the decoration of imperial mortuary gifts, the Northern Wei rulers announced their endorsement of Confucian teaching, a critical gesture for winning over the Chinese elites.

²⁶ Luo Zongzhen 罗宗真, "Nanjing Xishanqiao Youfangcun Nanchao damu de fajue 南京西善桥油坊村南朝大墓的发掘," *Kaogu* 6 (1963): 291-300.

²⁷ Knapp, *Selfless Offspring*, 69-70.

Secondly, applying filial piety illustrations to the mortuary stones of both royal family members and Han Chinese elites, the Northern Wei rulers showed impartial favor to all these subjects, regardless of their ethnicity. Indeed, the Chinese recipients of mortuary stones came from a variety of backgrounds: Ning Mao's wife was a member of an eminent Chinese clan with a strong tie to the Tuoba royalty; Wang Yue was a high-ranking general from a Chinese family whose political status had been illustrious since the Former Qin; Qin Hong held no official position in his life but lived to be one hundred years old and honored by Northern Wei rulers as a respected senior Chinese.²⁸ To these figures and their families, filial piety illustrations on mortuary stones signaled a shared ideology linking them to their Northern Wei rulers, a convergence that would have cultivated a sense of loyalty among these Chinese elites.

Conclusion

Stone mortuary furniture was embedded in the political order of the Northern Dynasties. Focusing on the Late Northern Wei period, this section reveals that the three different types of mortuary stones reinforced the hierarchy between the Tuoba royalty, the primary recipients of stone coffins, and Han political elites, to whom stone couches and house-shaped sarcophagi were granted. Images on these mortuary stones, however, serve binary purposes: on the one hand, the directional deities functioned as royal emblems, further marking the hierarchy indicated by the different mortuary stones; on the other hand, filial piety illustrations cultivated a sense of loyalty among the Han-Chinese officials, binding together the heterogeneous upper class of the Tuoba dynasty. Although the significance of each type of mortuary stone changed after the Northern

²⁸ Guo Yutang, *Luoyang chutu shike shidi ji*, 14, 44, 30, 46.

Wei, the employment of stone mortuary furniture never seems to have lost its role in the establishment of the political order in subsequent dynasties.

II. A Natural Approach to Nature:

Two Northern-Wei Pictorial Stones in the Art Institute of Chicago

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, stone funerary couches with enclosing screens have become an important focus of study for students of early medieval Chinese art. A considerable number of such couches, all created in northern China during the sixth century, have been discovered over the past two decades through both scientific excavation and undocumented discovery. Carved and engraved with complex figurative images, these couches reveal critical aspects of pictorial art during this time, some of which we had little previous knowledge.

We can categorize these couches in two groups: those depicting Sogdians, (Fig. 1.2),²⁹ a Central Asian people of Persian origin who traversed the Silk Road as middlemen of luxury trade; and those portraying Chinese filial paragons and nobles accompanied by their attendants.³⁰ The so-called Sogdian couches, along with a number of much more elaborately adorned Sogdian sarcophagi, have received great international scholarly attention. But overshadowed by those exotic counterparts, couches portraying Chinese figures have been addressed primarily by a specialized audience. In public and private collections, however, these distinctively Chinese couches, which to date total about 20 (including incomplete examples), greatly outnumber the Sogdian of which we know about 7 thus far. Most importantly, just as is the case with the unprecedented Sogdian imagery, the remarkable carvings on these Chinese couches are also

²⁹ Lerner, "Aspects of Assimilation."

³⁰ Pearlstein, "Pictorial Stones from Chinese Tombs."

changing the way we look at the art of early medieval China in both textual research and firsthand observation of museum objects.

It will suffice to mention a few examples: in 2005, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) acquired a brilliantly colored and gilded stone couch, carved with filial stories and portraits of the deceased (Fig. 1.3)³¹; in 2007, a stone couch with a pictorial program similar to that of the VMFA couch was unearthed in Anyang, Henan province, the only one of its kind to be scientifically excavated (Fig.1.4); around 2010, in the MFA storeroom, Roger Covey recognized the famous C.T. Loo couch, which was first published in the dealer's 1940 catalogue and whose whereabouts were subsequently lost to virtually all outside scholars.³² In 2015, I have reconstructed the couch in an article and re-examined its iconic illustrations of filial sons (Fig.1.5).³³

Ongoing discoveries enable us to solve thorny problems concerning authenticity, provenance and source of material for these funerary couches. These finds also prompt us to reassess the relative artistic quality of some pieces in unprovenanced collections. The subject of this section is an example purchased by the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC) in 1995 (Fig. 1.6 – 1.7): two stone panels clearly remaining from a four-paneled screen that originally enclosed a mortuary stone couch. Despite their refined pictorial imagery, these panels have received little scholarly attention since their acquisition. Based on field research, I will first authenticate the AIC panels and identify their provenance by their unique stone material. Then, I wish to throw light on the distinctive visual effect naturally formed on the surface of the stones. This will lead to a discussion of an overarching theme in Chinese culture— namely, the natural approach to

³¹ Juliano and Lerner, *Ritual objects and Early Buddhist Art*.

³² Covey, "Canon Formation and the Development of Western Chinese Art History."

³³ Xu, "The Reconstruction of the Northern Wei Funerary Bed."

nature in painting and calligraphy. Lastly, I will address the question how this natural approach to mortuary stones might have reflected their occupants' elite identity as a scholarly official.

Part One: Iconography and Provenance

The AIC stones portray a deceased couple and their attendants sitting or standing against simple idyllic settings that comprise rocks, trees and clouds. The figures and their settings are carved in low relief silhouette against a lightly chiseled background, and those silhouettes detailed with engraved or incised lines that I will call "line carving." In a format characteristic of Northern Wei screen couches, each human figure is depicted in an independent rectangular composition separated one from another by line-carved borders simulating wooden frames.³⁴ Despite their ostensibly mundane nature, these images represent some of the most celebrated artistic idioms of the sixth century. For example, the husband and wife are shown sitting face-to-face in a lush landscape. As the wife raises a cup and her husband holds a staff (probably a back scratcher), they appear to be engaged in leisurely drinking (Fig.1.8). Such relaxed portrayals recall well-known depictions in stamped clay tile of "Rong Qiqi and the Seven Worthies among the Bamboo Grove," a prominent pictorial subject created presumably by the master painter Lu Tanwei during the fifth century (Fig.1.9). Revered for their artistic talent, free way of life, and love of nature, these mid-3rd century recluses served as cultural and spiritual models for the educated elite throughout Chinese history. But depicting the deceased couple as such contrasts dramatically with conventional tomb portraits, which are invariably frontal and more severe-looking.

³⁴ Pearlstein, "Pictorial Stones from Chinese Tombs."

The AIC panels also depict three similar attendants presented from varied angles (Fig. 1.6) — a popular sixth-century artistic device for depicting human figures. This treatment is best exemplified by portraits of the deceased that appear on the exterior back wall of the Ning Mao sarcophagus in the BMFA, which may have been executed by the imperial workshop of the Northern Wei Dynasty (Fig.1.10). In his study of this sarcophagus, Wu Hung has observed that portraying the deceased from multiple angles was not intended to fulfill a ritual function, but rather to highlight the noble figure’s graceful appearance and to convey an illusionistic sense of space.³⁵ Overall, the figures on the AIC stones attest to two prominent cultural trends associated with the early medieval period—the pursuit of spiritual freedom and the burgeoning idea of “art for art’s sake.”

Stylistic and formal analysis often serves as the primary tool for art historians to identify the date and provenance of a work of art. The distinctive material of the AIC panels, however, offers us an additional and ultimately more reliable clue to provenance. Nebulous black-grayish-purplish patterns naturally formed on this stone identify it as a special type of limestone quarried from Mt. Song—the central of the Five Sacred Mountains in China—and used primarily within surrounding regions that would have encompassed the area of Northern Wei Luoyang.³⁶ Characterized by nebulous black-grayish-purplish patterns—as seen on the AIC panels—the stone is known locally as “flowery bluestone” *hua qingshi*, or “minor bluestone” *xiao qingshi*—as opposed to “major bluestone” *da qingshi*, which features a uniform texture.

The quarry sites of the “flowery bluestone” were concentrated on the northern and southern slopes of Mt. Song, where the site of Northern Wei Luoyang and the renowned Shaolin

³⁵ Wu, “The Transparent Stone.”

³⁶ William J. F. Jenner, *Memories of Loyang, Yang Hsüan-chih and the Lost Capital (439–534)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

Temple are located. In these places, the “flowery bluestone” seems to have been a prestigious material for sculpture and architecture for a very long time. The Shaolin Temple, for example, is replete with historical and contemporary structures made of “flowery bluestone,” ranging from pavements and railings to architectural adornments. The most prominent are monumental stone tablets sitting on gigantic stone tortoises, erected over a succession of dynasties since the seventh century C.E. (Fig. 1.11).

A ninth-century text called *Ju tan lu*, or *Quick Talk Recorded*, penned by Kang Pian, offers us the earliest extant record about the “flowery bluestone” in the Luoyang region. It is said that in the private garden of the Tang-dynasty minister Li Deyu (787-850 C.E.), there is a curious type of stone:

“Its flat surface, when rubbed with the hand, shows vague images which look like rosy clouds, dragons and phoenixes, and grasses and woods.”³⁷

Li’s garden is located to the south of present-day Luoyang, about 70 kilometers to the west of Mt. Song. There is strong reason to believe that the peculiar stone slab mentioned in the text is carved out of the “flowery bluestone” produced in nearby quarries.

“Flowery bluestone” seems not to be mentioned in any pre-Tang text. Physical evidence, however, must be abundant. For example, the famous Yuan Mi sarcophagus and its accompanying tombstone, now preserved in the Minneapolis Institute of Art, are both made of “flowery bluestone” (Fig. 1.12). Reportedly unearthed within the imperial cemetery west of

³⁷ Chen Zhi and Chen Gonghong 陈植 张公弘, *Lidai mingyuan ji xuanzhu* 历代名园记选注, (Hefei: Anhui keji chubanshe, 1983), 9.

Northern Wei Luoyang, the sarcophagus can be identified by inscription with a member of the royal family who died in the year.³⁸

In addition to the Yuan Mi sarcophagus and tombstone, I have encountered two recently discovered fragments of “flowery bluestone” carving in course of field research in Luoyang. Both were reportedly collected from the site or vicinity of Northern Wei Luoyang. The first is a fragment of a typical Northern Wei Buddhist tablet. The front preserves a section of a bodhisattva torso carved in high relief; the back displays line-carved illustrations of a Buddhist text. The surviving cartouche indicates that this imagery is related to teachings about hell and purgatory (Fig.1.13). The second fragment belongs to a couch screen, which is decorated with motifs akin to those of the AIC stones (Fig.1.14). Here we see a man and woman sitting face-to-face in an idyllic landscape, with a child seated between them. The image could illustrate a paragon of filial piety or a noble family—each a ubiquitous pictorial subject of Northern Wei stone couches. In light of this textual and physical evidence, we can now safely ascribe the AIC stones to the region of Northern Wei Luoyang.

Part Two: “Flowery Bluestone” and a Natural Approach to Nature

The enduring history of “flowery bluestone” in the Luoyang area provides us with a unique example of the celebrated tradition of appreciating and revering natural materials in Chinese art and culture. In this tradition, natural stones and rocks of curious shapes or beautiful patterns have been esteemed as independent art forms, and in special cases, even superior to paintings.³⁹ For

³⁸ Wang, “Coffins and Confucianism.”

³⁹ For this subject, see Stephen Little, *Spirit Stones of China: The Ian and Susan Wilson Collection of Chinese Stones, Paintings, and Related Scholars’ Objects* (Berkeley: University of California Press in association with Art Institute of Chicago, 1999); Kemin Hu, *Scholars Rocks in Ancient China: the Suyuan Stone Catalogue* (Orchid Press, 2002).

example, in his *Stone Catalogue of Cloudy Forest*, one of the most comprehensive studies of curious rocks, Du Wan (twelfth century C.E.) describes a type of stone from Guozhou (present-day Sanmenxia city, Henan province) near Luoyang. Du characterizes this “Guo Stone” as follows:

“The stone is of yellow and white color. It bears textures resembling mountains near and far, connected by streams and valleys. ... often made into an ink-stone screen, which looks like real paintings.”

No screen made of “Guo Stone” is known to survive. However, the visual effect of such objects must have been similar to those of marble from Dali, Yunnan province—a more prestigious and widespread material. Numerous screens of Dali marble, small and large, are now preserved in public and private collections (Fig. 1.15). Akin to the “flowery bluestone,” the appeal of Dali marble lies in its painterly texture and colors.

Significantly, the artists of the Luoyang fragments and the Yuan Mi sarcophagus seem to capitalize on the natural pattern of the “flowery bluestone” to enhance their hand-carved images. In the Buddhist fragment, the purplish-black patterns transmit an impression of flames and smoke, contributing to the horrific atmosphere of the infernal scene in which a heap of sinners are suffering in a caldron above the fire (Fig.1.13). In contrast, the patterns on the Yuan Mi sarcophagus and the fragment of the couch screen (Fig.1.14), like those on the stone slab in Li Deyu’s garden, could have been imagined as a serene landscape of “rosy clouds, dragons and phoenix, and grasses and woods,” echoing the same motifs executed in the line carvings on the stone surface.

Compared to the abovementioned objects, the AIC stones exhibit a natural landscape with more distinct forms. As in the Dali marble screen of Figure 1.15, the contour of a dark area

at the bottom of each AIC panel resembles an undulating mountain range, which continues across the artificial frames and integrates the separate scenes into a single unit. The mountains are surrounded by nebulous patterns that evoke the effect of flowing water, swirling clouds, and trembling leaves, pointedly mirroring and enhancing the line-carved images. Some sections of the naturally formed mountains even overlap with the line-carved rocky ground, making the artificial images look like an integral part of the stone surface.

Thanks to the exceptional bond between the natural patterns and the hand-carved images on the AIC panels, it looks as though the visual quality of the “flowery bluestone” might even have inspired the unusually cursory and spontaneous style of the line-carvings, thus reflecting the dynamic interaction between painting, calligraphy and nature during the early medieval period. Despite the formal link between the subjects on the AIC panels and those canonical images of the sixth century, previously noted, the disparity in their execution is obvious. The Seven Worthies and the Ning Mao portraits are rendered in a highly refined and exquisite manner — each line is executed with great control and precision. In contrast, the line carvings on the AIC panels look quite sketchy and disorderly: the figures are radically simplified, with few details; the outlines of adjacent images overlap or fuse together, often achieved via a single movement of the chisel; the majority of the lines and images tend to be repetitive, suggesting speed and force in execution.

Could the AIC stones have been carved by a less skillful hand than the Seven Worthies and Ning Mao portraits? Considering artistic trends of the early medieval period, the cursive style of their line carvings may well have been intentional, displaying a spontaneous approach to nature in Chinese calligraphy and painting. The Northern and Southern Dynasties were witness to a momentous moment in the history of Chinese art, when calligraphy, the primary art form

among the cultural elite, began to exert an impact on painting. The principal master of this achievement was Wang Xizhi (303-361 C.E.), who has been revered as the Saint of Calligraphy in East Asia (Fig.1.16). Under his influence, running and cursive styles superseded formal and standard scripts in artistic and cultural prestige (Fig. 1.17).⁴⁰ The spontaneous and expressive quality of the former two styles made them an ideal vehicle for personal feeling and ineffable spiritual messages, which subsequently attracted the admiration of contemporary painters.

There are two key features of running and cursive scripts: simplification and continuous, speedy movement. Simplification means that the strokes of a character are reduced, i.e., multiple strokes combined into one, or compressed. An extreme form of such simplification is the so-called “one stroke script,” which, according to the renowned Tang art historian Zhang Yanyuan, “goes with a single movement of brush, like the flow of *qi* energy, remaining unbroken even as the line changes.”⁴¹ Cursive scripts similarly stress the continuous speedy movement of the brush. Whereas an unbroken stroke reveals the continuous motion of the hand, its drastically varying width reflects the sudden increase or decrease of strength put on the brush. Traces of swift brush movement are especially appreciated in a particular cursive style called *feibai*, or “flying white,” which derives its name from white areas left in the painted surface when the brush splits in course of its rapid sweep.

Keeping in mind the features of running and cursive scripts, we will see that the seemingly crude and hasty execution of the line carvings on the AIC stones might be the pictorial translation of this prestigious calligraphic style (Fig.1.18). The motifs on the screens are greatly

⁴⁰ Zhongshi Ouyang and Wen C. Fong, *Chinese Calligraphy (The Culture and Civilization of China)* (Yale University Press, 2008).

⁴¹ Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih trans. and eds., *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 109.

simplified, especially when compared to the Ning Mao portraits and the Seven Worthies: details of garment and headdress are minimized; trees, rocks, and clouds, deprived of texture and outlined merely by suggestive contours, look almost like hieroglyphs.

Clearly, the simplification of motifs serves the artist well, allowing him to execute his carving swiftly and without restraint. As shown in Figure 1.18, unbroken curvy lines at the bottom of the composition outline the base of a rock, the trunk of a tree, and the skirt hem of a standing figure. When the rock on the left side and the skirt hem are separated, they still exhibit a consistent movement of the brush, which is often described by calligraphy critics as “broken brushstroke but continuous idea.” Even the “flying white” effect might be implied here (Fig. 1.19). The dense repetitive pleats of the attendant’s skirt seem like streaks left by the sweeping movement of a big dry brush. In short, the cursory effect of the line carvings on the AIC stones cannot be the result of unskilled execution, but rather a pictorial interpretation of the current cursive script.

As probably one of the earliest examples demonstrating the impact of calligraphy on pictorial art, the AIC stones also shed rare light on works by Lu Tanwei and Zhang Sengyou, two leading painters of the Southern Dynasties. As a court painter in the latter half of the 5th century, Lu Tanwei—as pointed out by Zhang Yanyuan—was known for his “one stroke painting,” featured by the sinuous and unbroken brushstrokes in his works. Active in the early half of the 6th century, Zhang Sengyou was acclaimed for his swift and sparse application of brushstrokes. As described by Zhang Yanyuan:

“With just a brush stroke or two, the image already corresponds to the object of the painting. Spaces are left between the dots and strokes, occasionally omitted altogether.”⁴²

None of Lu or Zhang’s paintings has survived. However, since their influence must have reached Northern Wei Luoyang, where the culture of the south prevailed, it is very likely that the line carvings on the AIC panels reflect the achievement of the two southern master painters.

According to Zhang Yanyuan, both Lu Tanwei and Zhang Sengyou drew upon calligraphy to create their innovative painting styles. While Lu Tanwei’s “one stroke painting,” as Zhang Yanyuan explains, was an appropriation and development of the “one stroke script” created by the Han-dynasty calligrapher Zhang Zhi, the sparse brushwork of Zhang Sengyou was inspired by the works of Lady Wei, an influential calligrapher active in the first half of the fourth century C.E..⁴³ Following these observations, Zhang Yanyuan concluded that painting and calligraphy share common roots. These are vividly exemplified by the AIC stones,

It is worth noting that whereas the AIC line-carvings translate the cursive script into pictorial language, master calligraphers of cursive style looked to nature for inspiration. In his colophon to Lady Wei’s treatise on calligraphy, Wang Xizhi states, “every horizontal stroke should be like lined clouds in battle formation” ; “every dot stroke should be like a rock falling from a precipitous peak” ; “as to the method of hook strokes, the movement of the brush should be as lofty as tall pine trees leaning toward a stream valley, as if about to fall down” ; “when executing dots, they should be amassed like big rocks lining an avenue.”⁴⁴ Interestingly, many images he cites were also popular subjects for paintings during the 6th century. In the AIC stones,

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Richard Barnhart, “Wei Fu-jen’s *Pi Chen Tu* and the Early Texts on Calligraphy,” *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 18 (1964): 13-25.

for example, we see lines of clouds, precarious rocks and lofty trees, which can be aptly used to illustrate the verbal instructions of Wang Xizhi.

The imitation of nature in cursive script, however, goes well beyond merely representing the form of natural objects. The point of Wang Xizhi's instruction lies more in the spontaneous momentum or movement of these natural objects than their physical appearance. Indeed, the notion of nature in Chinese philosophy, as Li Zehou posited, is twofold:

The first is naturalness, or the refusal to serve man-made artifice. The second is the natural environment and landscape. These two meanings can easily be united if one considers how beautiful nature is without the addition of any human artifice.⁴⁵

The spontaneous movement in running and cursive style, which eschews premeditation and elaboration, is the best embodiment of nature in its first sense. In this case, there is no doubt that the spontaneously formed landscape on the AIC panels would provoke the artist to follow a similar path of naturalness.

Following Li Zehou's comments, we see how the AIC stones embrace the twofold significance of nature in a profound and comprehensive way. Not only do the line carvings portray an idyllic natural environment — comprised of swirling clouds, graceful trees and curious rocks — but they also create, in a natural and spontaneous fashion, the epitome of the cursive style derived from calligraphy. Most importantly, as a product of geological evolution rather than human labor, the stones themselves present a natural landscape, which not only informs the manmade images but also surpasses both painting and calligraphy in its naturalness. Such a dialogue between artificial and natural images makes the AIC panels an emblem of

⁴⁵ Li Zehou, Maija Bell Samei trans., *The Chinese Aesthetic Tradition* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 94.

reverence for nature and the pursuit of its spontaneity in early medieval Chinese culture, which would fully blossom in the literati art of the following dynasties.

Conclusion

The marked aesthetic quality of the natural material in the AIC stones situates them in a long scholarly tradition of Chinese rock appreciation. Chinese scholars began to write about, paint, and collect rocks as early as the Northern and Southern Dynasties, a trend that continued in subsequent periods. This interest in rocks arose from an obsession, among educated elites, with Daoism and its esteem of the beauty of natural landscapes. During the Song period, scholars' rocks became an integral part of literati culture, epitomized by writings like Du Guan's *Stone Compendium of Cloudy Forest*, an encyclopedia that includes more than one hundred types of stones with notable aesthetic features. Several entries of Du's book mention stones that were made into screens because of their picturesque texture.⁴⁶ The AIC stones, therefore, represent the earliest extant examples of such practice. Like those curious rocks represented in their line carvings, the AIC stones would have been appreciated for their natural appearance and spontaneous beauty, as opposed to qualities related to human artifice.

Beyond a love of landscape, scholars' appreciation of rocks is inseparable from their devotion to the creation of gardens. In Chinese tradition, famous gardens are always noted for their display of curious rocks. Prince Wenhui of the Southern Qi Dynasty, for instance, built a private garden "decorated with plenty of curious rocks, which look more wonderful than real landscapes."⁴⁷ The engravings on the AIC stones show no mountains in their distant background,

⁴⁶ Edward H. Schafer, *Tu Wan's Stone Catalogue of Cloudy Forest: A Commentary and Synopsis* (Floating World Editions, 2006).

⁴⁷ Zhou Weiquan 周维权, *Zhongguo gudian yuanlin shi* 中国古典园林史 (Beijing: Qinghua daxue chubanshe, 1999), 103.

as the engravings of many mortuary stones do; instead, they are composed of standing rocks of variegated shapes. Mingled with swaying trees and well-dressed human figures, these rocks recall more of a garden-like environment than a natural outdoor space. Initially surrounding the deceased couple, the AIC stones similarly invoke a garden space in the afterlife, a space mirrored by the garden represented on their surfaces.

Based on the pronounced way in which the AIC stones reflect the scholarly passion for rocks and gardens, we can deduce that their owners came from a literati background. As the first section of this chapter has pointed out, in late Northern Wei period stone mortuary couches might have been gifted by Tuoba emperors to their Han officials. Although the AIC stones came to the collection without any archaeological information, they probably belonged to a high-ranking Han official and his wife. Textual sources indicate that Han officials in late Northern Wei kept pace with their peers in the south in championing the literati culture. For instance, a Han minister called Zhang Lun built for himself at Luoyang a spectacular garden, best known for its lofty artificial mountain.⁴⁸ It was probably someone like Zhang Lun who owned the AIC mortuary stones, and therefore we can see how the AIC stones can be said to not only stand for a natural approach to nature in early medieval China but also as a symbol of their owner's literati identity.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 102.

III. “Persian Brocade:”

World, Community and Self in Chinese Sogdian Art

The sixth century is a high point in the history of the Silk Road, when a vibrant trade network was forged among a divided China, the Turkic Empire, and Sasanian Persia.⁴⁹ From the intense cultural exchange during this period emerged the so-called *Bosi jin* 波斯锦, or “Persian brocade,” one of the best known luxury items in Chinese history. It is a silk product created with Sasanian weaving technique and characterized by Western Asian motifs, such as facing animals, hunting kings and linked-pearl roundels.⁵⁰ Although the Chinese term “Persian brocade” has long been known in historical records, it is not until the early twentieth century that archaeologists and expeditioners began to uncover physical remains of this luxury textile along the Silk Road.⁵¹ As further archaeological findings reveal, the patterns of “Persian brocades” were translated into mural paintings, stone carvings and metalwork decorations, constituting a prominent feature of arts of the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581-618 CE), the so-called golden age of Chinese civilization.⁵²

⁴⁹ For the history of the Silk Road between the third and sixth century AD, see Xinru Liu, *The Silk Road in World History* (Oxford Press, 2010), 42-86; B. A Litvinsky, *History of Civilizations of Central Asia Vol. 3* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ, 1999).

⁵⁰ In Chinese historical texts, “Persian brocades” belong to a broader category of import textiles called “barbarian brocades” (*fanjini* 番锦) or “foreign brocades” (*hujin* 胡锦), see Jiang Boqin 姜伯勤, *Dunhuang Tulufan wenshu yu sichou zhilu* 敦煌吐鲁番文书与丝绸之路 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1994), 206-210.

⁵¹ For literary records of “Persian brocades,” see Jiang, *Dunhuang Tulufan*, 71-83. For major discoveries of “Persian Brocades” on the Silk Road, see Zhao Feng and Le Wang, *Dunhuang sichou yu sichou zhilu* 敦煌丝绸与丝绸之路 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009); Xia Nai 夏鼐, “Xijiang xin faxian de gudai sizhipin — qijin he cixiu 新疆新发现的古代丝织品—绮、锦和刺绣,” *Kaogu xuebao* 1 (1963):45-76, 156-170.

⁵² Characteristic patterns on “Persian brocades” can be found in a wide range of artifacts between the sixth and eighth centuries CE. For Buddhist stone carvings, see Yang Un-Gyong, *Suidai fojiao kuan yanjiu* 隋代佛教窟龕研究 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2004) and Li Yuqun 李裕

In this section I explore the significance of “Persian brocades” among Sogdian merchants in China, a Persian-speaking community that originated in Central Asia but migrated extensively along the Silk Road.⁵³ As the most active middlemen between East and West before the advent of Islamic civilization, Sogdian merchants handled a global range of luxury objects, notably gold, silver, glass, gems, perfumes, and above all, silk. Scholars in the field of Chinese and Iranian studies have conducted much research to reveal the origin, circulation and types of these commodities.⁵⁴ However, an important question has yet to be sufficiently addressed: how might material objects have defined the identity of Sogdian merchants, shaping their view of the world they traversed and of their individual selves?⁵⁵

群, *Beichao wanqi shikusi yanjiu* 北朝晚期石窟寺研究 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2003); for Buddhist mural paintings, see Bo Xiaoying 薄小莹, “Dunhuang Mogaoku liu shiji mo zhi jiu shiji zhongye de zhuangshi tu’an 敦煌莫高窟六世纪末至九世纪中叶的装饰图案,” in *Dunhuang Tulufan wenxian yanjiu lunji* 敦煌吐鲁番文献研究论集 5 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1990), 355-436; for ceramics, see Xie Mingliang 谢明良, *Liuchao taoci lunji* 六朝陶瓷论集 (Taipei: Guoli taiwan daxue chubanshe, 2006), 191-229; for metalwork, see Qi Dongfang 齐东方, *Tangdai jinyin qi yanjiu* 唐代金银器研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1999).

⁵³ For Sogdians and the history of their homeland in Central Asia, see É. de La Vaissière, “SOGDIANA iii. HISTORY AND ARCHEOLOGY,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2011, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sogdiana-iii-history-and-archeology> (accessed on 04 March 2011). For Chinese Sogdians and their cultural remains, see Rong Xinjiang 荣新江, *Zhongguo Zhongguo yu Sute wenming* 中古中国与粟特文明 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2014); A.L. Juliano and J. Lerner eds., *Monks and Merchants: Silk Road Treasures from Northwest China Gansu and Ningxia, 4th -7th Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., with the Asia Society, 2002). According to Jiang Boqin’s study, Sogdian migrants formed settlements in major Chinese cities, taking up occupations ranging widely from tenant farmer to military officer. See Jian, *Dunhuang Tulufan wenshu*, 154-198.

⁵⁴ See Étienne de La Vaissière and James Ward trans., *Sogdian Traders: A History* (Boston: Brill, 2005).

⁵⁵ Sinicization has been a dominant mode of studying the identity of non-Han Chinese, including Chinese Sogdians, but this mode has received increasing criticism for the past two decades. The most heated debate over this methodology takes place in the field of Manchu Qing Dynasty (1644-1911 CE). For major points of this debate, see Evelyn Rawski, “Presidential Address: Reenvisioning the Qing: Significance of the Qing in Chinese History,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 55 (1996): 829-850; Ping-ti Ho, “In Defense of Sinicization: A Rebuttal of Evelyn Rawski’s

Focusing on “Persian brocades,” this section answers this question by proposing that this prominent textile epitomized a cosmopolitan outlook held by Sogdian merchants, spoke to their communal identity, and served to convey their personal memories and aspiration. Moreover, the section examines the issue of the Sogdian identity from two rarely explored perspectives: the material qualities of brocades and the body of the Sogdian merchants.⁵⁶ It is hoped that this section may shed light not only on the lives of Chinese Sogdians during the medieval period but also on our understanding of the ways in which body and material were utilized to construct personal identity.

The section comprises three parts. First, it analyzes the Sogdian involvement in the production of “Persian brocades,” illustrating how the textile interweaves a syncretic mixture of cultural symbols from across the continental Eurasia.⁵⁷ Second, “Persian brocades” were prized

Reenvisioning the Qing,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, (1998):123–155. Another approach to Sogdian identity is centered on Sogdian migrants’ belief in Zoroastrianism, namely their religious identity. However, many scholars challenge this approach on the basis of the diverse religious elements in Sogdian tombs, see Jiang, *Zhongguo Xianjiao yishushi yanjiu*; Grenet, “Religious Diversity among Sogdian Merchants.” Drawing on identity theories in archaeology and anthropology, Katheryn M. Linduff and Mandy Jui-man Wu apply concepts such as “hybridity” to explain the Sogdian identity, providing an alternative perspective beyond the polarization between Sinicization and the overemphasis of native Sogdian culture. See Linduff and Wu, “The Construction of Identity,” Wu, “Art and Identity.”

⁵⁶ Scholars in the field of Chinese art seldom consider material qualities and the body in their discussion of identity. In other fields, these two factors have attracted increasing attention in recent years. For materials and identity, see Joanna R. Sofaer, *Material Identities* (Malden: Blackwell Pub, 2007); for body and identity, see Mireille M. Lee, *Body, Dress, and Identity in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Jill Ross and Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *The Ends of the Body Identity and Community in Medieval Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); S. Lydia Chiang, *Collecting the Self: Body and Identity in Strange Tale Collections of Late Imperial China* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

⁵⁷ Scholars focus more on political cosmopolitanism of great multiethnic empires in Chinese history, such as the Tang (618-960 CE) and Qing (1644-1911 CE) Dynasties. Cultural cosmopolitanism in Chinese art has received relatively little attention. See Hu Minghui and Johan Elverskog, *Cosmopolitanism in China, 1600-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Mark E. Lewis, *China’s Cosmopolitan Empire: the Tang Dynasty* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009); Suzanne G. Valenstein, *Cosmopolitanism in*

among different peoples and social groups during the medieval period. However, it was primarily in Sogdian art that they were represented as an extension of the body, forming a brocade-body composite which, I suggest, indicated a unique “textile identity” among Sogdian merchants. Third, portraits and life scenes of Sogdian merchants are often depicted on their funerary and religious objects, which, I argue, serve as vehicles for Sogdian individuality. Ultimately, this section reveals that, through “Persian brocades,” Sogdian merchants found a concerted expression of their cosmopolitan pursuit, communal identity, and individual selves.

Part One: “Persian Brocades” and Sogdian Cosmopolitanism

Silk was one of the best-known Chinese products in the ancient world. People in central China began to make silk as early as 4000 BCE.⁵⁸ Yet it was not until the Western Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 8 CE), when the trade route between China and Central Asia was established, that silk textiles spread westward in large quantities, which led the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905) to name this route the “Silk Road.” Together with silk products, sericulture also arrived at the western regions of China. According to legend, a Chinese princess first introduced the secret of silk production to Central Asia. Married to a king of the Khotan Kingdom, she smuggled silkworms in her cap from China and taught sericulture to the locals.⁵⁹ Whether the legend is true or not, historical texts and archaeological evidence testify that around

the Tang Dynasty: A Chinese Ceramic Figure of a Sogdian Wine-merchant (Los Angeles: Bridge21 Publications, 2014).

⁵⁸ The earliest evidence for sericulture in China was found at Qingtai, Zhengzhou (Henan Province), see Zhao Feng 赵丰, *Jincheng: Zhongguo sichou yu sichou zhilu* 锦程: 中国丝绸与丝绸之路 (Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press, 2012), 11. China is not the only place where silk originated, see I.L. Good *et al.*, “New Evidence for Early Silk in the Indus Civilization,” *Archaeometry* 51 (2009): 457-466.

⁵⁹ Zhao, *Jincheng*, 115

the third to fourth centuries CE, people in Central Asia and Persia had already mastered sericulture and some of their best products began to find their way to China.⁶⁰

During the sixth century, the most acclaimed silk import in China was the so-called “Persian brocade,” a product whose origin has long been attributed to the Sasanian Empire, as its name indicates (Fig.1.20).⁶¹ The designation “Persian brocade” was once known to scholars only in historical texts, often associated with tribute gifts sent by foreign kingdoms.⁶² However, in the past century, large numbers of silk remains, dating from the sixth to ninth centuries, have been excavated in Northwest China, either by archaeologists or tomb robbers.⁶³ Many of them have been described as “Persian brocades” because of their marked Sasanian motifs.⁶⁴ Burial inventories and commercial contracts bearing the name “Persian brocade” were also unearthed alongside these physical remains.⁶⁵

Unlike Chinese brocades, which feature organic patterns and swirling compositions (Fig.1.21), “Persian brocades” boast emblematic structure and figural images (Fig.1.20). The trademark of “Persian brocades,” as is widely acknowledged, is the pearl roundel or linked pearl pattern.⁶⁶ Arranged in an orderly fashion across the textile surface, these pearl roundels function

⁶⁰ Ibid., 115-135.

⁶¹ Ibid., 141. Jiang, *Dunhuang Tulufan*, 71-83.

⁶² Ma Jianchun 马建春, *Dashi, Xiyu yu gudai Zhongguo* 大食西域与古代中国 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008), 400.

⁶³ Xia, “Xijiang xin faxian;” Zhao Feng and Le Wang, *Dunhuang sichou yu sichou zhilu* 敦煌丝绸与丝绸之路 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009); Huo Wei 霍巍, “Yipi liusan haiwai de Tubo wenwu de chubu kaocha 一批流散海外的吐蕃文物的初步考察,” *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 5 (2007): 27-41.

⁶⁴ Jiang, *Dunhuang Tulufan*, 71-83; A.D.H. Bivar, “Sasanian Iconography on Textiles and Seals,” in Schorta, Regula ed., *Central Asian Textiles and Their Contexts in the Early Middle Ages* (Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung, 2006), 9-21.

⁶⁵ Ibid.; Zhao, *Jincheng*, 140.

⁶⁶ Michael Meister, “The Pearl Roundel in Chinese Textile Design,” *Ars Orientalis* 8(1970): 255–267.

as basic framing units for a great variety of figural motifs, ranging from a quartet of lion-hunting kings on horseback to a simple disembodied boar's head. The most common of such motifs are facing birds and animals (Fig.1.20). These motifs hark back to Persian and Greco-Roman traditions, whose artistic parallels can be widely found on metalwork and stone carvings in the Sasanian and Byzantine territories.⁶⁷ To Chinese audiences, these motifs possessed an unequivocally exotic taste.⁶⁸

As archaeological discoveries of textiles on the Silk Road keep increasing, the term “Persian brocade” proves to be largely a misnomer. Based on technical analysis and textual evidence, many silk experts have concluded that the great majority of “Persian brocades” discovered on the Silk Road were in fact manufactured by Sogdian weavers in Central Asia and China, rather than produced in Sasanian Persia.⁶⁹ As the most active international merchants of the sixth century, Sogdians not only brought Sasanian brocades to China but also reproduced the textile on their own and introduced Chinese craftsmen to the Western weaving technique, characterized by weft-faced compounds in contrast to the Chinese warp-faced structure.⁷⁰ The

⁶⁷ Matteo Compareti, “Ancient Iranian Decorative Textile: New Evidence from Archaeological Investigations and Private Collections,” *The Silk Road* 13 (2015): 36-45.

⁶⁸ Linked-pearl patterns appeared in Chinese art as early as the Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD), but they are seldom combined with figurative images like those on Persian brocades.

⁶⁹ During the late eighth and early ninth centuries, Sogdians were known for producing a type of brocade called Zantaniji, named after the place of its production, see D. G. Shepherd and Walter Henning, “Zandaniji Identified” in *Aus der Welt der islamischen Kunst: Festschrift für E. Kuhnel* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann., 1959), 15- 40. For Sogdian brocades, see also, Arthur Upham Pope and Phyllis Ackerman eds., *A Survey of Persian Art: From Prehistoric Times to the Present* (Oxford University Press, 1964), 702-703. Jiang boqin suggests using “Sogdian brocades” instead of the historical term “Persian brocade;” however, Zhao Feng notes that the term “Sogdian brocade” never appeared in any historical texts, see Jiang, *Dunhuang Tulufan*, 206 ; Zhao, *Jincheng*, 140-44. Angela Sheng argues that many Sogdian brocades were produced in Northwest China, see “Innovations in Textile Techniques on China's Northwest Frontier, 500 - 700 AD,” *Asia Major* 2 (1998): 153.

⁷⁰ Mariachiara Gasparini, “A Mathematic Expression of Art: Sino-Iranian and Uighur Textile Interaction and the Turfan Textile Collection in Berlin,” *Transcultural Studies* 1 (2014): 141.

emergence and popularity of “Persian brocades” in China was therefore an achievement of the Sogdians, whose creation exerted a far-reaching impact on Chinese textile production.

“Persian brocades” produced by Sogdians in China fuse Sasanian and Greco-roman motifs with Chinese elements, exhibiting a cosmopolitan quality unprecedented in Chinese art history. The most famous example in point is a large brocade banner, datable to the Sui and Early Tang Dynasties (581-712 CE) and now preserved in the Temple of Horyu-ji at Nara, Japan (Fig.1.22).⁷¹ The magnificent composition of this work combines pearl roundels with Sasanian king hunting on the back of Pegasus.⁷² The jumping lions, however, are rendered in typical Chinese foo-dog fashion, deprived of the ferocity possessed by their western prototypes.⁷³ Moreover, the hips of the Pegasus are stamped with archaic Chinese characters for “mountain” (*shan*) and “auspicious” (*ji*), whose origin can be traced to bronze inscriptions of the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BC).⁷⁴ Such meticulous integration of different cultural symbols, in this case Byzantine, Sasanian and Chinese, represents a recurrent pattern in Chinese Sogdian art, which can be fittingly described as a cultural cosmopolitanism.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Shoshin Kuwayama 桑山正進, “Horyu-ji shiki shishikari monkin no seisaku nendai 法隆寺四騎獅子狩文錦の製作年代,” in *Egami Namio Kyoju koki kinen ronshu* 江上波夫教授古稀記念論集 (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1976), 137-161; Yokohari Kazuko, “The Horyu-ji Lion-hunting Silk and Related Silks,” in Schorta, *Central Asian Textiles*, 155-173.

⁷² See Richard Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World: Three Modes of Artistic Influence* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 11-17.

⁷³ Cai Hongsheng 蔡鴻生, “Xiyu shizi de huahua xingtai 西域獅子的華化形態,” in Cheng Peikai ed., *Xiyu: Zhongwai wenming jiaoliu de zhongzhuanzhan* 西域：中外文明交流的中轉站 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong City University Press, 2009), 25-39.

⁷⁴ Wu Shan 吳山 ed., *Zhongguo lidai zhuangshi wenyang vol.2* 中国历代装饰纹样 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), 101-104, 440-441.

⁷⁵ Scholars are using different terms to describe Chinese Sogdian art, such as cultural or religious diversity, multiculturalism, or cultural hybridity. However, compared to the term “cosmopolitanism,” none of them can better convey Sogdian merchants’ active and creative engagement with all the major cultures and religions on the Silk Road. For recent studies of cosmopolitanism, see Zlatko Skrbis and Ian Woodward, *Cosmopolitanism: Uses of the Idea*

The cultural cosmopolitanism exemplified by the Horyu-ji brocade may well reflect Sogdian migrants' knowledge of major artistic traditions on the Silk Road. In the ancient world, portable precious objects facilitated the dissemination of styles and motifs.⁷⁶ As global traders during the sixth century, Sogdian merchants built an encyclopedic collection of luxury items from major empires of the time.⁷⁷ In the 1980s and 1990s, archaeologists at Guyuan, a strategic city connecting the Silk Road and Chinese heartland, uncovered the tombs of General Shi Wushe (610), the descendant of a Sogdian merchant family, and his Chinese superiors General Li Xian (504-569 CE) and General Tian Hong (511-575 CE).⁷⁸ In these tombs, they found Byzantine gold and Sasanian silver coins, a Sasanian silver ewer decorated with the Judgment of Paris (Fig.1.23), Sasanian glass bowls, and a Roman-style gold ring engraved with a dancing figure.⁷⁹ These western objects offer us a rare glimpse into Sogdian merchants' possessions, revealing the diverse thematic and stylistic sources of Sogdian art.

(London: Sage, 2013); Nikos Papastergiadis, *Cosmopolitanism and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

⁷⁶ In her recent book, Marian H. Feldman conducts a thorough study on the significance of portable luxury objects in facilitating cultural exchanges, see *Diplomacy by Design: Luxury Arts and an "International Style" in the Ancient Near East, 1400-1200 BCE* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁷⁷ In Chinese folktales, Sogdian merchants are often portrayed as connoisseurs of precious objects, celebrated for their unusual talent in identifying seemingly worthless treasures. See Cheng Qiang 程蔷, *Zhongguo shibao chuanshuo yanjiu* 中国识宝传说研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1986), 69-132.

⁷⁸ Ningxia huizu zizhiqu bowuguan and Ningxia Guyuan bowuguan 宁夏回族自治区博物馆 宁夏固原博物馆, "Ningxia Guyuan Beizhou Li Xian fufu mu fajue baogao 宁夏固原北周李贤夫妇墓发掘简报" *Wenwu* 11 (1985):1 -20; Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo and Ningxia Guyuan bowuguan, "Ningxia Guyuan Sui Shi Shewu fajue jianbao 宁夏固原隋史射勿墓发掘简报" *Wenwu* 10 (1992): 15 – 22; Yuanzhou lianhe kaogu dui 原州联合考古队, *Bei Zhou Tian Hong mu* 北周田弘墓 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2009).

⁷⁹ These objects were highlights in several important exhibitions. See Watt and Harper eds., *China: Dawn of a Golden Age*; A.L. Juliano and J. Lerner eds., *Monks and Merchants: Silk Road Treasures from Northwest China Gansu and Ningxia, 4th -7th Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., with the Asia Society, 2002).

Many Sogdian artists came from merchant families and may have enjoyed the opportunity to familiarize themselves with different artistic traditions. It was through these artists that Sogdian cosmopolitanism found a visual expression.⁸⁰ According to a recent study by Zhao Feng, it is very likely that the Horyu-ji brocade banner was created by He Chou, the grandson of an illustrious Sogdian migrant merchant.⁸¹ It is said that He was commissioned by Emperor Wendi to replicate a gold brocade garment from the Sasanian Empire, and the quality of his reproduction even surpassed its prototype.⁸² From his biography in the dynastic history of the Sui, we know that He was a connoisseur of antique objects and the master of a plethora of crafts, including textiles, glass, ceramics, mechanics and even architecture.⁸³ With his superb and versatile artistic skills, He was promoted to Minister of Works, who played a decisive part in the innovation of textile craft during the Sui Dynasty (581-618 CE).⁸⁴ In his biography, He was also praised for his imitation of glass using celadon wares, again testifying to the artist's talent in mediating eastern and western artistic traditions.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Sogdian merchants were often directly involved into textile production. In the *Chaoye qianzai* 朝野僉載, or "Draft notes from the court and the country," a collection of stories written by Zhang Zhuo 張鷟 during the early or high Tang period (618-739 CE), the author mentions a Sogdian merchant called He Mingyuan, who owned a textile workshop equipped with five hundred looms. Jiang Boqi suggests that He Mingyuan represents the upper class of Sogdian merchant community, see "Sabao fu zhidu yuanliu lunlue."

⁸¹ Zhao Feng 赵丰, "Tangxi yima weijin yu He Chou fangzhi bosijin wenwu 唐系翼马纬锦与何稠仿制波斯锦文物" *Wenwu* 3 (2010): 71-83.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ It is also said that He Chou's father was an excellent jade carver. Li Yangshou 李延寿, *Beishi* 北史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003).

⁸⁴ Zhao, "Tangxi yima," 71-83. Comparing the Horyu-ji brocade with extant examples of "Persian brocades," Zhao Feng has noted that it indeed possesses a better quality and more intricate composition, thus implying its provenance in the imperial workshop.

⁸⁵ Many celadon wares shaped and decorated as glass vessels were found in sixth-century tombs in North China, attesting to He's innovation. See Xie, *Liuchao taoci*, 191-229.

Sogdian cosmopolitanism may initially have been forged by Sogdian merchants as a mercantile strategy for a global market, as attested by the expansive circulation of “Persian brocades” on the Silk Road. However, it eventually evolved into a commitment to diverse cultural traditions on the Silk Road, leading to a self-perception to which the term “world citizen” can properly apply.⁸⁶ To understand this, we need to look at Sogdian merchants’ stone sarcophagi and mortuary couches.⁸⁷ Buried deeply underground, these funerary objects offer us a rare glimpse into the inner world of Chinese Sogdians. The foremost example is the house-shaped sarcophagus of Lord Shi, a *sabao* or official leader of the Sogdian migrant community (Fig.1.24).⁸⁸ The epitaph tells us that Lord Shi emigrated from the Central Asian state of Shi (*Kashana*), assumed his official position in Liangzhou in Norwest China, and died in Chang’an, the capital city of the Northern Zhou Dynasty in the Chinese heartland.⁸⁹ Lord Shi’s epic journey is illustrated on the sarcophagus with a succession of scenes alternating between settling and traveling. In these scenes, scholars have identified motifs of Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. The shifting landscapes and heterogeneous cultural elements were thus incorporated into a coherent narrative about Lord Shi’s life, a life defined by an unequivocally cosmopolitan perspective.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ The usage of “world citizen” here follows Skribis and Woodward’s interpretation, in which they posit that the term indicates “a degree of detachment from the immediate political and cultural context as well as proposing a sense of openness towards the universal.” Skrbis and Woodward, *Cosmopolitanism*, 2.

⁸⁷ It is argued that stone mortuary furniture offered Chinese Sogdians a way to reconcile their own burial customs, which forbade earth burial, with Chinese mortuary tradition. See Judith Lerner, “Aspects of Assimilation.”

⁸⁸ Shi Jun or Lord Shi was buried with his wife in Chang’an (today’s Xi’an in Shaanxi Province) in 581 CE. His Sogdian name is Wirkak. For the report on the excavation of this tomb, see Yang and Shaanxi Sheng kaogu yanjiusuo, *Bei Zhou Shi Jun mu*.

⁸⁹ For the bilingual epitaph of Lord Shi, see Yang, *Bei Zhou Shi Jun mu*, 293-310.

⁹⁰ For the heterogeneous nature of the iconography on the sarcophagus, see Grenet, “Religious Diversity among Sogdian Merchants.” As Angela Sheng puts it, “the Sogdian artistic uniqueness

A similar case of Sogdian cosmopolitanism can be found in a mortuary stone couch uncovered in today's Anyang region of central China (Fig. 1.25).⁹¹ Like the Shi Jun sarcophagus, the couch used to be occupied by a Sogdian *sabao* leader, whose name is unknown due to the loss of the tombstone.⁹² In addition to a pair of gateposts, shaped like *que*, or Chinese timber gate towers, the couch mimics an indigenous type of wooden furniture, with a raised platform enclosed by a paneled screen.⁹³ The base of the couch is carved with Buddhist motifs such as the giant luminous pearl and various guardian figures. In spite of these Buddhist and indigenous Chinese elements, engraved on the screen of the couch are domestic and Zoroastrian ceremonial scenes centering on the Sogdian leader and his wife, attired in distinctive Central Asian garb decorated with linked pearl patterns (Fig. 1.26).⁹⁴ These multiple cultural references again speak to the Sogdian leader's cosmopolitan life.

lies in the simultaneous presentation of different cultural motifs." See "Innovations in Textile Techniques," 151. For the pictorial biography of Lord Shi, see Dien, "The Tomb of the Sogdian Master Shi." In chapter two, I suggest that the monument is a hybrid structure of a sacrificial shrine for ancestor worship and a "heavenly palace" for the dead soul.

⁹¹ The stone couch was first closely studied by Gustina Scaglia, see "Central Asians on a Northern Ch'i Gate Shrine." The surviving parts of the couch consist of three screen panels, two gateposts and three base panels. They are preserved in different countries across the world: two screen panels in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, one in the Musée Guimet in Paris, the gateposts in the Museum of East Asian Art Cologne and the base panels in the Freer and Sackler Galleries, Washington, DC. In Lin Sheng-chih's study, the author identifies the indigenous source of the motifs and compositions. See "Stone Funerary Couches of the Late Northern Dynasties Period."

⁹² The official title granted by the Chinese government to these immigrant leaders is called "Sabao." For the origin and meaning of the term, see Rong Xinjiang, "Sabao or Sabo: Sogdian Caravan Leaders in the Wall-Paintings in Buddhist Caves," in E. de la Vaissière and E. Trombert eds. *Les Sogdiens en Chine* (Paris, 2005), 207-230.

⁹³ For a discussion of the form of such screen couches, see Pearlstein, "Pictorial Stones from Chinese Tombs."

⁹⁴ In Chinese couches, the borders of the screen were engraved with fake joints recalling panels mounted on wooden frames, and the thin-line engravings of the images reflect the calligraphic brushwork of traditional Chinese painting, especially appreciated by the cultured elite of the time.

What is most special about the Anyang couch is that the physical properties of “Persian brocades” are translated into its stone surfaces, giving its cosmopolitan expression a textile veneer. Notably, linked pearls cover the entire visible surface of the screen, decorating the Sogdian costumes, the horse saddles and the architectural background. Even the border of each panel of the screen is filled with linked pearls (Fig.1.26). Remember that these images were carved in *bas relief* and initially brilliantly colored and gilded, which enhances their brocade-like effect.⁹⁵ In this case, “Persian brocades” become as a visual device for the designer of the Anyang couch to interweave disparate cultural elements and material properties into a single piece of fabric.

Part Two: Brocade-Body Composite and Merchant Identity

The permeating linked-pearl patterns and the resultant brocade-like effect distinguish the Anyang couch from most funerary stone equipment from the sixth century.⁹⁶ Considering Sogdians’ leading role in creating “Persian brocades,” it is tempting to take linked-pearl patterns as a token of Sogdian ethnic and cultural identity.⁹⁷ However, two facts seem to work against this observation. First, as discussed above, “Persian brocade” was a global product whose wide popularity among different peoples across Eurasia makes it difficult to link the textile

⁹⁵ The Horyu-ji banner is 250 cm long and 134 cm wide. The screen is 232 cm long and 63.8 cm high. So the screen might have been intended to evoke the expression of a brocade banner.

⁹⁶ A similar treatment can be seen on another Sogdian stone couch preserved in the Miho Museum, Japan.

⁹⁷ Jiang Boqin 姜伯勤, “Anyang Beiqi shiguanchuang huaxiangshi yu ruhua Suteran de Xianjiao meishu 安阳北齐石棺床画像石与入华粟特人的袄教美术,” in *Zhongguo Xianjiao yishushi*, 51-62; Lin, “Stone Funerary Couches,” 539; Sha Wutian 沙武田, “Mogaoku di 322 ku tuxiang de hufeng yinsu— jiantan dongku gongdezhu de Sute jiuxing huren shuxing 莫高窟第 322 窟图像的胡风因素—兼谈洞窟功德主的粟特九姓胡人属性,” *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 3 (2011): 71-96.

exclusively to Sogdian identity. The most notable historical figure clad in “Persian brocade,” for example, is in fact a Tibetan envoy to China called Gar Tongtsen (Fig. 1.27). In *Emperor Taizong in a Sedan Chair*, an acclaimed work by the court painter Yan Liben (600-673 CE), the Tang emperor Li Shimin (598-649 CE) is holding an audience in his court with Gar Tongtsen. Although rendered smaller than the Chinese emperor and his ministers, Gar Tongtsen is evidently distinguished by the pearl roundels on his clothing, an indicator of the material of “Persian brocade.” Indeed, the largest corpus of “Persian brocades” unearthed in recent decades came from Tibetan royal mausoleums in today’s Qinghai Province.⁹⁸

Second, thanks to the reputation of “Persian brocades,” linked-pearl patterns appeared on both Sogdian and non-Sogdian mortuary stones, thus becoming a symbol of status and prestige. In 1964, archaeologists uncovered a sarcophagus at Sanyuan (Shaanxi Province). The accompanying tombstone informs us that the tomb owner was an eminent high-ranking official called Li He (506-582 CE).⁹⁹ According to Luo Xin’s reading of the epitaph, Li was not a Han Chinese; his ancestors might be *ji hu*, a Hun people who migrated to China from the Mongolian steppes.¹⁰⁰ However, the overall decoration of the sarcophagus comprises native Chinese motifs conventionally associated with political privilege, such as the deities of the cardinal directions, immortals soaring amid rolling clouds, and guardian warriors.¹⁰¹ Among these motifs we see

⁹⁸ Sadly, most discoveries of the textiles surfaced through tomb robbery. See Huo, “Yipi liusan haiwai de Tubo wenwu,” 27-41; Xu Xinguo, “The Discovery, Excavation, and Study of Tubo (Tibetan) Tombs in Dulan County, Qinghai,” in Schorta, *Central Asian Textiles*, 265-290. A systematic survey of this corpus of material has yet to be done.

⁹⁹ Patricia Karetzky, “The Engraved Designs on the Late Sixth Century Sarcophagus of Li Ho,” *Artibus Asiae* 47 (1986): 81-106. Li’s biography is included in the official historical books *Zhou shu* (Book of Zhou Dynasty) and *Bei shi* (History of the Northern Dynasties).

¹⁰⁰ Luo Xin and Ye Wei 罗新 叶炜, *Xinchu Wei Jin Nanbei chao muzhi shuzheng* 新出魏晋南北朝墓志疏证 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), 325-330.

¹⁰¹ Karetzky, “The Engraved Designs,” 81-106.

some friezes composed of pearl-roundel patterns, adorning the bottom edge of the front panel, and the border and central axis of the coffin lid (Fig.1.28).¹⁰²

Bearing in mind the abovementioned two facts, namely the popularity of “Persian Brocades” among different ethnic groups and the esteem of linked-pearl patterns as a symbol of political prestige, can we still take the brocade-like effect of the Anyang couch as an expression of the Sogdian identity? To address these questions, we need to take into account the body, an often overlooked factor in the discussion of the dynamics between textiles and identity.¹⁰³ The following discussion will demonstrate that silk textiles – “Persian brocades” in particular – are frequently bound up with the body in Sogdian art, forming a visual composite of body and textile, which characterizes a distinctive “textile identity” of the Sogdian merchant community.

¹⁰² Some scholars argue that this exotic addition might have something to do with Li He’s non-Han background. Indeed, among Chinese nobles, “Persian brocades” seem to be less prestigious than Chinese products, mainly because of their foreign associations. Sometimes “Persian brocades” were even deliberately adopted by Chinese artists to differentiate foreigners from native Chinese. The best case in point comes from paintings in the tomb of Xu Xianxiu, an eminent Chinese general in the Northern Qi state (550-577 CE). In this tomb, the mural painting depicts the deceased couple with their grand retinue, all dressed in gorgeous costumes. Noteworthy is that pearl roundel patterns appear only on the skirts of four female attendants and the horse saddles. Most tellingly, while the roundels embellishing the horse saddles and the foreign-looking servant have retained their exotic appearance with frontal human faces, those decorating the two Chinese attendants, who flank the deceased couple, were highly Sinicized, rendered to be like Chinese floral patterns. In this case, “Persian brocades” might probably be utilized to label a foreign figure and visually define the hierarchy between the Chinese lord and his alien servant. (Fig.1.29) Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo and Taiyuan shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 山西省考古研究所 太原市文物考古研究所, “Taiyuan Beiqi Xu Xianxiu mu fajue baogao 太原北齐徐显秀墓发掘简报” *Wenwu* 10 (2003): 4–40.

¹⁰³ The interaction between textiles and identity is a heated topic today. The latest two exhibitions on this topic took place at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World (New York City) and the Textile Museum (Washington D.C.). See Thelma K. Thomas *et al.* eds., *Designing Identity: The Power of Textiles in Late Antiquity* (New York: Institute for the Study of the Ancient World; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Sumru Belger Krody ed., *Unraveling Identity: Our Textiles, Our Stories* (Washington D.C.: Textile Museum, 2015).

To begin with, as dealers, transporters, and manufacturers of silk textiles, Chinese Sogdians kept an intimate physical bond with this precious material. Many commercial contracts unearthed from Northwest China attest to the active role Sogdians played in silk transactions and transportation.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, in paintings and pottery figurines from medieval China, Sogdian merchants are typically represented as traveling with bolts of silk (Fig.1.30).¹⁰⁵ Such textual and visual evidence demonstrates that the bond between Sogdian merchants and silk was more than just economic and commercial; it was bodily and physical contact on a daily basis, which involved constant handling of this luxury material – weaving it on looms, rolling them into bolts, tailoring them into dresses, handing them to their clients and wearing them on important occasions.

Among various silk textiles, “Persian brocades” played a central part in Sogdian lives. Little surprise that Sogdian painters treated them as an extension of the physical body, as seen in the mural painting (*circa* seventh century CE) at the court of Afrasiab, located at the capital of the ancient Sogdian state of Samarkand in Central Asia.¹⁰⁶ In a procession of envoys from some neighboring state of Samarkand, all the figures are dressed with “Persian brocades (Fig.1.31)”

¹⁰⁴ Valerie Hanson, *The Silk Road: A New History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 115-119; Angela Sheng has noted Sogdians’ deep involvement in the raw silk transaction, “Innovations in Textile Techniques,” 133.

¹⁰⁵ Zhang Qingjie 张庆捷, “Beichao Suitang de hushing yong, hushing tu yu hushing wenshu 北朝隋唐的胡商俑、胡商图与胡商文书,” in Rong Xinjiang and Li Xiaocong eds., *Zhongwai guanxi shi: xinshiliao yu xinwenti* 中外关系史: 新史料与新问题 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2004), 173 -203.

¹⁰⁶ For mural paintings at Afrasiab, see Matteo Compareti, “AFRĀSĪĀB ii. Wall Paintings,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, I/6, p. 577, available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/afrasiab-ii-wall-paintings-2> (accessed online on 28 July 2011). Brocade patterns permeate mural paintings at Afrasiab, see Valentina I. Raspopova, “Textiles Represented in Sogdian Murals,” in Schorta, *Central Asian Textiles*, 61-73.

and one figure, possibly a merchant, is holding a bolt composed of the same textile material.¹⁰⁷

Noteworthy is that the boundary between his dress and the brocade in his hands seems to be deliberately blurred, as both are characterized by prominent pearl roundels of similar sizes.

Visually, the brocade bolt becomes part of his dressed body, and his body is accentuated as a brocade-like entity. Although the exact identity of this figure cannot be confirmed, the peculiar way in which the Sogdian painters rendered “Persian brocades” may reflect their unique perception of the relationship between their bodies and silk textiles.

Like the brocade bolt in the hands of the envoy, the brocade screen of the Anyang couch might also have been conceived as an extension of the dead body. In China, “Persian brocades” have mostly survived in tombs, sometimes assuming explicit mortuary functions. For example, in the Astana cemetery at Gaochang, a prosperous multiethnic settlement on the Silk Road, “Persian brocades” were found as face covers for the deceased (Fig.1.32).¹⁰⁸ In an unearthed inventory of grave goods, one such cover is called “*Posi jin mian yi*” or “Persian-brocade face dress.”¹⁰⁹ Many of these face covers could have belonged to Sogdian settlers at Gaochang. Given the ostentatious imitation of “Persian brocades” on the Anyang couch, it is possible that the

¹⁰⁷ While most scholars identify these figures as emissaries from the neighboring Chaghaniyan kingdom, Markus Mode argues that the first figure in the procession is a Sasanian king and those following him are either Sasanian envoys or those from other states. See I. Arzhantseva, and O. Inevatkina, “Afrasiab Wall-Paintings Revisited: New Discoveries Twenty-five Years Old,” in M. Compareti and E. de La Vaissière eds. *Royal Nawrūz in Samarkand: Acts of the Conference Held in Venice on the Pre-Islamic Afrāsyāb Painting* (Rome, 2006), 185-211; I. Arzhantseva, “Iranian People depicted in Afrasiab Wall Painting (7th century AD),” in Antonio Panaino and Andrea Piras eds., *Proceedings of the Fifth European Conference of Iranian Studies Ravenna, 2003* (Milan: Mimesis, 2005), 307-317; Markus Mode, *Court Art of Sogdian Samarkand in the 7th Century AD: Some Remarks to an Old Problem - A Web Publication*, 2002, available <http://www.orientarch.uni-halle.de/ca/afras/general.htm> (accessed 14 April 2009).

¹⁰⁸ Krishna Riboud, “Some Remarks on the Face-covers (Fu- Mien) Discovered in the Tombs of Astana,” *Oriental Art* 4 (1977): 438-54.

¹⁰⁹ It was found in Tang tomb no. 15 of a person called named Tang Chuanghai at Astana. See Zhao, *Jincheng*, 141.

missing body was originally dressed or shrouded with the same type of textile.¹¹⁰ In addition, considering the proximity of the screen and the body, it suffices to say that the brocade-like screen was intended as an extension of the body of the Sogdian occupant of the couch. The screen and his body therefore formed a brocade-body unity recalling the envoy holding a bolt of brocade in the Afrasiab painting.

Sogdian artists and merchants were active participants in Buddhist activities in China during the sixth century.¹¹¹ In Sogdian Buddhist art, the connection between silk and the body found an ontological expression, which merges silk and body into a single undifferentiated entity. This takes form in the “Cao Family Style,” one of the most acclaimed innovations in Chinese art history. The namesake of the “Cao Family Style” is Cao Zhongda, a Sogdian migrant contemporary with He Chou.¹¹² The Buddhist icons that Cao Zhongda painted were celebrated for their clinging drapery, which, according to historical texts, revealed the body shape as if the robe were drenched in water.¹¹³ None of Cao’s works have survived, but his eponymous style

¹¹⁰ Archaeological evidence indicates that occupants of stone mortuary couches were dressed or shrouded. One example comes from the tomb of a Sogdian migrant named Kang Ye, in which traces of Chinese brocades were found with Kang’s skeletal remains. The adoption of Chinese brocades seems to mirror Kang’s portrait in Chinese-style dress on the screen. See Xi’an shi wenwu baohu kaogusuo, “Xi’an Beizhou Kang Ye mu.” Appearing first in the sixth century, stone couches functioned as a *guan* or inter coffin, a conventional form of mortuary furniture in Chinese tradition. The *guan* coffin is regarded as an outfit of the deceased in Confucian ritual texts. In *Li ji* or *The Book of Rites*, there is even a specific term, *jiu*, coined to describe a coffin with the corpse inside, treating the two as parts of an integrated whole. Although the corpse on the Anyang couch has disappeared without a trace, the mortuary context turned the couch into an integral part or even a surrogate of the dead body. For the significance of the *guan* coffin, see Wu Hung, *The Art of the Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2010), 128.

¹¹¹ See Mariko Namba Walter, “Sogdians and Buddhism,” *Sino-Platonic Papers* 174 (2006).

¹¹² The life of Cao Zhongda and the Cao Family style are recorded in *Li dai ming hua ji* (Records of Famous Paintings of All the Dynasties) written in 847 CE by Zhang Yanyuan. For the English translation, see William Acker ed. and trans., *Some Tang and Pre-Tang Texts* (Brill, 1954), 189-194.

¹¹³ Ibid.

can be discerned in many paintings and sculptures on the Silk Road, which leads Jiang Boqin to propose that the artist belonged to a Sogdian school widely active in China during the sixth century.¹¹⁴

While many scholars trace the origin of “Cao Family style” to the Gupta art of India, later adopted by Sogdian artists and then spread to China, some suggest that the diaphanous effect of the drapery, the hallmark of “Cao Family Style,” might also have been intended to evoke the supple quality of silk.¹¹⁵ In light of Cao Zhongda’s migrant background, it is likely that “Cao Family Style” is referring to silk’s material attributes. After all, silk had been one of the most popular forms of donation in Chinese Buddhism, especially among Sogdian merchants along the Silk Road.¹¹⁶ On the other hand, silk merchants also constituted a major donor group for Buddhism. At Longmen (Henan Province), two late-seventh-century cave chapels were commissioned exclusively by silk guilds. The names of several Sogdian merchants are included in the votive inscriptions.¹¹⁷

Buddhist statues, when dressed with “Persian Brocades” in “Cao Family Style,” become an ontological manifestation of the brocade-body unity featuring Sogdian art. A good example can be found in Cave 420 at Dunhuang (Fig.1.33). Constructed during the late sixth or early

¹¹⁴ Jiang Boqin 姜伯勤, *Dunhuang yishu zongjiao yu liyue wenming* 敦煌艺术宗教与礼乐文明 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1996), 125-156.

¹¹⁵ Jin Weinuo 金维诺, “Nanliang yu Beiqi zaixiang de chengjiu yu yingxiang 南梁与北齐造像的成就与影响,” in *Yishushi yanjiu vol.1* (Guangzhou: Zhongshan daxue chubanshe, 1999), 41-46; Su Bai, “Sculpture of the Northern Qi Dynasty and Its Stylistic Models,” in Lukas Nickel, ed. *Return of the Buddha: The Qingzhou Discoveries* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002), 54-59; Wang Renbo 王仁波, “Ribei Falong si fojiao zaixiang yishu yuanliu de tansuo 日本法隆寺佛教造像艺术源流的探索,” *Shanghai bowuguan jikan* 8 (2000): 260.

¹¹⁶ Liu Xinru, *Silk and Religion: An Exploration of Material Life and the Thought of People, AD 600-1200* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 49-73; John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 98-100.

¹¹⁷ Chang Qing 常青, “Longmen shiku ‘Beishi caibo hang Jingtutang’ 龙门石窟北齐彩帛行净土堂,” *Wenwu* 8 (1991): 66-73.

seventh century, the single-chambered chapel represents an array of caves, which, according to Jiang Boqin and Sha Wutian's studies, might have been sponsored by local Sogdians. In Cave 420, the "Persian brocade" was rendered in "Cao Family Style" to reveal the feminine contour of the body of the Bodhisattva. If this luxury textile extends the dressed body on the Afrasiab painting and the shrouded body on the Anyang couch, in the Dunhuang cave it literally transforms to become the body of the deities. Moreover, linked pearl patterns not only appear on the dress of the Bodhisattvas, but also pervade the entire cave, filling the borders of the walls, niches and altars. These patterns render the caves as if they were covered with "Persian brocades," which would have enclosed the audience who came inside to worship the Buddha.¹¹⁸

Devised by Sogdian artists, the brocade-body composites might have accorded Sogdian migrants, especially the merchants, a visual trope to articulate a shared "textile identity," asserting their communal distinction compatible with a cosmopolitan vision of the world. It is noteworthy that Afrasiab, Dunhuang and Anyang outline the major trajectory of the migration of Sogdian merchants, who traveled between their homeland and central China along the Silk Road. In this regard, the Afrasiab painting, Dunhuang statues, and the Anyang couch broadly represent the Sogdians' political, religious, and mortuary art. As a prominent feature of these Sogdian arts, the brocade-body composite reflects a heightened sense of the relationship between body and physical properties of silk. It is through this corporeal interaction that Sogdian artists translated "Persian brocades" into an expression of Sogdian identity.

¹¹⁸ Sha Wutian, "Mogaoku di 322 ku," 71-96; Jiang, *Dunhuang yishu*, 125 -156. For Sogdian migrants in Dunhuang, see Rong Xinjing, Imre Galambos trans., *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang* (Brill, 2013), 330-332.

Part Three: Silk Textile and Selfhood

In ritual and religious art of Sogdian merchants, portraits and representations of major aspects of their daily life play an important part. Whereas these images enhance Sogdian merchants' communal identity, they also serve to express their pronounced sense of self.¹¹⁹ Admittedly, portraits and life scenes of Sogdian merchants focus on a limited range of common motifs such as traveling, banqueting and outdoor excursions, which speak to the shared experiences of Sogdian merchants as a group.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, these images demonstrate considerable variations in styles, details and pictorial narratives to suggest a high extent of individuality. We should also remember that in the ritual and funerary contexts of these images, the intended audience comprised a private circle of friends, family members, and usually the subjects of the portraits themselves. To such an audience, the portraits and life scenes would have been inextricably related to personal memories and a sense of selfhood.¹²¹

Given the importance of silk in Sogdians' life, it is little wonder that textiles became a vehicle for Sogdian merchants' self-expression. The first example is a Buddha statue rendered in "Cao Family style." (Fig. 1.34) Sogdian donors of the statue had their images painted on the silk robe of the Buddha, therefore projecting their individuality into the karmic future. Dating from the latter half of the sixth century, this standing statue was unearthed in the precinct of a

¹¹⁹ Lord Shi's sarcophagus is a good case in point. See Dien, "The Tomb of the Sogdian Master Shi," 42-50; Grenet Frantz and Pénélope Riboud, "A Reflection of the Hepthalite Empire: The Biographical Narrative in the Reliefs of the Tomb of the Sabao Wirkak (494-579)," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 17 (2003):133-143.

¹²⁰ Frank Grenet summarizes these representations as the "self-images of the Sogdians," see "The Self-image of the Sogdians," 123-40. Rong Xinjiang takes them as representations of *sabao* leaders' lives, see "The Illustrative Sequence on An Jia's Screen: A Depiction of the Daily Life of a Sabao," *Orientalism* 10 (2001): 54-61.

¹²¹ In his study of an Eastern-Han (8 -220CE) stone shrine erected in the family cemetery of Wu Liang, Wu Hung talks about the familial nature of stone funerary objects. See *The Wu Liang Shrine*, 167-186 .

Buddhist temple at Qingzhou, a major city in the Northern Qi with a considerable Sogdian presence.¹²² Scholars have long been fascinated by five Sogdians portrayed on this Buddha statue.¹²³ Clad in characteristic Sogdian dress and bearing a strong Central Asian yet highly individualized physiognomy, these figures stand elegantly on both sides of a Buddhist assembly depicted in the center of the Buddha's chest. In a recent study, Qiu Zhongming proposes that these Sogdians are local merchants who commissioned the statue.¹²⁴ They might have envisioned themselves participating in the preaching of the future Buddha.

In the early medieval period, however, donor images seldom appear on the body of the Buddha. Instead, they are depicted on the pedestals of Buddhist statues, a humble position appropriate for mortals. Portraying themselves on the robe of the statue seems to indicate that these Sogdian donors identify their own bodies with the "silk body" of the Buddha. In fact, as Buddhist art scholar Katherine Tsiang has pointed out, this type of free-standing Buddha statue emerged from the burgeoning belief in universal Buddhahood: namely, that everyone can become a Buddha.¹²⁵ This aspiration is often uttered in votive inscriptions that read:

¹²² Qiu Zhongming 邱忠鸣, "Nianhua de huren: you beiqi qingzhou foyi huren huaxiang guankui zhonggu sichou zhilu shang de Sute shangdui" 拈花的胡人：由北齐青州佛衣胡人画像管窥中古丝绸之路上的粟特商队(forthcoming).

¹²³ The best known group comes from a buried crypt at the Longxing Temple in Qingzhou, Shandong. See Nickel, *Return of the Buddha*.

¹²⁴ Zhang Zong has identified this statue as the Cosmic Buddha, see "Lushena fajie renzhongxiang, caihui sengni xiang 卢舍那法界人中像彩绘僧尼像," in *Qin Qingzhou bowuguan, Qingzhou Longxing si fojiao zaixiang yishu* 青州龙兴寺佛教造像艺术 (Jinan: Shangdong meishu chubanshe, 1999), 110-137.

¹²⁵ Katherine Tsiang, "Resolve to Become a Buddha (*Chengfo*): Changing Aspirations and Imagery in Sixth-century Chinese Buddhism," *Early Medieval China*, 13-14 (2008):115-169.

We also wish that all members of the Buddhist society and others of all times will meet the Buddha and hear the dharma, that their resolve to follow the way will increase daily and that all become Buddhas simultaneously.¹²⁶

To the Sogdian donors, the standing Buddha statue they commissioned could have well symbolized the body into which they aspired to be incarnated in the karmic future. Juxtaposing their portraits with the body of the Buddha, the Sogdian merchants emphatically transferred their individual identity onto their incarnations for coming ages.

The second example for Sogdian merchants' expression of selfhood is the Anyang couch. In this case, the portraits of the deceased were intended to preserve their individual identity in the afterlife. On the Anyang couch, the focal point of each panel of the screen is an idealized portrait of the tomb owner and his wife, surrounded by his grand retinue (Fig.1.35). These figures altogether seem to constitute a wide range of activities recalling the past memory of the deceased as the *sabao* leader of Sogdian migrant community: on the gateposts are processions in celebration of the Sogdian New Year and Zoroastrian priests attending fire altars (Fig.1.36); on the screen the deceased is holding banquets with his guests, dining with his wife at their sumptuous home or in a lush vineyard garden, and making outdoor excursions with a splendid entourage.¹²⁷ Despite the fact that, as Lin Shengchih has observed, the compositions and motifs draw heavily on indigenous mortuary art traditions, the portraits of the deceased invest these images with strong personal references, invoking memories among the deceased's family members or even the deceased himself.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Ibid., 154

¹²⁷ Scaglia, "Central Asians on a Northern Ch'i Gate Shrine," 9-28.

¹²⁸ Lin, "Stone Funerary Couches of the Late Northern Dynasties Period," 513-596.

Similar to the Qingzhou statue, it is onto the brocade-body composite, made up of the couch screen and the deceased's body, that the artisans projected the portraits of the deceased. On the one hand, dressed with "Persian brocade," the tomb owner and his attendants look as if they are merging into the linked pearl patterns that surround them in the background; on the other hand, absorbing the portraits of the deceased, the brocade-like screen enlivens the shrouded body once laid on the stone couch, becoming a surrogate of his past self. As Quentin Bell has said, "it is as though the fabric were indeed a natural extension the body, or even of the soul."¹²⁹ With "Persian brocades," the artisans interwove the image, body and life memory of the Sogdian merchant into a single fabric.

Conclusion

The body provides us with a key to decipher the meaning and significance of "Persian brocades" among Sogdian émigrés in China, offering us a new angle from which to look at the dynamics between textile and identity during the medieval period. As this section has shown, the life and culture of Chinese Sogdians pivoted on silk textiles in the sixth century. This is reflected in their role in creating "Persian brocades," a product characterized by a cosmopolitan quality that made it the product a hallmark of Chinese Sogdian art. While the "Persian brocades" transmit a Sogdian world view accentuated by a global consciousness, Sogdian merchants also seem to have upheld a distinctive communal identity, articulated in the integration of silk textiles with the body in Sogdian art, as we see in the Anyang stone couch and Qingzhou Buddha statue. We also see how portraits of Sogdian merchants were adopted to imprint selfhood on their brocade-covered bodies, passing on individual images and memory to the karmic future and the afterlife.

¹²⁹ Quentin Bell, *Of Human Finery* (London: Hogarth Press, 1976), 19.

Admittedly, Chinese Sogdians left few words about themselves and only receive a scarce mention in Chinese historical texts; however, through textiles, paintings, sculptures, and stone carvings, Sogdian artists and merchants forged a way to raise their own combined voice concerning the world, community and self. Such a voice may still strike a chord with many of us today.

CHAPTER TWO
HARMONIZING SPACES AND IDENTITIES:
THE SHI JUN TOMB AND ITS HOUSE-SHAPED SARCOPHAGUS

In contemporary writings about art history, “space” is a quintessential concept, an *a priori* way of thinking about art.¹ According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the English word “space” comes from the Latin term “spatium,” which means “room, area, distance, stretch of time.” The modern Chinese translation of “space” is *kong jian* 空间, a combination of the character *kong* 空, “void, empty,” and *jian* 间, “interval.”² Like “space,” *kong jian* or “void interval” implies an abstract three-dimensional entity, which can be materialized, substantiated, and circumscribed.³ In Wu Hung’s explication of spatiality in Chinese mortuary art, he states that tombs are “created first as a vacuum.”⁴ To “materialize and stabilize” tomb spaces, people in ancient China invented variegated underground structures, furnishing them with funerary objects and images. Tomb spaces therefore become a multifarious concept, referring alternatively to physical space,

¹ The theorization of space in the field of art history probably culminated in David Summers’s magnum opus *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism*, in which space is discussed under a series of categories: real space, virtual space, social space, metaoptical space, personal space, etc.. See David Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (New York: Phaidon, 2003), 15-60.

² The most authoritative definition of *kongjian* in Chinese can be found in *Small Dictionary of Modern Chinese*, which defines space as “an objective form of material existence, articulated through length, width and height 物质存在的一种客观形式, 由长度、宽度、高度表现出来.” *Xiandai Hanyu xiaocidian* 现代汉语小词典 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1980), 306.

³ As Immanuel Kant famously claims, “space is not an empirical concept that has been drawn from outer experience,” and “the representation of space cannot be obtained from the relations of outer appearance through experience, but this outer experience is itself first possible only through this representation.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998), 174-75.

⁴ Wu, *Yellow Springs*, 13.

pictorial space, symbolic space, ritual space, etc.⁵ In a word, space is a modern analytic lens which enables us to conceptualize, categorize and codify tomb constructions that often look chaotic and inconsistent.

Looking at ancient Chinese texts, however, we can hardly find an equivalent concept of “space.” As Kuang-ming Wu has observed, “Chinese thinking never leaves concrete things.”⁶ This holds true in particular when it comes to space. In ancient Chinese literature, space is seldom referred to as an abstract existence, but is signified by concrete objects. Suffice to look at the Chinese characters *kong* 空 and *jian* 间. Both pictographs contain an object as the physical signifier: a “cave or cavity” (穴) tops “kong 空” and a “gate” (门) frames “jian 间.” Space is something accommodated within a cave or going through a gate.⁷ In contrast to the modern concept of space, which is intimately related to our visual perception, this object-oriented thinking about space implies a tactile dimension.⁸ Space is not only visible but also tangible; it could even be handled and manipulated.

In this chapter, focusing on a Sogdian couple’s tomb discovered in today’s Xi’an city in northwest China, I want to discuss spatial strategies employed to express identity in early medieval Chinese art and architecture.⁹ Rather than starting with concepts like ritual space,

⁵ Ibid., Chapter One, “Spatiality,” 17-84.

⁶ Kuang-ming Wu, “Spatiotemporal Interpenetration in Chinese Thinking,” in Chun-chieh Huang and Erik Zürcher eds., *Time and space in Chinese Culture* (Brill, 1995), 17-18.

⁷ In the earliest Chinese dictionary *Shuo wen jie zi* (“Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters”) compiled by Xu Shen in second century CE, *kong* means hole or cavity. Its meaning comes from its upper part *xue* (穴), which indicates earthen caves. *Jian* refers to gap or crevice, a meaning derived from its radical *men* (门) or gate. Zang Kehe and Wang Ping 臧克和王平, *Shuowen jiezi xinding* 说文解字新订 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 491, 787.

⁸ Because of scholars like Erwin Panofsky, the concept of space in the scholarship of art history has been inextricably related to perspective in western art. See James Elkins, “On David Summers’ *Real Spaces*,” in *Is Art History Global* (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), 41-72.

⁹ The tomb was excavated in 2003 and the full report was published in 2014. Yang, *Shi Jun mu*.

pictorial space and illusory space, my investigation will pivot on a concrete object, a house-shaped sarcophagus placed in the center of the tomb chamber. (Fig. 2.1) Unlike most mortuary furniture excavated from early medieval China, which bears no title or designation, the Shi Jun sarcophagus, in a unique bilingual inscription, is called “stone hall” in Chinese and “house of gods” in Sogdian.¹⁰ Based on these textual designations, it will be shown how the sarcophagus, as a dual-named object, defines and signifies spaces in disparate ways.

It will also be demonstrated how the spatial strategy centered on the Shi Jun sarcophagus serves to harmonize two distinct cultural identities of the tomb owner or his heirs. The coexistence of “stone hall” and “house of gods,” I will argue, embodies the Sogdian family’s innovative effort to negotiate their identification with Confucian ideology and their devotion to multiple spiritual beliefs.¹¹ Designated as “stone hall,” the sarcophagus is situated in a ritual setting (or a real space as David Summers would call it) prescribed by Confucian texts concerning ancestor worship and the performance of filial piety;¹² entitled “house of gods,” on the other hand, the sarcophagus is integrated into a virtual space, or an imaginary vision of *tian gong* or “heavenly palace,” depicted in current religious texts and arts about afterlife. After expounding on the meanings of these two designations and their distinctive ways of shaping spaces in the Shi Jun tomb, I will briefly discuss the social and cultural conditions that led to

Yang Junkai and Rong Xinjiang have summarized the scholarship for the past decade in “Beizhou Liangzhou sabao Shi Jun mu yanjiu zongshu 北周凉州萨保史君墓研究综述,” in Luo Feng and Rong Xinjiang 荣新江 罗丰 eds., *Sogdians in China: New Evidence in Archaeological Finds and Unearthed Texts* (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2016), 572-583.

¹⁰ See Sun Fuxi, “Xi’an Shi Jun mu sutewen hanwen shuangyu timing hanwen kaoshi 西安史君墓粟特文汉文双语题铭汉文考释,” in Yang, *Shi Jun Tomb*, 293-310.

¹¹ The Sogdians’ eclectic cultural attitude can be best illustrated by their acceptance of multiple religions on the Silk Road. See Grenet, “Religious Diversity among Sogdian Merchants,” 463-478.

¹² For the differentiation between real space and virtual space, see Summers, *Real Spaces*, 43-45.

such a spatial innovation, and most importantly, such an orchestrated expression of identities through spaces.

I. Introduction

The Shi Jun tomb is located four miles to the east of the historic city of Chang'an, the capital of the Western Han(206 B.C.E. – 8 C.E.), the Western Wei (535-557 C.E.) and the Northern Zhou (557 to 581 C.E) Dynasties. Short biographies of the tomb occupants, Shi Jun and his wife, are inscribed both in Chinese and Sogdian on a rectangular stone plaque placed on the lintel of the house– shaped sarcophagus. According to the inscription, Shi Jun's Sogdian name is Wirkak; his wife is called Kang Shi in Chinese and Wiyusi in Sogdian. We also know the patrons of the sarcophagus were Shi's three sons; they built the tomb for their parents in 580 C.E.

Judging from its building method and internal structure, archaeologists assert that Shi Jun's tomb is a typical Chinese burial during the Northern Zhou Dynasty. There is a 54.5-foot long sloping passageway leading to the single-chambered grave, which is located 40.4 feet beneath the ground.¹³ (Fig.2.2) The tomb chamber is 12.1 feet wide and 11.5 feet long, opening to the passageway at the entrance with a stone gate. The chamber is paved with plain bricks, and on its crudely plastered walls, archaeologists discerned some traces of painting. The sarcophagus, 8.2 feet wide, 5.1 feet deep and 5.2 feet high, is installed in the back of the chamber, facing the entrance. It is carved with exuberant images and was originally brilliantly painted and gilded. Except for the sarcophagus, the tomb chamber contains no other objects. Although some burglars broke into the tomb and sarcophagus a long time ago, it seems quite impossible that they looted the tomb so thoroughly that not a single trace of grave goods had been left behind.

¹³ Yang, *Shi Jun Tomb*, 35-37. For the planning and structure of tombs in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, see Ni Run'an 倪润安, "Beizhou muzang de dixia kongjian yu sheshi 北周墓葬的地下空间与设施," *Palace Museum Journal* 1 (2008): 60-158.

Archaeologists thus infer that the tomb chamber was intended to be so. In fact, among Chinese Sogdian tombs excavated so far, it is not uncommon to find the tomb chamber unfurnished. Two other Sogdian tombs, containing no contents but a sarcophagus and a tombstone, were found just a few miles away from Shi Jun's tomb.¹⁴

In spite of the “empty” tomb chamber, a couple of precious items are uncovered within the sarcophagus, including a gold coin, a gold ring, a gold earring, a gilded bronze belt buckle, together with skeletal remains of the deceased. Given the sumptuously executed sarcophagus and its luxurious contents, the “empty” chamber looks very peculiar, especially compared to sarcophagus tombs of the Chinese nobles.¹⁵ The significance of this unusual treatment will be discussed later.

Shaped like an actual freestanding timber house, the Shi Jun sarcophagus is carved with intricate images on its outer surface: protective deities and domestic attendants in high relief on the façade, an array of vertical panels of narrative illustrations, carved in bas relief, running from the west to the east side of the outer walls (Fig.2.3).¹⁶ The illustrations can be further divided into two groups according to their subject matter: the panels West 1, North 5 and East 1 are characterized by certain god-like figures, worship scenes, mythical creatures or miraculous

¹⁴ For these unfurnished tombs, see Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiu suo, *Xi'an Beizhou An Jia mu* and *Xi'an shi wenwu baohu kaogusuo*, “Xi'an Beizhou Kang Ye mu.”

¹⁵ It is obvious that tomb burglars once entered the tomb and broke into the sarcophagus, but archaeologists exclude the possibility that the burglars looted everything within the tomb chamber. First of all, the burglary did not seem to have occurred in modern times, when grave goods, such as pottery figurines and burial vessels, came to be valuable items in the burgeoning antique market. Second, the underground tomb chamber collapsed long ago, keeping the tomb from further disturbance before its excavation and clearing by archaeologists. See Yang, *Shi Jun Tomb*, 51-52.

¹⁶ The panels are demarcated by the false columns and joint seams of the stone hall. The east side (East 1) comprises a single unified composition in spite of the interruption of the columns.

episodes; the panels West 2 to North 4 show no supernatural elements, but instead represent worldly activities such as banqueting, hunting and traveling.¹⁷

When the Shi Jun sarcophagus was unearthed, scholars were immediately drawn to its unprecedented pictorial motifs. The religious images do not conform to Buddhist or Daoist iconography, and most human figures, involved in grand banquets and overland journeys, look foreign and exotic. Thanks to the inscription, scholars can associate these images with the daily and spiritual life of the Sogdians.¹⁸ As a people of Persian origin, Sogdians played a critical role along the Silk Road in the medieval world. From their homeland Sogdiana, a vast region in Central Asia which connects modern day China and Iran, Sogdian merchants reached as far as Constantinople to the west and Chinese coastal cities to the east. Their caravans were loaded with luxury items such as Chinese silk, Sasanian silver wares, and Byzantine ivory, often accompanied by pilgrims and monks of different religions. As rich and colorful as were their lives on the Silk Road, the images on Shi Jun's sarcophagus epitomize the dynamic cultural and material exchange in sixth-century Eurasia.¹⁹

¹⁷ The sequential numbers of the illustrations are adopted from the excavation report. See Yang, *Shi Jun Tomb*, 81.

¹⁸ In Chinese texts, records concerning the lives of Sogdian migrants are scanty. But archaeological discoveries of their tombs, which usually contain epitaphs with lengthy biographical inscriptions and magnificently decorated stone coffins, shed light on the life experiences of Chinese Sogdians. In light of these findings, we now know that Sogdian merchants settled in China between fifth and sixth centuries C.E. Living under regimes established by non-Han Chinese, they formed their own communities, whose leaders became closely involved in the social and political issues of local regimes. They took China as their second homeland, and at the same time kept a constant contact with their countries of origin in their persisting business on the Silk Road. The narrative scenes on their sarcophagi represent their lives on the Silk Road, see Dien, "The Tomb of the Sogdian Master Shi."

¹⁹ A comprehensive study of the Sogdians on the Silk Road can be found in Étienne de la Vaissière, James Ward trans., *Sogdian Traders: A History* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

II. Dual Designations of the Sarcophagus

Imbedded in the lintel of the house-shaped sarcophagus, a rectangular stone slab, inscribed with a bilingual epitaph, stands out prominently on the façade. (Fig.2.4) The inscription designates the sarcophagus as *shi tang* or “stone hall” in Chinese and *snkyn 'k by kt 'k* or “house of gods” in Sogdian. Such an inscription of self-designation is seldom encountered in other mortuary furniture of the time.²⁰ Situating the lengthy inscription in the opulent images on the surfaces of the sarcophagus, the designer further established a connection between word and image, which recalls the addition of colophons on Chinese paintings.²¹ This unusual emphasis on designations and inscriptional texts demands careful consideration. In the following discussion, it will be shown that the inscription does not simply designate the sarcophagus with two different names, but makes a range of statements that inform disparate spatial strategies in the tomb and point to divergent audiences and cultural identities.

Before we delve into the relationship between text and image on the sarcophagus, it is necessary to first examine the prototype of the stone slab on the lintel, probing the possible meaning imbued in the medium itself. From historical texts, we know the slab probably imitates

²⁰ Although in the Han Dynasties, tombs and mortuary equipment often bear self-referential inscriptions, this practice did not endure into early medieval China. Evidence of such inscriptions during the sixth century is scarce. The only other such inscription related to stone mortuary equipment is an inscribed brick in Song Shaozu's tomb, which refers to the house-shaped sarcophagus as a *jiu* coffin. Zhang Qingjie and Liu Junxi 张庆捷 刘俊喜, “Beiwei Song Shaozu mu liangchu mingji xi 北魏宋绍祖墓两处铭记析,” *Wenwu* 7 (2001); Liu, Zhang, and Zuo, “Datong shi Beiwei Song Shaozu.”

²¹ In early medieval China, mortuary texts predominantly take the form of epitaph, a self-contained form of writing never make reference to the contents of specific tombs. But there are precedents for this mutual reference in the Eastern Han Dynasty. A notable example has been discussed by Wu Hung in his article, “Beyond the ‘Great Boundary:’ Funerary Narrative in the Cangshan Tomb,” in John Hay, ed., *Boundaries in China* (London, 1994), 81-104. Tomb decorations in general were dictated by the wild imagination of the artist, who drew on a rich repertory of motifs but barely touches upon their textural sources. One exception is illustrations of filial son stories, which will be discussed in the third chapter.

a conventional architectural component called *men bang* 门榜, namely “gate plaque.”²² In a traditional Chinese timber structure, the gate plaque was used to display the name of an important building, clarifying its type (e.g., hall, pavilion, gate, pagoda, etc.) and according it certain political, symbolic or poetic significance.²³ For example, the throne hall of the Northern Wei is called the Hall of Taiji or Supreme Ultimate, a name symbolizing the unsurpassed status of the emperor. It is very likely this name was inscribed on a gate plaque, just as we see today in the throne hall (the Hall of Supreme Harmony) of the Forbidden City in Beijing.²⁴ Placing a gate plaque on the sarcophagus thus indicates an impulse to define the object, giving it a proper name and clarifying its meaning.

When it comes to the two designations of the sarcophagus on the gate plaque, the Chinese name is presented much more prominently than the Sogdian one. The full name of the sarcophagus in Chinese is “The Stone Hall of Shi Jun, the Sabao in the Liangzhou City of the Great Zhou Dynasty,” which sounds very formal and ritualistic. Occupying the first column of the Chinese inscription, the name “stone hall” is positioned toward the center of the plaque and therefore looks like the title of the sarcophagus. In fact, the name is set off from the rest of the

²² Although no gate plaques or representations of it have survived from the early medieval China, we know their existence from textual records. One can be found in Zhang Yanyuan’s *Fashu yaolu* 法书要录, which says: “The emperor Ming of the Wei state (220-265 A.D.), mistakenly had the gate plaque installed before inscribing it 魏明帝起凌云台，误先钉榜而未题。” See Lu Shengfu 卢辅圣 ed., *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* 中国书画全书 vol.1 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1993), 36.

²³ Although the origin of this architectural device is difficult to trace, door plaques might have already been a typical part of architectural design during the sixth century C.E. For instance, according to Yu Jianwu 庾肩吾(487—551 C.E.), a renowned calligrapher during Shi Jun’s time, one of the principal functions of calligraphy is to label the entrance of a palace, a function probably realized by a door plaque. Ibid.

²⁴ About the study of the capital of the Northern Wei, see Du Jinpeng and Qian Guoxiang 杜金鹏 钱国祥 eds., *Han Wei Luoyang cheng yanjiu* 汉魏洛阳城遗址研究(Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2007).

inscription by bigger seal-script characters, or *dazhuan* 大篆, an archaic style related to classical Chinese culture and often used for gate plaques and stele titles in the medieval period.²⁵ In contrast, the Sogdian name of the sarcophagus does not appear until the text concludes at the end of the plaque. Nevertheless, the name is emphatically pointed out in the last sentence, “this stone house of gods was constructed by (sons of Shi Jun).” These two designations will serve as the starting point of our interpretation of the Shi Jun tomb as a whole.

Besides the designations of the sarcophagus, the bilingual inscription bears the only textual evidence for the lives of the deceased couple and their family. A comparison of the Chinese and Sogdian parts demonstrates a strong but disproportionate correspondence between the texts and the images on the sarcophagus (See Appendix 1).²⁶ First of all, the Chinese and the Sogdian texts both focus on the lives of the deceased couple, which is reflected in the pictorial panels lining the two sides and the back of the sarcophagus. They tell an intriguing story about a Sogdian immigrant family. Shi Jun, or Wirkak, came from the city-state of Kess in Central Asia, known to Chinese as the State of Shi. His family probably migrated to China in the generation of his grandfather, who took the *sabao* position as the leader of the immigrant community.²⁷ Born in 493 C.E., Shi Jun launched his political career as an affiliate of *sabao* around 535 C.E., and

²⁵ According to the fifth-century writer Li Daoyuan 郦道元, the seal-script style was applied to most door plaques on royal palaces in Luoyang during the Eastern Han period, when “the seal-script was used to inscribe gate plaques.” See Chen Qiaoyi 陈桥驿, *Shuijingzhu jiaozheng* 水经注校证 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 878. In early medieval China, this style was used primarily to inscribe the cover of a tombstone and the head of a stele, both of which function as the title of the inscribed texts. See Liu Tianqi 刘天琪, *Sui Tang muzhi gai timing yishu yanjiu* 隋唐墓志盖题铭艺术研究 (Guangzhou: Nanfang chubanshe, 2011).

²⁶ The full text of the epitaph see Appendix 1.

²⁷ For the origin and meaning of the term, see Rong Xinjiang, “Sabao or Sabo: Sogdian Caravan Leaders in the Wall-Paintings in Buddhist Caves,” in E. de la Vaissière and E. Trombert eds., *Les Sogdiens en Chine* (Paris, 2005), 207-230.

was eventually promoted to the *sabao* of the Liangzhou City in Northwest China.²⁸ He married his wife in Xiping, another northwestern city, where she was raised, and the couple died in the same year, 579 C.E., in Chang'an, the capital city of the Northern Zhou. One year later, their three sons buried them in the east suburb of Chang'an. As the inscription indicates, Shi Jun's family migrated across three generations among several distant major cities along the Silk Road. Considering the sedentary nature of life in Chinese society, Shi Jun's family history is truly epic. On the pictorial panels, we see scenes alternating between traveling (W1-2, N1,3) and settled life (W3, N2,4-5), which must have been a reflection of this incredible migration.²⁹

Leaving their commonalities aside, however, we see that the Chinese and the Sogdian texts show some outstanding disparities, which also affect the pictorial choices on the carved panels. The Chinese text highlights the patriarchal lineage of the Shi family, their political achievements in China and their moral merits, especially the prestige enjoyed by Shi Jun among the immigrant community and the filial piety of his sons. Neither the Sogdian text nor the pictorial program alludes to these elements. The Chinese text only briefly mentions the wife's name and date of death at the end, while the Sogdian part gives an equal role to the wife as her husband. It introduces the couple's marriage, extols their life-long companionship, and most importantly, celebrates their ascent to paradise and eternal bond in the afterlife. All these elements unfold fully in the pictorial program. In all but two scenes (W3, N1), we see the couple depicted together - worshipping, traveling or banqueting. In the poignant scenes of their afterlife,

²⁸ The official title of Shi Jun is *sabao panshi caozhu* in Chinese.

²⁹ Some scholars are discontented with a realistic interpretation of the pictorial program, arguing the images have been appropriated from stock motifs to express an idealized life coveted by the Sogdian. Qi Dongfang 齐东方, "Between Reality and Ideal: A Reflection on the Stone Carvings in the Tombs of An Qie and Master Shi 现实与理想之间: 安伽、史君墓石刻图像的思考," in Wu Hung and Zheng Yan eds., *Studies on Tomb Art 1* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2011), 205-18.

the couple even hangs on to each other when crossing the purgatory Cinwat Bridge. (Fig.2.5) Eventually, they pass the judgment in the afterlife and together make their way to heaven.

In a word, there is an orchestrated effort to define the sarcophagus and to inform readers of its images through the words inscribed on the bilingual gate plaque. Whereas the Chinese text exhibits a stronger tie with the gate plaque and the house shape of the sarcophagus, the Sogdian words maintain a closer connection with the pictorial program. The two parts of the inscription seem also to suggest a division of intended audiences, who might have come from different social backgrounds with dissimilar cultural expectations. Considering Shi Jun's ethnic background and the *sabao* position he assumed, it is not far-fetched to suggest that one audience mainly consisted of Shi Jun's Chinese friends and colleagues, and the other was primarily his Sogdian family members and expatriates.³⁰ What different messages does the inscription convey to these audiences? How do the texts and images relate to them? What is the meaning and significance of "stone hall" and "gods' house"? What types of spaces do they indicate and signify? In the following two sections, I will explore the ways in which the bilingual inscription shapes defines the sarcophagus and informs its pictorial program. Most importantly, I will discuss how the sarcophagus signifies and materializes different spaces in the Shi Jun tomb.

III. Chinese Designation: Shi tang – Sacrificial Hall

The Chinese name for the Shi Jun sarcophagus is *shi tang* or "stone hall," a term that is very literal and generic in its English translation. However, the origin of the term can be traced to the Eastern Han Dynasty, when stone shrines were built at gravesites for deceased family members.

³⁰ As to Sogdian settlements in China, Rong Xinjiang has published a series of articles, included in his books, *Zhonggu Zhongguo yu wailai wenming* 中古中国与外来文明 (Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 2001) and *Zhonggu Zhongguo yu Sute wenming* 中古中国与粟特文明 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2014). Although Chinese monks studied Sanskrit and other central Asian languages to translate Buddhist scriptures, there is no evidence that any Chinese studied Sogdian.

In textual records and surviving dedicatory inscriptions, these stone shrines are called *shi tang* 石堂(stone hall), *shi tang* 食堂(offering hall) or *shi ci tang* 石祠堂 (stone sacrificial hall), all of which refer to the same type of sacrificial structure built of stone.³¹ The sacrificial hall or *ci tang* has been a pivotal type of architecture in ancestor worship since the Han Dynasty. As early as the eleventh century C.E., Confucian scholars already observed that sacrificial halls were commissioned by officials and noblemen as an ersatz version of the ancestral temple or *zongmiao* 宗庙, which is reserved as a royal prerogative in Confucian ritual protocols.³²

The Chinese inscription recounts Shi Jun's family history and praises the filial deeds of his offspring. Although these texts recall the function of an epitaph, or *muzhi*, the inscription as a whole reads more like a dedication for a stone sacrificial hall.³³ There are two reasons for this. First, compared to epitaphs for other eminent Sogdian figures of Shi Jun's time, the wording of the inscription is perfunctory and oversimplified. As it states, the father of Shi Jun was a great person, who possessed excellent virtues such as "embracing a fine *jin* jade and holding a beautiful *yu* jade 怀瑾握瑜." He is said to have acted according to strict rules such as "following

³¹ For the study of Han stone shrines and their inscriptions, see Xin Lixiang 信立祥, *Handai huangxiangshi zonghe yanjiu* 汉代画像石综合研究 (Beijing, Wenwu chubanshe, 2000).

³² Penning a commemorative text for the ancestral temple of Fan Zuyu, Si Maguang, the acclaimed historian of the Northern Song Dynasty, posits that "in the system established by ancient kings, from the son of heaven to officials, all have ancestral temples. When a gentleman is to construct a city, he builds the ancestral temple first and living quarters next. The First Emperor rejected and ridiculed the sage, eradicating classics and rituals and making ministers revere and obey the lord. Since then, except for the son of heaven, no one was allowed to build the ancestral temple. During the Han Dynasties, the noble and wealthy often erected sacrificial hall at graveyard, but they seldom did so in cities. 先王之制, 自天子至于官师皆有庙。君子将营宫室, 宗庙为先, 居室为后。及秦非笑圣人, 荡灭典礼, 务尊君卑臣。于是天子之外, 无敢营宗庙者。汉世公卿贵人多建祠堂于墓所, 在都邑则鲜焉。" See "Wenlu gong jiamiao bei 文潞公家庙碑," in Si Maguang 司马光, *Sima guang ji* 司马光集 vol.7 (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2010), 1602.

³³ Given the fact that the inscription is carved on a gate plaque instead of a conventional tombstone, archaeologists of Shi Jun's tomb called the inscription a *timing* 题铭, rather than *muzhi* or *zhi* epitaph. See Sun, "Xi'an Shi Jun mu Sute wen Han wen."

the precise shapes shown with the compass and the ruler 重规叠矩.” He “excelled among others with his remarkable establishments, and undertook great affairs and achieved great merits 秀杰不群, 立功立事.” Shi Jun himself is described as “being endowed with the spirit of lofty mountains 秉灵山岳.” All these phrases are quoted verbatim from some of the best known texts of the time and are simply put together with no customization.³⁴ As Sun Fuxi has pointed out, these hollow phrases might even have been compiled by a Sogdian who was not well-versed in Chinese literature.³⁵ Looking at the magnificently crafted sarcophagus, we may wonder why Shi Jun’s sons did not create an appropriate epitaph for their parents, like those devised for other Sogdian leaders?³⁶ Maybe an epitaph could not better serve their purposes?

Second, while the inscription does not function as a satisfactory epitaph, it conforms to and elaborates on the standard format of dedications engraved on stone shrines of the Eastern Han dynasty. Many elements of the Chinese inscription never appeared in epitaphs of early

³⁴ These quotes come from sources ranging from the Confucian cannon *Book of Documents* 尚书 (立功立事) and the literary classic of the Warring States Period *Poetry of the South* 楚辞 (怀瑾握瑜). See Chan Hung Kan and Ho Che Wah eds., *Citations from the Shangshu to Be Found in Pre-Han and Han Texts* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong), 269; Huang Linggeng 黄灵庚, *Chuci zhangju shuzheng* 楚辞章句疏证 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 191.

³⁵ Sun, “Xi’an Shi Jun mu sutewen hanwen shuangyu timing hanwen kaoshi,” in Yang, *Shi Jun Tomb*, 293-310.

³⁶ Adding to its inadequateness as an epitaph, the Chinese inscription lacks a rhymed *ming* verse which normally concludes an epitaph. In the latter half of the sixth century, the *ming* verse tended to be a decisive part for an ideal epitaph. Originally referring to inscriptions on ritual bronzes designed for the ancestral temple, by this time *ming* verse had evolved into a literary style tied up with the function of acclaiming and spreading the virtues and achievements of ancestors, and the part it played in epitaph-writing during the sixth century was so important that, as many cases imply, the preceding biographical accounts in prose were frequently regarded as merely a preface to such a *ming* verse or *ming xu* 铭序 in Chinese. Although it is the so-called preface that offers the most detailed and concrete information about the dead, it seems as if the verbal apotheosis of the dead would not be complete without a glorious, though insubstantial, *ming* verse. In light of this trend, the simple and restrained rhetoric of the Chinese inscription on Shi Jun’s door plaque, with its crudely executed carving, might also suggest that the inscription was not intended as an epitaph per se—that is, as a funerary text requiring the best use of beautiful words and elegant styles to commemorate the dead.

medieval China, notably the designation of a sarcophagus and the celebration of its completion. However, these elements are essential in Eastern Han dedications. One case in point is the dedication of the shrine of Wen Shuyang. The only surviving part of this monument bears an inscription that reads:

“On the nineteenth day of the eighth month in the first year of the Jiankang 建康 era (144 A.D.). The offering shrine of Wen Shuyang of *shougui li* neighborhood 壽貴里文叔陽食堂. Shuyang held official posts as *caoshi* 曹史, *xingting shiyuan* 行亭市掾, *xiangsefu* 鄉嗇夫, *tingyuan* 廷掾, *gongcao* 功曹 and *fu wenxueyuan* 府文學掾. He had three grown-up children, a daughter called Ning 寧, her younger brother Shuming 叔明 and her younger sister Si 思. Shuming died at an early age. His eldest son Daoshi 道士 together established the shrine. This cost cash seventeen thousand. Former official of *caoshi shiyuan* 曹史市掾.”³⁷

Although it is much shorter, the dedication of this Eastern Han shrine could be aptly taken as a rhetorical model for the Chinese inscription on Shi Jun’s sarcophagus. Both inscriptions introduce the designation of the monument at the beginning, followed by a brief account of the deceased’s political career. Both end with the names of the offspring and their effort and patronage of the monument. The inscription on the sarcophagus — especially its biographic part — is more detailed and elaborate than the dedication of the Wen Shuyang shrine, but its basic

³⁷ The original Chinese text reads, “建康元年八月乙丑朔十九日丁未. 壽貴里文叔陽食堂. 叔陽故曹史, 行亭市掾, 鄉嗇夫, 廷掾, 功曹, 府文學掾. 有立子三人, 女寧, 男弟叔明, 女弟思. 叔明蚤失春秋, 長子道士同立成□直錢萬七, 故曹史市掾.” See Nagata Hidemas 永田英正, *Kandai sekkoku shusei* 漢代石刻集成 (Tokyo: Dohosha Shuppan, 1994), fig.61.

formula does not diverge much from the latter. In some sense, the Chinese inscription seems to be a dedication fleshed out with some epitaphic contents.

The rhetorical agenda of a dedication on an aboveground shrine is very different from that of the epitaph buried in a tomb. Simply put, a dedication is composed to publicize the merits of the living, while the epitaph is intended to preserve the achievements of the dead. Dedications are generally inscribed in a prominent place, usually the façade, of a stone shrine. As such, a dedication invites the audience to read and learn about the emotional and financial investments of the living family members, and subsequently acclaim their moral qualities.³⁸ In contrast to a dedication, epitaphs from the medieval period are predominantly engraved on a tightly covered-up tombstone, intended for no living audience (Fig.2.6). The overriding concern of an epitaph is therefore to keep the deceased from being forgotten in the unpredictable future.³⁹ Preservation was clearly not a major concern when the inscription was engraved on the gate plaque of Shi Jun's sarcophagus. Damaged by the elements and broken by tomb burglars, the inscription became illegible in several places.

Through thorough analysis of the Chinese inscription, we may now conclude that Shi Jun's sarcophagus does not simply mimic an above ground house, but is intended, in a written form, to be perceived as a stone sacrificial hall or *ci tang*. The gate plaque first draws our attention and names the sarcophagus as a stone sacrificial hall. Then the dedicatory inscription

³⁸ After analyzing the existing inscriptions of Eastern Han funerary shrines, Wu Hung observes that at the end of this period "the focus of inscriptions had shifted to the expression of filial piety on the part of the contributors. In lengthy inscriptions, such as those carved on the Xiang Tajun Shrine (154 C.E.) and the An Guo Shrine (158 C.E.), the contributors described their sorrow and gratitude, their dedication to creating the shrine and to holding ancestral sacrifices, their general moral commitment and achievement and so on. Such words are repeated over and over, occupying most of the memorial." See Wu, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, 226.

³⁹ Shi Jie has expounded on this aspect of tombstone in "My Tomb Will Be Opened in Eight Hundred Years: A New Way of Seeing the Afterlife in Six Dynasties China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 2 (2012), 217-257.

invokes the reading experience associated with a stone shrine. Since the tombstone is replaced by a gate plaque and the epitaph is integrated into a dedication, the attention of the audience would be diverted from the lives of Shi Jun and his wife to their sons' efforts in building the monument. The intention of transforming the sarcophagus into a sacrificial hall, however, raises more questions than provides answers. Why did the Sogdian family want to turn a sarcophagus into a stone sacrificial hall, an act we do not even see in Chinese tombs? What cultural and social conditions made it acceptable to place an aboveground monument in a subterranean tomb? And most relevant to our central inquiry, how does the stone sacrificial hall signify tomb spaces differently from a sarcophagus? To answer these questions, we have to consider the function and meaning of mortuary furniture in early medieval China, and to examine varied spatial strategies in mortuary contexts.

3.1 Sarcophagus or Offering Shrine

The designation “stone hall” first materializes in the architectonic form of the sarcophagus. The house shape recalls stone shrines of the Han Dynasty on the one hand, and incorporates contemporary architectural features on the other. Like Han stone shrines, Shi Jun's stone hall has a diminished size (8.2 feet in width, 5.1 feet in depth and 5.2 feet in height), and is installed on a rectangular stone base. Built of seventeen solid stone slabs, it also exhibits some typical features of six-century timber architecture, such as its hip and gable or *xianshan* 歇山 style of roof, lotus-decorated roof tile caps and “人”-shaped brackets. Two false windows are articulated on the façade, and twelve false columns line the outer walls. These are features we do not see in extant Han shrines. While the windows and columns are executed in *bas relief*, the doors and steps are

seperately made. Thanks to these meticulous treatments, the mortuary function of Shi Jun's sarcophagus becomes invisible.

Aside from its architectonic form, some of the major subjects and motifs in the pictorial program also harken back to stone shrines of the Eastern Han Dynasty. To be sure, upon the excavation, many scholars were shocked by the foreign and exotic imagery carved on the stone hall, particualy the outstanding Zoroastrian priests, various unfamiliar deities, the masculine multi-armed guardians, the foreign-looking Sogdians and their vineyard garden. However, after close inquiry, we find it hard to say that these pictures were imported directly from a foreign land.⁴⁰ For example, the banquet scenes on W 2 and N1-4 bear a close resemblance to the lavish and boistous gatherings on Han shrines, similarly crammed with guests, performers and attendants (Fig.2.7); the tomb owners' spectacular ascent to heaven on the eastern wall resonates with the dashing journey of immortals amid a cloudy sky, often accompanied by a menagerie of celestial creatures (Fig.2.8); even the lively birds and beasts dotting the lintel of the stone hall look like auspicious omens on the ceiling of some Han shrines.⁴¹ In short, in spite of its foreign style, the pictorial program on Shi Jun's stone hall retains a thematic connection with its Han predecessors.

In fact, the affinity with Han stone shrines displayed in Shi Jun's stone hall is not a singular case in the Northern Dynasties. When separated from their original contexts, such house-shaped sarcophagi could easily be misidentified as an aboveground structure. One case in point is the noted sarcophagus of Ning Mao, in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Fig.2.9). Reportedly unearthed from Luoyang, this house-shaped structure has long been regarded as

⁴⁰ In fact, most images on the Shi Jun sarcophagus have no parallels in Sogdians' homeland Central Asia, which further corroborates the assumption that they were created in China, probably inspired by Chinese pictorial tradition.

⁴¹ Wu, *Wu Liang Shrine*, 73-108.

burial equipment. Nevertheless, in an article published in 2005, Lin Sheng-chih challenges this presumption and argues that the sarcophagus is in fact an aboveground stone shrine. His claim is primarily based on the evidence that the monument's form and themes resemble extant shrines of the Eastern Han Dynasty.⁴² Given the fact that no aboveground stone shrine similar to the Ning Mao sarcophagus has been discovered or recorded, Lin's argument is not widely accepted in the academic community. However, his conclusion raises some critical questions we must seriously consider: Are there any fundamental differences between a house-shaped coffin and a stone offering shrine (or sacrificial hall)? When a subterranean sarcophagus is transformed into an offering shrine, does it inherit the function of the latter and perform a similar ritual role?

3.2 Emptied Burial Space

The distinction between a coffin and a sacrificial hall is not merely nominal. In classic Confucian rites, these two architectural objects define ceremonial spaces in fundamentally different ways. A coffin, once accommodating the corpse, becomes a physical surrogate of the deceased. It functions as the focus of a burial, which is categorized under the rubric of inauspicious rites, or *xiongli*, amid the five principal rites in Confucian ritual protocols. A tomb is constructed pivoting

⁴² Lin attempts to confirm the status of the stone hall as an offering shrine erected above the ground, though his suspicion about the subterranean location of the stone hall could probably never be sufficiently supported because of the loss of crucial evidences about its discovery. But what relevant to our discussion is that he does not explain why a stone shrine could not also function as a coffin, or vice versa. Besides the pictorial program, there are two other reasons raised by Lin: first, the stone shrine includes some large stone panels which he believe could hardly be transported into the tomb chamber; second, the stone shrine has no traces of doors which he assumes indispensable for a sarcophagus. In light of Shi Jun's sarcophagus, both reasons seem to be invalid. First, Shi Jun's stone hall incorporates panels larger than Ning Mao's. Second, its doors were not imbedded in the doorframe, and therefore they could have been removed and lost without leaving any traces. Lin, "Beiwei Ningmao shishi," 19-20.

on the coffin. This includes building an underground chamber or pit, furnishing it with trappings, and performing an array of rituals.⁴³

In *Tong Dian* 通典 (Comprehensive Compendium), a voluminous encyclopedia of customs and rites of early medieval China, the author Du You 杜佑 offers the description of a proper burial in great detail (See Appendix 2). From his description, or prescription as some may argue, certain basic structures and contents of a burial can be discerned. To construct a tomb, it is essential to first build a ramped passageway, a tomb gate, and an underground chamber, all of which can be readily identified in most excavated sixth-century tombs, including Shi Jun's.⁴⁴ When it comes to the inside of the tomb chamber, a burial cannot be fully carried out without undergoing certain ritual processes and arranging an assortment of mortuary objects. Some of these objects are perishable, functioning only temporarily, such as a mat, feathers, silk and food offerings, although sometimes their remains can still be seen when excavated. Others, including “spirit vessels” (*mingqi*) like pottery figurines and wares, and the tombstone, are intended to accompany the deceased forever.

Among the variegated tomb furnishings, spirit vessels and tombstones function as the most important contents in a tomb context, actually forming a tripartite core with the coffin in a

⁴³ *The Book of Rites* 礼记 says: “Of All the methods for the good ordering of men, there is none more urgent than the use of *li*. *Li* are of five kinds [i.e., sacrificial, mourning, greeting, military, and festive], and there is none of them more important than *ji* 凡治人之道, 莫急于礼, 礼有五经 (吉, 凶, 宾, 军, 嘉), 莫重于祭.” Cited from Wu, *Monumentality*, 21. It is important to note that in the original literary context, “sacrificial” and “mourning” correspond to Chinese words *ji* (auspicious) and *xiong* (inauspicious) respectively.

⁴⁴ For common mortuary practices during the sixth century in North China, see Wu, “Mortuary Art in the Northern Zhou China;” Dien, *Six Dynasties Civilization*, 80-98, 193-233; Bonnie Chen, “Fabricating Life Out of Death: Sixth Century Funerary Monuments and the Negotiation of Cultural Traditions,” Ph.D. dissertation, the University of Chicago, 2003; Mary Fong, “Antecedents of Sui-Tang Burial Practices in Shaanxi,” *Artibus Asiae* 51(1991): 147-198; Yuan Anzhi 袁安志, *Zhongguo Beizhou zhengui wenwu: Beizhou muzang fajue baogao* 中国北周珍贵文物: 北周墓葬发掘报告(Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin meishu chubanshe, 1993).

conventional tomb in early medieval China. Spirit vessels, mostly miniature figurines, are used to serve the dead soul's need in their afterlife, and the tombstone preserves the epitaph, guaranteeing that the deceased's life and reputation will not be forgotten even when the body disappears. Arranged in an orderly fashion within the tomb chamber, these tomb trappings incorporate the coffin into an unambiguous mortuary context, in which the living will not participate once the tomb is closed.⁴⁵ Take Song Shaozu's house-shaped sarcophagus, for example. The monument is astoundingly constructed with one hundred and one stone parts, making it far more like a free-standing wooden shrine aboveground than any sarcophagi we have ever seen. However, the monument is inundated by an army of small-scale figurines, and accompanied by an epitaph that records the name of the tomb owner and explicitly designates the sarcophagus as a "coffin."⁴⁶ (Fig.2.10) These funerary devices make the function and meaning of the "coffin" crystal clear despite its unconventional appearance. At the same time, the coffin, or the encased body, is the only reason why all these devices make sense.

Although placed in a tomb of a conventional plan, Shi Jun's sarcophagus is nevertheless deprived of all the furnishings and trappings affiliated with and required by a coffin, which alienates the object from any mortuary symbolism. There are neither spirit vessels nor a tombstone, and even traces and fragments of these objects cannot be found. As the archaeological report indicates, we are confronted with a stone hall placed within an emphatically "empty" space. If the formal and textual connection with a sacrificial hall obscures

⁴⁵ For major studies of spirit vessels, see Wu Hung, "Mingqi de lilun he shijian---Zhanguo shiqi liyi meishu zhong de guannianhua qingxiang 明器的理论和实践: 战国时期礼仪美术中的观念化倾向," *Wenwu* 6 (2006): 72-81; Wu, *Art of the Yellow Spring*, 87-99. For tombstone, see Zhao Chao 赵超, *Gudai muzhi tonglun* 古代墓志通论 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2003).

⁴⁶ Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo and Datong shi kaogu yanjiusuo, "Datong shi Beiwei Song Shaozu mu."

the mortuary nature of the Shi Jun sarcophagus, the absence of mortuary paraphernalia further severs its visual association with a coffin.

3.3 Sacrificial Space: Hall/Stele Complex

From archaeological evidence, it seems that Shi Jun's tomb chamber was left empty deliberately. Consequently, the function and meaning of its status as a sacrificial hall was unequivocally affirmed. In Chinese tradition, the sacrificial hall was a place where the living made offerings to the deceased. Just as a coffin is the ritual focus of a tomb, a sacrificial hall is the center of ancestor worship, a ritual of paramount importance in Confucian teaching on filial piety. Among the five principal rites in classic Confucianism, ancestor worship or sacrifice is put under the category of "sacrificial rite," the premier rite among the others. Unlike the rite of burial, it is regarded as an auspicious rite, which is expected to bring blessing and fortune to the living. Over the prolonged history of China, the location of the sacrificial hall shifted between living quarters and gravesites. However, in both cases, they were constructed in an open space, either a courtyard or a tomb park. The empty space within Shi Jun's tomb seems to remind us of the aboveground location of a courtyard or a tomb park, which opens to visitors from the living world.

As I pointed out in the preceding section, a coffin is not a self-contained object. Likewise, the "sacrificial hall" also stands amid a complex of ritual paraphernalia, which typically includes guardian statues lining the spirit path, gate towers marking the entrance, and above all, a stele or a stone upright tablet inscribed with commemorative texts for the deceased. Since the Eastern Han Dynasty, a stele has been a quintessential component of a sacrificial hall, just as spirit

vessels and a tombstone are inexorably affiliated with a coffin.⁴⁷ According to the interpretation of many Confucian scholars, during the early medieval period the inscribed *bei* stele, by virtue of its imperishable quality, was esteemed as a contemporary substitute for the bronze ritual vessels revered in the age of antiquity. It takes up the function of recording and preserving the virtue and achievement of ancestors, ensuring the family history will be handed down to future generations.⁴⁸

It is worth noting that the Chinese inscription of Shi Jun's sarcophagus also mentions a *bei* stele. It is said that "... (the sons) built a stone hall, and erected a *bei* stele on the tomb path."⁴⁹ In textual sources from the sixth century, the term "tomb path" refers to the spirit path, which runs through the graveyard from its gate to the tomb mound or the sacrificial hall in front of it.⁵⁰ The stele mentioned in the inscription must have been removed or lost a long time ago,

⁴⁷ As Wu Hung states, temple and ritual vessels constitute "the two basic components of an archaic monumental complex in Shang – Western Zhou society," see Wu, *Monumentality*, 79. Since the Han dynasties the *bei* stele became a third defining component of the temple complex.

⁴⁸ Liu Xie 刘勰 (465-? C.E.) in *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龙 claims: "An ancestor temple contains a stele, erected in front of the two middle pillars (of the sacrificial hall). It was (initially) used to slaughter animal sacrifices, not inscribed with achievements and deeds (of ancestors). As ritual vessels became obsolete, later generations (began to) adopt steles, replacing bronze (vessels) with stone (tablets) for its imperishability. From temple to tomb, it is also used to mark a grave. 宗廟有碑，樹之兩楹，事止麗牲，未勒勛績。而庸器漸缺，故后代用碑，以石代金，同乎不朽，自廟徂墳，猶封墓也。" Zhou Zhenfu 周振甫, *Wenxin diaolong yizhu* 文心雕龙译注 (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2006), 201.

⁴⁹ Archaeologists were puzzled by the description of a *bei* stele on the tomb path, for the term "tomb path," or *mu dao*, is used in modern archaeology to designate the passageway leading from the ground-level to the tomb chamber. However, no parallel has been identified for such an arrangement in documented archaeological finds. See Xi'an wenwu baohu kaogusuo, "Shi Jun mu fajue jianbao."

⁵⁰ In the Han stele for Guo Fu 郭辅, it says: "Climb the mountain to gather the stone, and erect (the stele) on the spirit path 登山采石，致于墓道," see Yang Shuda and Wang Zijin 杨树达 王子今 *Handai hunsang lisu kao* 汉代婚丧礼俗考 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000), 126. The stele of Gao Zhen 高贞 (erected in 523 C.E.) says "together we gathered the stone from a sacred mountain, erect the stele on the spirit path 乃相与采石名山，树碑墓道," see Yan Kejun and Chen Yanjia 严可均 陈延嘉, *Quan shanggu sandai Qian Han sanguo liuchao wen* 全上古

because the tomb was located in proximity to a new palace that was built soon after Shi Jun's death.⁵¹ Still, regardless of where the stele has gone or even whether it was erected at all, the inscription seems to prescribe a hall/stele complex, clinching the sacrificial context of Shi Jun's "stone hall."

As just discussed, Shi Jun's stone hall makes a strong reference to Han dynasty shrines, not only in its architectonic form but also in its pictorial themes. The combination of the stone hall with a *bei* stele further corroborates this connection, since the stone shrine/stele complex was a hallmark of the graveyard plan during the Eastern Han Dynasty. Positioned at a distance, they define a processional space: visitors of the tomb would first stop before the stele, learn about the life of the deceased inscribed on it, and then proceed to the stone shrine, paying homage and making offerings.⁵² (Fig.2.11) During the Northern Dynasties, due to sumptuary laws, people were not allowed to build a stone hall/stele complex, but they could still see them in the ruins of Han graveyards. In *Water Classic Commentary*, or *Shui jing zhu* 水经注, the sixth-century author Li Daoyuan visits and records many stone shrine/stele compounds that survived from the Eastern Han.⁵³ As many scholars have noted, these Han stone shrines might have

三代秦汉三国六朝文(Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1997), 705. For study of the spirit path, see Ann Paludan, *The Chinese Spirit Road: the Classical Tradition of Stone Tomb Statuary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

⁵¹ Shi Jun died in a critical year in early medieval period when the Sui took over Northern Zhou, right after the Northern Zhou emperor decided to relocate his capital in the suburb of the original one. This new city later became one of the best known metropolises in the ancient world. For the relocation of the capital city, see Victor C. Xiong, *Sui-Tang Chang'an: A Study in the Urban History of Medieval China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 2000).

⁵² Wu, *Monumentality*, 190. Anthony Barbieri-Low has made a digital reconstruction of the gravesite of Wu family shrines, see <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/barbierilow/Research/ComputerRecon.html>.

⁵³ After the fall of the Han Empire, stone offering shrines almost completely disappeared from mortuary constructions, though *bei* steles persisted as integral components of various architectural complexes, including temples and graveyards. Michael Nylan, "Wandering in the

stimulated the emergence of the house-shaped sarcophagus during the fifth and sixth centuries, a revival of the stone mortuary culture, though in an underground space.⁵⁴ In light of this observation, Shi Jun's tomb must have imitated the extant Han graveyard in a fuller version.

It is also important to point out that the archetype of the stone hall/stele complex is the privileged ancestral temple. Zhang Taiyan has noted that stone shrines and *bei* steles, widespread in the Eastern Han Dynasty, were both appropriated from the plan of an ancestral temple prescribed in Confucian classics.⁵⁵ Direct evidence for this kind of appropriation comes from an inscription dated to the second century C.E. This dedication of a stone shrine quotes a passage from the renowned *Classics of Filial Piety*, in which the reputed author, Confucius, instructs the people to build an ancestral temple when fulfilling their filial piety. Drawing on Confucius's words, the Han patron associates the stone shrine with an ancestral temple, an association both justifying the lavish expense and glorifying the filial effort.⁵⁶ Visually, the association can also

Land of Ruins.”

⁵⁴ Zheng Yan 郑岩, *Weijin nanbeichao bihua mu yanjiu* 魏晋南北朝壁画墓研究 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2002), 236-251.

⁵⁵ Zhang has observed, “steles, pillar, spirit path and gate towers were first all at the ancestral temple, but later they are built at gravesite 碑表神道石阙，其始皆在寝庙，后阡于墓，” in Zhang Taiyan 章太炎, *Zhang Taiyan juan* 章太炎卷 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), 92. This observation is also supported by modern scholarship of archaeology, see Xin, *Handai huaxiangshi yanjiu*, 135-136.

⁵⁶ It claims that “... erect a stone hall and built a tomb mound, which cost cash twelve thousand. *The Classic of Filial Piety* says, ‘they consult the tortoise-shell to determine the grave and the ground about it, and there they lay the body in peace; they prepare the ancestral temple (to receive the tablet of the departed), and there they present offerings to the disembodied spirit (James Legge trans.) 起石室立坟直钱万二千，孝经曰，卜其宅兆，而安措之；为之宗庙，以鬼享之。” Xu Yuli 徐玉立, *Hanbei quanji* 汉碑全集 vol.2 (Zhengzhou: Henan meishu chubanshe, 2006), 550. It is important to note that in Confucian classics either the act of building a temple or the sacrificial activities occurring in it fall into the category of auspicious rites, or *jili*, in opposition to inauspicious rites to which the burial rite is associated. As to this ritual distinction in Confucian canons, Wu observes “it is recorded that temple sacrifices are ‘auspicious’ in nature (*jili*), since these are dedicated to deities of the country and kingdoms; funerary sacrifices, on the other hand, are ‘in auspicious rituals’ (*xiongli*), which are always associated with death and sorrows. In fact, the trend to make such connection emerged during the

be discerned from the affinity between the diagram of an ancestral temple, reconstructed from Confucian classics (Fig.2.12), and that of a standard Han graveyard. Both incorporate a sacrificial hall and a *bei* stele.⁵⁷ In short, by mimicking the Han graveyard plan, Shi Jun's tomb inherits its intrinsic connection with the ancestral temple.

Through an analysis of the etymological and architectural origin of Shi Jun's sarcophagus, we see that "stone hall" is not simply an alternative name for the coffin or a descriptive term for its architectural form. Instead, it is a prescriptive designation that transforms the tomb chamber from a burial space to a sacrificial space. Defining a space that stretches from the graveyard to

Han dynasties, when the physical center of ancestor worship moved by degrees from the ancestral temple to the graveyard. Because in the Confucian ritual codes, the ancestral temple is always described as the unchallenged center of the ancestor worship, the plan of the ancestral temple exerted a remarkable influence on the architectural structure of the graveyard. See Wu, *Monumentality*, 79-112, and "From Temple to Tomb: Ancient Chinese Art and Religion in Transition," *Early China* 13 (1988): 78-115.

⁵⁷ In the *Book of Rites*, one of the three principal Confucian ritual canons, there is a passage which describes vividly the consecration of a newly-built ancestor temple and demonstrates how the temple space is marked and defined: "When a temple was completed, they proceeded to consecrate it with the following ceremony - ... The butcher rubbed the sheep clean, the officer of prayer blessed it, and the cook with his face to the north took it to the *pillar (bei)* and placed it on the south-east of it. Then the butcher took it in his arms, went up on the *roof* at the middle point between the east and west, and with his face to the south stabbed it, so that the blood ran down in front; and then he descended. At the *gate* of the temple, and of each of the two side apartments, they used a fowl, one at the *gate* of each (going up as before and stabbing them). The hair and feathers about the ears were first pulled out under the *roof* (before the victims were killed). When the fowls were cut at the *gates* of the temple, and the *apartments* on each side of it, officers stood, opposite to each *gate* on the north. When the thing was over, the officer of prayer announced that it was so, and they all retired, after which he announced it to the ruler, saying, 'The blood-consecration has been performed.' This announcement was made at the *door* of the back *apartment* of the temple, inside which the ruler stood in his court-robcs, looking towards the south. This concluded the ceremony, and all withdrew. ... The consecration by blood of the temple building was the method taken to show how intercourse with the spirits was sought. All the more distinguished *vessels* of the ancestral temple were consecrated, when completed, by the blood of a young boar. 成廟則釁之。其禮：祝，宗人，宰夫，雍人，皆爵弁純衣。雍人拭羊，宗人視之，宰夫北面，於碑南，東上。雍人舉羊，升屋自中，中屋南面，剗羊，血流於前，乃降。門，夾室，皆用雞。先門而後夾室。其崑，皆於屋下。割雞，門當門，夾室中室。有司皆鄉室而立，門則有司當門北面。既事，宗人告事畢，乃皆退。反命於君曰：「釁某廟事畢。」反命於寢，君南鄉于門內朝服。既反命，乃退。” English translation by Legge, see *Li Chi: Book of Rites*.

the underground chamber, the stone hall/stele complex replaces the conventional mortuary contents, converting the isolated otherworldly domain into a ritual arena open to the living. Effectively, the construction of a “stone hall” reshapes the entire space of the tomb.

3.4 Crossing the Boundary

The construction of a sacrificial hall/stele complex within Shi Jun’s tomb transcends the boundary traditionally drawn between the living and the deceased. In Chinese minds, the subterranean tomb belongs to a mysterious domain called the Yellow Springs. It is a realm segregated from the human world, perpetually inhabited by the souls of the deceased.⁵⁸ As an epitaph dated 589 C.E claims, “the stone coffin offers this residence for everlasting habitation in the darkness of night.”⁵⁹ Although the soul might still be active in its posthumous home, the closed tomb would be placed in an eternal dark night for the living. Other epitaphs make this grim prospect even more evident, asserting that the tomb would “not be exposed for a thousand years, completely separated from the living, and would never be visited by relatives and friends.”⁶⁰ From this perspective, a tomb marks the boundary between the living and the dead, which is not supposed to be crossed.

In the medieval period, the isolated and alien nature of the tomb space sparked people’s imagination about a mythical and mysterious underground world. Pottery figurines buried with the deceased nourished this imagination the most. As miniature models of human beings and animals, these objects constitute a microcosm in which there is no way for the living to

⁵⁸ See Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs*, 7-16.

⁵⁹ See Luo Xin and Ye Wei 罗新 叶炜, *Xinchu Weijin Nanbei chao muzhi shuzheng* 新出魏晋南北朝墓志疏证 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), 405.

⁶⁰ See Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs*, 9.

participate.⁶¹ In many miraculous stories, widespread during the early medieval period, tomb figurines come to life in their underground residences, further confirming the belief that they would take care of dead souls in their posthumous “happy home.”⁶² From this microcosmic perspective of the deceased, Song Shaozu’s house-shaped sarcophagus actually looks like an imposing and lofty palace, rather than an imitation of a modest stone shrine (Fig.2.13).⁶³

In contrast to the isolated and mysterious tomb space, Shi Jun’s burial chamber is open to a living audience, who could have read the stele in the graveyard, descended the passageway, entered the empty tomb chamber and paid their homage in front of the sacrificial hall.⁶⁴ Although the tomb was eventually closed up, the boundary between the living and the deceased was deliberately eliminated in the original plan.⁶⁵ Unlike the coffin, which conceals the body from the living, the offering shrine needs to be visited and taken care of constantly. As the patron of a Han sacrificial shrine claims in the inscription, “I make sacrifices every morning, and offer food

⁶¹ For the practices and meanings of this miniaturization, see *ibid.* 114.

⁶² *Ibid.* 38, 100.

⁶³ See note 22.

⁶⁴ The dedicatory inscription of Shi Jun’s sarcophagus was also made for the living visitors. Besides the descendants of the dead, friends and unacquainted passersby would also visit an offering shrine every now and then. These non-familial visitors were supposed to learn the life of the dead and meritorious acts of their heirs through the inscriptions. The shrine’s dedicatory inscription serves this purpose well. Sometimes carved on a prominent place of the shrine façade, like that of Xiangtajun, the inscription was both prominent and easily read by visitors. In Shi Jun’s tomb, the dedicatory inscription follows this example by occupying the door plaque, the visual label of the stone hall, so that the inscription could capture the visitors’ attention as soon as they came close to the monument.

⁶⁵ According to Du’s description of a typical burial, people would carry out certain sacrificial activities within the tomb chamber before the concealment of the tomb, but these activities were temporal and inconsequential. They play little part in the design of the tomb, and would not alter the isolated nature of the tomb space. In Shi Jun’s tomb, however, everything seems to be prepared for sacrifices for the dead: when people entered the tomb and encountered the stone hall placed in the empty space, they were supposed to read the words about the virtuous sons and look at the marvelous images, just as they would do in the open world. In a word, it is a space open to the participation of the living. See note 26.

at all times.”⁶⁶ Admittedly, Shi Jun’s tomb was probably opened to the living just for a brief time. However, the bond between the living and the deceased could have persisted even after the burial in the memory and imagination of Shi Jun’s descendants and associates.

3.5 Performing Filial Piety

In early medieval China, a spirit of novelty and experiment permeated among different art forms.⁶⁷ Except for its basic structure and layout, Shi Jun’s tomb is a highly idiosyncratic construct: the house-shaped sarcophagus is designated as a “sacrificial hall;” the empty space hides its mortuary function; the stele/hall complex invokes a ritual space aboveground; the boundary between the dead and the living was transgressed. Such orchestrated efforts to redefine and transform the mortuary space encourages us to explore the purpose and motivation behind the spatial strategy in Shi Jun’s tomb, investigating the functions the tomb space serves and the messages it tries to convey.

In this case, the Chinese epitaph again offers a crucial clue. As it proclaims, “(Shi Jun’s sons) all possess the merit of filial piety, and therefore built the stone hall, and erected a *bei* stele on the tomb path.” The inscription explicitly ascribes the motivation for building a hall/stele complex to the moral quality of its patrons, namely the filial piety of Shi Jun’s three sons. The words “so and so is of filial piety” and “filial sons so and so” appear frequently in epitaphs of the time. In most cases they are taken as stock expressions with no specific reference. However, in Shi Jun’s tomb, the inscription denotes the self-aggrandizing nature of the unusual design of the

⁶⁶ Wu, *Monumentality*, 199.

⁶⁷ As many scholars have already pointed out, this is a period when new genres of painting and calligraphy were invented, and foreign styles and influences became widespread. As Michael Sullivan said, this is a time period during which “new forms, ideas, and values first, and often tentatively tried out.” See *The Arts of China*, Fourth Edition (University of California Press, 1999), 122.

tomb. In fact, we can rephrase the expression this way: “in order to show their filial piety, they created the stone hall and the stele.”

Converted from a coffin to a “stone hall,” the Shi Jun sarcophagus transforms the mortuary space into a historical and sacrificial space. This spatial strategy was employed to broadcast and showcase the filial piety of the patrons, and most importantly, to express their identification with classical Chinese culture and Confucian morality. The reason is twofold. First, the imitation of a typical Han graveyard shows a reverence for the gold age of filial piety. Second, the invocation of the ancestral temple represents the performance of the most acclaimed filial deed prescribed in Confucian classics. In the tomb they created for their father, Shi Jun’s sons presented themselves as both the successors of a historical heritage and the personification of a Confucian doctrine. I will expound on this in detail in the following paragraphs.

For Shi Jun’s contemporaries, the Han Dynasties were the age of filial paragons. Aside from numerous vivid accounts of Han filial figures, funerary ruins surviving from the time also served as tangible testimonies to the filial passion and deeds of the Han paragons.⁶⁸ A Han stone shrine in Xiaotangshan (Changqing County, Shandong Province) attests to the impulse in the sixth century to connect historical paragons with specific Han relics. Although the stone shrine bears no inscriptions, the sixth-century audience attributed it to Guo Jun, a legendary filial son from the Han period. The shrine was therefore widely known as the “Hall of the Filial Son” or *Xiaozi tang*.⁶⁹ (Fig.2.14) In Shi Jun’s time, Han moral paragons existed not just in legends, but made their presence felt through these physical remains.

⁶⁸ Michael Nylon, “Wandering in the Land of Ruins,” 69.

⁶⁹ It is recorded in a sixth-century inscription engraved on the shrine and Li Daoyuan’s writing. See Luo Zhewen 罗哲文, “Xiaotang shan Guoshi mu shici 孝堂山郭氏墓石祠,” *Wenwu* 4-5 (1961): 44-55; “Xiaotangshan Guoshi mu shici buzhen 孝堂山郭氏墓石祠补正,” *Wenwu* 10 (1962): 23.

Funerary and mortuary services form a central theme in didactic stories about filial piety. Indeed, filial paragons from the Han Dynasty, a period known for sumptuous burial and extravagant tombs, feature many such stories. Historic relics similar to the “Hall of the Filial Son” in Xiaotangshan might have further reinforced the aura of these Han paragons as personifications of filial deeds related to funeral and burial. A good case in point is a stone coffin of the Northern Wei Dynasty (Nelson and Atkins Museum, Kansas), engraved with three filial son stories on each side panel.⁷⁰ The three stories on the left side feature paragons celebrated for their attentive service to living parents, while those on the right side illustrate how to piously treat deceased parents, including preparing a proper burial, taking care of mortuary equipment and keeping company beside their tomb.⁷¹ It is noteworthy that all three stories related to death take place in the Han Dynasties.⁷² (Fig.2.15) It is not an exaggeration to say that, in the sixth century, Han paragons provided the best examples for dealing with death.

Ning Mao’s house-shaped sarcophagus is a good example to elucidate how the Han heritage was utilized to legitimize and aggrandize the filial conduct of a sixth-century family. As mentioned previously, this stone hall was closely modeled on the Han offering shrine, both in

⁷⁰ Sickman, “The Sarcophagus of Filial Piety.”

⁷¹ The first group includes Shun, Guo Ju and Yuan Gu; the second group has Wang Lin, Cai Shun and Dong Yong. Details about their feats can be found in Zou, *Beiwei xiaozi huaxiang*, 117-149. This division of pictorial themes explains a crucial teaching in the *Classic of Filial Piety*, which says “the services of love and reverence to parents when alive, and those of grief and sorrow to them when dead: these completely discharge the fundamental duty of living men. The righteous claims of life and death are all satisfied, and the filial son’s service of his parents is completed 生事爱敬，死事哀戚，生民之本尽矣，死生之义备矣，孝子之事亲终矣.” See James Legge trans., F. Max Müller ed., *The Sacred Books of China: The Texts of Confucianism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), 487-88.

⁷² Among these illustrations, the one in the center is related with Cai Shun, who tried to protect his father’s coffin from fire with his own body. Interestingly, the illustration of Cai’s story featured a funerary pavilion, a house-shaped structure in which the coffin was placed. As Wu suggests, such visual representation or imagination of Han funerary structure might have served as an important source for the revival of funerary stone halls during the sixth century. Wu, “A Case of Cultural Interaction.”

form and iconography. Not mentioned is that on its façade, Ning's sons inscribed their names with the title of "filial son." (Fig.2.16)⁷³ Executed in a forceful and emphatic way, these titles recall the "Hall of the Filial Son" known from the Han Dynasties and project the memory of those historical paragons onto the filial conduct of Ning's sons.

Moreover, when we look at the filial son stories carved on this contemporary version of the "Hall of the Filial Son," the Ning sons seem to be further glorified by the aura and prestige surrounding the Han paragons. Among the four stories on the two side walls, Ding Lan and Dong Yong stand out above the other two with their subjects focused on handling the death of the parents: Ding Lan serves his late mother's statue as she were alive, and Dong Yong sold himself as a slave to give his father a good burial. Keeping these two stories in mind, the title "filial son" attached to the Ning sons is no longer an empty term. By imitating the Han stone shrine, the sons enacted the examples illustrated in the moral illustration. Thus, they regarded themselves as successors of these Han paragons side-by-side.

Made in 527 C.E., Ning Mao's sarcophagus can readily be taken as an antecedent for Shi Jun's stone hall. However, the latter case gives a much bolder expression of the patrons' impulse to revive the Han tradition and align themselves with the Han paragons. Accompanied by a tombstone, Ning Mao's sarcophagus was still conceived as mortuary equipment in the first place. In Shi Jun's tomb, however, the sarcophagus is redefined as a stone sacrificial hall and situated in a hall/stele complex. Most significantly, by doing so, Shi Jun's sons promoted themselves to the embodiment of Confucian doctrines. As I have pointed out, as an imitation of the ancestral temple, the Han graveyard plan derives its legitimacy and prestige from Confucian classics. In *Classics of Filial Piety*, a canon that enjoyed the greatest authority over how one should fulfill

⁷³ Kojiro Tomito, "A Chinese Sacrificial Stone Hall of the Sixth Century A.D.," in *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston)* 40 (1942): 98-110.

the duty of filial piety, the final chapter, “Filial Piety in Mourning for Parents,” prescribes that after the parents’ deaths the heirs should “prepare the ancestral temple, and there they present offerings to the disembodied spirit.”⁷⁴ The ancestral temple is therefore esteemed as the ultimate manifestation of the filial piety of the offspring.⁷⁵ Although Shi Jun did not reach the status to enjoy a proper temple, his sons made their best effort to approximate the idea of a temple by appropriating the temple layout for the tomb, an unusual gesture that epitomizes their understanding and following of Confucian teaching.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Legge, *The Sacred Books of China: The Texts of Confucianism*, 487-88.

⁷⁵ For example, Xu Xiaosu, recorded under the category of “filial piety” in *History of the Northern Dynasties* or *Bei shi*, was praised for the temple he constructed for his late father, in which he put his father’s portrait and made sacrifice every month. See Li Yanshou 李延寿, *Bei shi* 北史 vol.9 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 22.

⁷⁶ Due to the proscription against the commoners’ right of building the ancestral temple in Confucian classics, as well as sumptuary laws initiated after the fall of the Han Dynasties, during the sixth century only royal family members and high-ranking officials enjoyed the privilege of having a temple for their ancestors. For minor officials and commoners, they could only carry out ancestral sacrifice in the bedroom of the deceased or at the gravesite. See Gan Huaizhen 甘怀真, *Tangdai jiamiao lizhi yanjiu* 唐代家庙礼制研究 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1991), 25-30. However, it is highly commended that the low-class should simulate sacrifices held in a temple. In the biography of Kou Zhi (457 – 525 C.E.), another paragon of filial piety listed in *Bei Shi*, it is said that “although his father had died long ago, he prepared and set up curtains, canopies, offering tables and canes within the hall where his father had been living. Regarding it as the ancestral temple, he opened the hall as season changes, bowing in turn and offering homage to his father in tears 父亡雖久，而猶於平生所處堂宇，備設幃帳几杖，以時節開堂列拜，垂淚陳薦，若宗廟然。” The inscription on Shi Jun’s stone hall indicates that the highest official title of Shi Jun was *sabao* of Liangzhou, a title that Su Hang indicates might rank six or lower, similar to the rank of the governor of a small county at the time. With this relatively low political status, it is very likely that Shi Jun was unable to receive posthumous temple sacrifices. By investing the house-shaped coffin with the meaning of a stone offering shrine, however, Shi Jun’s sons seemingly found a way to solve this problem. Through the imitation of the Han graveyard plan in the tomb, they constructed a structure which could function as an ancestral temple without violating the ritual hierarchy. See Su Hang 苏航, “Beichao moqi de *sabao* pinwei 北朝末期的萨保品位,” *Xiyu yanjiu* 2 (2005):12-24. In fact, because of the association of the stone shrine with the ancestral temple, a monument sometimes functioned as the temple in reality. One case can be found in the cemetery of Empress Feng, in which a stone shrine was erected for her and “served as the imperial ancestral temple 终为清庙.” Xie Baofu 谢宝富, *Beichao hunsang lisu yanjiu* 北朝婚丧礼俗研究 (Beijing: Shoudu shifan

To conclude, the spatial strategy of Shi Jun's tomb speaks to the profound desire of its patrons to perform and exhibit their meritorious deeds of filial piety, to an intended audience versed in Chinese history and Confucian teaching. Even its idiosyncratic elements could have reinforced the impression of their thoughtful and exceeding filial effort. As demonstrated in numerous textual accounts, the most notable acts of filial sons usually deviated from common practices, either in their unconventional forms or excessive emotional investment.⁷⁷ The exotic foreign motifs might also have served as an indicator of the sumptuous investment the offspring

daxue chubanshe), 172-73.

⁷⁷ To make their effort known to as many people as possible, Shi Jun's sons seem to have seriously considered the siting of their parent's tomb. Recent archaeological projects reveal that there was probably a great avenue passing by the tomb, an artery connecting one of the three east gates of the capital city to the ferry of the Ba River in the east. This route must have been thronged with travelers passing to and from the eastern provinces and the state of Northern Qi. It is possible that the passengers learned about the unusual design of Shi Jun's tomb during the burial and would be impressed by the Shi's sons' thoughtful effort in fulfilling the Confucian teaching about filial piety. Liu Qingzhu and Li Yufang 刘庆柱 李毓芳, *Han Chang'an cheng* 汉长安城 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe), 23-26.

made in decorating the tomb.⁷⁸ When the “stone hall” was transposed from the living quarters to the tomb and placed in the empty tomb chamber open to visitors, the filial piety of the Shi Jun family would be widely known and extolled by their Chinese audience.

IV. Sogdian Designation: *By'kyk* – House of Gods

The Sogdian inscription conveys a message that differs significantly from the Chinese engraved on the stone door plaque. Neither the form of the plaque nor the format of the inscription has any parallel in Central Asia.⁷⁹ The content of the Sogdian inscription does not read like the Chinese one either, certainly not its translation. As I have pointed out, although both inscriptions address the lives of the Sogdian couple, the aspects on which they choose to focus are very different.

⁷⁸ In the sixth century texts, we have some examples indicating that even the most doctrinal or narrative depictions to modern scholars might be regarded as no more than decoration. One such case is recorded in *Wei shu*, in which the way of making a royal Chariot, called *qianxiang nian* 乾象輦 in Chinese, is described: “The twenty eight constellations, heavenly steps, *yunhuan* banners, mountains, forests, clouds, immortals, saints, sages, loyal ministers, filial sons, virtuous women, righteous friends, swimming dragon, flying phoenix, Red Phoenix, Black Tortoise, White Tiger, Blue Dragon, strange birds and odd beasts, all that can be used as decoration should be painted 二十八宿, 天阶云罕, 山林云气、仙圣贤明、忠孝节义、游龙、飞凤、朱雀、玄武、白虎、青龙、奇禽异兽可以为饰者皆亦图焉,” see Wei Shou 魏收, *Wei shu* 魏书 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 1879. It is important to note that here there is no difference between figures like loyal ministers and filial sons and more decorative motifs like forests and clouds. In terms of foreign motifs, the tendency to treat them as just ornament seems to be much greater. In Yang Xuanzhi’s account of Buddhist temples in Luoyang, he used the word *hushi* 胡飾, namely foreign decoration, to describe imagery created by foreign monks. See Fu Xinian 傅熹年, *Zhongguo gudai jianzhushi* vol.2 (Sanguo, liangjin, nanbeichao, Sui, Tang and wudai jianzhu) 中国古代建筑史 第二卷 三国、两晋、南北朝、隋唐、五代建筑 (Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe, 2009), 86. Since foreign imagery was often valued just for its exotic flavor as decorative art, it is quite plausible that Chinese people of the sixth century would largely attribute the foreign motifs of Shi Jun sarcophagus, which were created in an exotic style, to foreign decoration. Moreover, far from distracting Chinese audience from the Confucian implication of the tomb, the foreign imagery of the sarcophagus, viewed as brilliant and rare decorations, would imply the descendants’ considerable financial investment in their parent’s funeral and would surely add to their merit of filial piety.

⁷⁹ About Sogdian literature, see Ronald E. Emmerick and Maria Macuch eds. *Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran, The Companion Volume I: History of Persian Literature A, Vol XVII* (I.B.Tauris, 2008).

While the Chinese section stresses the lineage of Shi Jun, their moral character and political achievements, the Sogdian inscription gives more weight to the conjugal bond and the afterlife of Shi Jun and his wife.

The most significant difference between the two sections is their disparate designations of the sarcophagus. The “stone hall” or “stone sacrificial hall” in Chinese is replaced by “stone house of gods,” or *By’kyk* in Sogdian. What does this “stone house of gods” mean? To most scholars, this term is just an alternative name of the “stone hall” in Chinese, and its meaning has never been seriously addressed. However, except for the common reference to a stone structure, the two designations do not seem readily compatible. What does the term “gods” refer to? Where did this “house of gods” originate? What does the term connote in the cultural context of its time? Despite the scarcity of textual evidence, the images on the sarcophagus shed some critical light on the meaning of the Sogdian designation.⁸⁰ These images demonstrate a strong connection with the Sogdian inscription, which we do not see in the Chinese text. Moreover, while the Chinese inscription prescribes a stele/hall complex in the tomb chamber, offering a spatial framework for the performance of filial piety, the Sogdian section points to some aspects quite divergent from Confucian ideology: it acclaims the deceased couple’s ascent to paradise, and their everlasting bond in the afterlife.⁸¹ These aspects are depicted repeatedly and in great detail on the

⁸⁰ In Sogdian Manichean texts, there are two terms for “house of gods” -- *bay kadag* and *kadag i yazdan*. Both terms refer to a place of worship, namely a Manichean church or temple with idols. This might support Grenet’s identification of some icons on the sarcophagus as Manichean deities. But there is no evidence of Manichean art surviving from early medieval China, and the connection between these two terms and *By’kyk* can only be speculative. See *Monumentum Georg Morgenstierne*, I, Acta Iranica, 21 (Brill, 1981), 63; Michael Shenkar, *Intangible Spirits and Graven Images: The Iconography of Deities in the Pre-Islamic Iran* (Brill, 2014), 38; P.O. Skjærvø, “The Manichean Polemical Hymns in M 28 I,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 9 (1995): 239-255.

⁸¹ As to Confucian attitude toward afterlife, Philip Ivanhoe states “Kongzi (Confucius) did not believe in any strong sense of personal survival after death.” See “Death and Dying in the

sarcophagus. Particularly on the east wall, the entire surface is turned into an integrated depiction of the couple's journey to paradise, in which the wife can be seen leaning affectionately against the husband. If the correspondence between the Sogdian inscription and the images is so strong and vibrant, we have good grounds for interpreting "the house of gods" through the lens of these images.⁸²

In fact, given the varied icons and deities carved on its surface, the sarcophagus is literally a "house of gods." Since religious icons seldom appeared in tombs during the Northern Dynasties, the spiritual figures on Shi Jun's sarcophagus have been the most discussed subject since the discovery of the tomb. In addition to the prominent Zoroastrian priests on the façade, Grenet argued that the figure on the west wall is Mani, the founder of Manichaeism, and the back wall illustrates the Sogdian god of Wind.⁸³ Jiang Boqin, however, contended that the so-called Mani figure should be the Zoroastrian god Mithra.⁸⁴ There are also scholars who pointed out deities of Buddhist origin, such as winged goddesses and guardian figures.⁸⁵ Although these iconographic identifications are far from certain, the abundant sacred figures make the "house of gods" an apt description of the sarcophagus.

The "house of gods," however, is not just descriptive. Taking into account its cultural and visual contexts, we will find that underlying the term is a set of notions about the afterlife.

Analects," in Tu Wei-ming and Mary Evelyn Tucker eds., *Confucian Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 221.

⁸² In his translation of the epitaph, Yoshida does not mention the origin of this word.

⁸³ Grenet, "Religious Diversity among Sogdian Merchants."

⁸⁴ Jiang Boqin 姜伯勤, "Anyang Beiqi shiguanchuang huaxiangshi yu ruhua Suteran de Xianjiao meishu 安阳北齐石棺床画像石与入华粟特人的祆教美术," in *Zhongguo Xianjiao yishushi yanjiu*.

⁸⁵ Ishida Mie 石田美江, "Northern Dynastic Tombs of the Sogdians Living in China: Focusing on the Tomb of Shijun (in Japanese)," *Journal of the Japanese Archaeological Association* 5 (2011): 21-37; for the guardian figures, see Yin Xiaqing 尹夏清, "Beizhou Shi Jun mu shimumen jiqi xiangguan wenti yanjiu 北周史君墓石墓门及其相关问题研究," *Kaogu yu wenwu* 2 (2006): 73-75.

Although no similar term has been found in extant Sogdian texts, it is useful to consider comparable concepts in early medieval Chinese and their visual expression.⁸⁶ In Yoshida's translation, the "house of gods" refers to the Sogdian term *By'kyk*. Since "by" in Sogdian does not only refer to a god, but also to heaven, Yoshida and some other scholars also translate the Sogdian designation as "the hall of heaven." The concept of a heavenly realm in which gods reside was prevalent during the sixth century, and articulated in Chinese with terms such as *tian gong* (天宫) "Heavenly Palace," or *tian tang* (天堂) "Heavenly Hall."⁸⁷ In the Chinese mind of that time, these terms were not abstract notions, but were associated with numerous images in popular art forms.

Comparing the Sogdian "house of gods" with Chinese "heavenly palace," we find that the two terms might refer to the same perspective concerning the afterlife.⁸⁸ First, like the Sogdian "house of gods," the "heavenly palace" denotes an ideal destination of the afterlife in both Buddhist and Daoist popular texts during the sixth century. In Buddhism, "heavenly palace" is translated from the Sanskrit term "*deva-palara*," denoting the palace in which the deities of the multileveled heaven in Buddhist cosmology reside. Since the cult of the Maitrya Buddha prevailed in the sixth century, the term "heavenly palace" often refers to his palace in the Tusita

⁸⁶ Sogdian monks translated many Chinese Buddhist texts into their own script. Mariko Namba Walter, "Sogdians and Buddhism," *Sino-Platonic Papers* 74 (2006). Heavenly palace or *tiangong* had been a coveted destination for afterlife in Chinese culture, see Liu Zhaorui 刘昭瑞, "Shuo tiangong yu Kou Qianzhi de jinglun tiangong 说天宫与寇谦之的静轮天宫," *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 3 (2004): 55-63.

⁸⁷ According to Nicholas Sims-Williams, the word *By'kyk* does not occur in any other Sogdian text. Private Correspondence.

⁸⁸ In a Pahlavi inscription from the Tang capital city, it is said "may the deceased ascend to heavenly hall." See Hassan Rezai Baghbidi, "New Light on the Middle Persian-Chinese Bilingual Inscription from Xi'an," in M. Maggi and P. Orsatti ed., *The Persian Language in History* (Wiesbaden, 2011), 105-115.

Heaven, which is expressed as a coveted place for rebirth in numerous votive inscriptions.⁸⁹ It is argued that religious Daoism appropriated this term to promote a similar perspective about the afterlife among its followers. Since the “house of gods” or “hall of heaven” in the Sogdian inscription also refers to a heavenly destination for the deceased, it is possible that the Sogdian term was inspired by or translated from the Sanskrit word *deva-palara* and the Chinese word *tian gong*.

Second, the concept of “heavenly palace” was substantiated in the art and architecture of early medieval China, often in the same manner as Shi Jun’s sarcophagus was constructed and decorated. The most common image of “heavenly palace” is a freestanding timber-structure house, just like Shi Jun’s house-shaped sarcophagus.⁹⁰ In his discussion of the “heavenly palace” in the sixth century, Zhang Zong finds many such representations. In one case, the donors of a Buddhist stone tablet had their own images portrayed within a house carved on the back of a stone tablet; the inscription tells us that they ascended to the heavenly palace.⁹¹ In the engraving of another stone tablet, a diseased family member is heading towards the heavenly palace on a richly decorated chariot. (Fig.2.17) In both cases, the “heavenly palace” destination of the afterlife is represented as an ornate free-standing house. If we regard Shi Jun’s house-shaped sarcophagus as a “heavenly palace” in the sense of what these two engravings represent, the destination of Shi Jun and his wife on the east wall becomes clear: led by goddesses soaring in

⁸⁹ See Yan Yaozhong 严耀东, “Fojiao dianji zhong de tiandishi shijie 佛教典籍中的天帝释世界,” in Chen Jinhua and Sun Yinggang eds., *Shensheng kongjian: Zhongguo zongjiao zhong de kongjian yinsu* 神圣空间: 中古宗教中的空间因素 (Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2014), 180-183. Hsiao Teng-fu 萧登福, *Hanwei Liuchao fodaoliangjiao zhi tiantang diyu shuo* 汉魏六朝佛道两教之天堂地狱说 (Xuesheng Shuju, 1989); Hou Xudong 侯旭东, *Wu liu shiji beifang minzhong fojiao xinyang* 五、六世纪北方民众佛教信仰 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1998), 66-86.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Zhang Zong 张总, “Tiangong zaoliang tanxi 天宫造像探析,” in *Yishushi yanjiu* 1 (1999): 205-230.

the clouds, the couple, mounted on their winged horses, are ascending to the “heavenly palace” symbolized by the sarcophagus itself.

Taking the pictorial program as a whole, we see that the journey of the dead couple to the heavenly palace unfolds in a succession of shifting backdrops, from natural landscape stretching from the east to the north wall, to celestial realms on the west wall. These backdrops form a sacred topography summed up on the back of a Buddhist stele dated to the early sixth century C.E., in which a panoramic view of the universe is provided (Fig.2.18). The lower part of the stele is the mundane world filled with various human activities, such as the worship and traveling scenes, many of which find resonance on the sarcophagus. In the upper part of the Buddhist stele, a grand Buddhist assembly takes place in a palatial compound, separated from the human world by a straight river dotted with lotus flowers. As seen on the sarcophagus, a bridge connects heaven and earth. The symmetrical and orderly arrangement of the heavenly palace contrasts drastically with the undulating terrain of the human world. On Shi Jun’s sarcophagus, a similar contrast can be drawn between the natural landscapes on the side and back walls and the static and symmetrical view of the facade. Whereas the “heavenly palace” surmounts the universe on the Buddhist stele, Shi Jun’s “heavenly palace,” part of the frontal view of the sarcophagus, consummates the couple’s journey to paradise.

Most importantly, according to Zhang Zong’s study, in Buddhist votive inscriptions, the term “heavenly palace” often refers to a pagoda, a Buddhist structure built to house the relics of the Buddha, Buddhist saints, eminent Buddhist monks, or even pious laymen. This funerary implication of the term further corroborates the interpretation of the Sogdian “house of gods” as the Chinese “heavenly palace.” In the Northern Dynasties, most Chinese pagodas adopted indigenous architectural techniques, taking the form of a timber tower, either single or multi-

storied. For the purpose of burial, many pagodas were built to a miniature scale, such as one stone pagoda housed in a cave chapel at the Bingling Temple (Fig.2.19). In the vicinity of the Lingquan Temple, hundreds of small stone pagodas are carved out in high relief on rocks and cliffs, with niches hollowed out for the cremated body remains. In fact, when the audience of the Shi Jun sarcophagus followed the journey of the deceased as it unfolds in the pictorial program, their circling around the structure would have enacted the ritual of circumambulation. Such a connection between Shi Jun's sarcophagus and Buddhist pagodas also attests to his role as both an administrative and a spiritual leader of the immigrant community.⁹²

In short, the “house of gods” (or “hall of heaven”) in the Sogdian inscription and the Chinese term “heavenly palace” are inextricably bound up with their common perspective of the afterlife in analogous visual expression, and most importantly, the same mortuary function. Although there is no evidence to prove whether the two terms share the same etymological root, it is safe to say the Sogdian “house of gods” can be translated culturally as “heavenly palace” in early medieval Chinese. In other words, while the Chinese inscription names the sarcophagus as a stone sacrificial hall, the Sogdian section designates it as a “heavenly palace.”

4.1 A New Gate to Heaven

Why is Shi Jun's sarcophagus presented differently in the Sogdian inscription? To answer this question, we need first to investigate its historical background. The sixth century was a golden age of Chinese Buddhism and a time when Sogdian immigrants were allowed to freely practice their own religions, most notably among them, Zoroastrianism. These religious activities played such a leading role in shaping the visual and material culture of early medieval China that they often challenged and overshadowed indigenous secular customs. One of the most noticeable

⁹² For the meaning of *sabao*, see Étienne de la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 147-152.

impacts of this prevalent religious culture on mortuary tradition was that tombs no longer functioned as the sole locus where the deceased could be buried and their afterlife be pictured.

Since the Han Dynasty, tombs had been the only abode of the deceased. By means of paintings and carvings, they were also envisioned as a happy home for the afterlife and a gateway leading toward immortal lands or celestial heavens.⁹³ However, when Buddhism and other foreign religions took root in China, there emerged several alternative loci where the deceased could be buried. Take Buddhism for example, many Buddhist practitioners were cremated and buried in pagodas instead of tombs. In Liu Shufen's study of Buddhist mortuary practices, we also see the popularity of exposing corpses in forests or caves among certain Buddhist sects.⁹⁴ In their homeland, Sogdians either exposed or cremated the dead body and then preserved the skeleton remains in a special container called ossuary.⁹⁵ When they settled in China, some still continued such indigenous customs.⁹⁶

Significantly, just as what we see in tombs, the afterlife is also pictured at these alternative burial sites. Referred to as the "heavenly palace," many relic or burial pagodas in medieval China are lavishly decorated. A salient example is a Tang dynasty stone pagoda in Shandong province (Fig.2.20). Raised high above ground on a multistoried base, the surface of the pagoda, occupied by Buddhist deities emerging from swirling clouds, represents a

⁹³ As Wu Hung has explicated in *Art of the Yellow Springs*, beside mimicking this life, mortuary images since the Han Dynasties often featured a posthumous journey, which transform the tomb space into a liminal realm between earth and heaven. The destination of this journey, either heaven or immortal land, was frequently illustrated in great detail on the ceiling or lintels of the tomb chamber. See Wu, "Beyond the Great Boundary," 81-104; *Art of the Yellow Springs*.

⁹⁴ Liu Shu-fen 刘淑芬, "Fojiao yu sangzang 佛教与丧葬," in *Zhonggu de fojiao yu shehui* 中古的佛教与社会 (Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008), 181-329.

⁹⁵ Han Wei 韩伟, "Beizhou An Jia mu weiping shita zhi xiangguan wenti qianjian 北周安伽墓围屏石榻之相关问题浅见," *Wenwu* 1 (2001).

⁹⁶ Immigrants like Shi Jun adopted a tomb burial, which as Judith Lerner argues, already shows "a sense of identity or an acceptance of Chinese cosmological belief." Lerner, *Aspects of Assimilation*, 6.

magnificent view into heaven and paradise.⁹⁷ On some monuments like this, patrons and their deceased family members are also portrayed, suggesting their rebirth in the heavenly palace in the afterlife. On the outer surface of ossuaries discovered in Central Asia, the afterlife is also represented, such as the purgatorial judgment over the Chivat bridge. Through these images, the dead soul seems to be visually delivered to paradise.

To be sure, religious mortuary practices did not entirely take the place of indigenous traditions, at least because they were constantly condemned and boycotted as unconventional and even declared to be heretical by Confucian ritualists.⁹⁸ However, religious elements infiltrated tombs, changing the way in which tombs were perceived and constructed. Shi Jun's tomb epitomizes such a change. The designation "heavenly palace" bears little connection with traditional mortuary equipment, but is intimately associated with monuments like Buddhist pagodas. Whereas the scarcely furnished and poorly decorated tomb chamber offers no clue about what the afterlife looks like, the sarcophagus manifests a splendid vision of "heavenly palace." Upheld by winged goddesses at the four corners of its stone pedestal, the stone "heavenly palace" is an airborne object unbounded by earth and gravity. (Fig.2.21)

⁹⁷ Eugene Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 336.

⁹⁸ When the Emperor Dezong wanted to bury the prince in a pagoda, the minister of rites opposed it on the grounds that it is foreign and does not match the majesty of the prince. Prime minister 杜鸿渐 was ridiculed for his will to be buried in a pagoda. See Wang Jing, "Dezong chao huangshi tazang de zhengyi wenti 德宗朝皇室塔葬的争议问题," in *Shensheng kongjian*, 150-173. To the Sogdian immigrants, the Chinese way of burial posed a pressing predicament. Subscribing to Zoroastrianism, the Sogdians in their homeland cremated their body and put the remains in a container called "ossury." To them, the soil would contaminate their bodies, dooming their fate in the afterlife. In this case, the earthbound nature of Chinese burial celebrated by Confucian scholars would seem a taboo to the Sogdians. As many scholars have convincingly pointed out, the reason why so many Sogdian immigrants adopted stone mortuary equipment is in the first place because they found a way to circumvent Zoroastrian proscription against earth burial, meanwhile showing their respect to Chinese tradition. In this case, subterranean tomb was seen not as a place to address death, but rather posed an obstacle for them to overcome.

4.2 Pictorial Space⁹⁹

Besides relying on architectural form, the transformation of the sarcophagus into a sacrificial hall lies primarily in the audience's Chinese literacy and its knowledge of classical culture and Confucian classics. The creation of the "heavenly palace," however, depends mainly on images. Whereas the stone hall is situated in a real space stretching from the graveyard to the tomb chamber, the heavenly palace presents a virtual space on the flat surface of the sarcophagus. Unless we examine the surface, the "heavenly palace" would remain a mere concept in the inscription.

The virtual space of the heavenly palace was invoked by many pictorial devices. One such device, as already mentioned, is the soaring goddesses on the pedestal; another takes the form of flying mythical creatures dotting the brackets beneath the roof. The foremost device, however, is the illusionistic space on the side and back walls. Despite the fact that the images on the walls are divided into separate scenes, they are united by a coherent landscape backdrop. Each scene is set against a lush and vibrant natural environment. A strong sense of spatial depth is created by a multi-layered composition, featured by a wavy pond or lake at the bottom, human figures in the middle and trees and the sky at the top.¹⁰⁰ To enhance the illusion of space, a nebulous and atmospheric pattern is carved in many places, probably representing clouds and mist (Fig.2.22). In contrast to indigenous line-carvings, the images, carved in bas relief, are replete with volume and weight, contributing to an illusion of space that goes beyond the physical boundary of the sarcophagus.

⁹⁹ For the birth of pictorial space in early medieval China, see Wu, "The Transparent Stone," *Representations*, 58-86.

¹⁰⁰ Annette Juliano has summarized two major spatial compositions: first, a space integrates foreground, middle ground and background; second, a space consists of two parallel registers. Both compositions are animated to evoke a tangible space, which can be seen on Shi Jun's sarcophagus. Juliano, "Chinese Pictorial Space."

Most importantly, the perspectives of space shift from the west and north walls to the east wall, creating a sense of ascending from human world to paradise. The scenes on the west and north walls are framed within an earthly realm. Terrestrial images entirely occupy the compositions, with a streak of sky barely visible at the top through the dense leaves and branches. The audience seems to be invited to participate in the activities, either in a solemn congregation or a convivial feast (Fig.2.23). Moving on to the east wall, the sky suddenly opens up, filled by soaring figures and rolling clouds (Fig.2.24). The human world is now relegated to the bottom of the scene, separated from the celestial realm by a towering mountain. Looking down to earth from a bird's eye view, the audience seems to be flying along with the ascending dead souls. With this spatial ascent in mind, we can easily convert the frontal view of the sarcophagus into the façade of a heavenly palace, the celestial destiny of the souls.

The pictorial space on Shi Jun's sarcophagus, as a result, testifies to a momentous development in early medieval Chinese art: the emergence of spatial illusionism --- picturing tangible spaces on a two dimensional pictorial plane. It is a development that to a large extent reflects the influence of Buddhist art and literature. Take the "multi-layered perspective" for example, it is a pictorial device employed primarily in Buddhist art to create an illusionistic vision of Buddhist paradises, often functioning as a visual aid for meditation or visualization (Fig.2.24).¹⁰¹ In her study of Yu Hong's sarcophagus, a house-shaped coffin similar to Shi Jun's, Annette Juliano has noted the appropriation of this proto-linear-perspective in the mortuary

¹⁰¹ For representation of spaces in Buddhist art and the practice of meditation, see Elizabeth Ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999).

context, which, she argues, helps to invoke the vivid vision of a heavenly feast over which the deceased couple presides (Fig.2.25).¹⁰²

In addition to rituals, the stories and miracles in Buddhist texts, which frequently draw on people's imagination of space, also spurred the artistic impulse to create spatial illusion. Particularly in the sixth century, popular Buddhist scriptures like the Lotus Sutra, the Vimalakirti Sutra, and the Flower Garland Sutra, are characterized by magical visions of Buddhist paradises. Significantly, these visions are often conjured up on a mundane object, like a mustard seed, a parasol, or the walls of a tiny bedchamber. To illuminate the supernatural power of the Buddha and the omnipresence of Buddhist nature, these objects served to act as a window or a telescope to miraculously reveal Buddhist paradises in all directions. Such miracles deeply captivated the Chinese mind which had rarely encountered such wild imaginings in its own tradition.

Two notable examples of this spatial illusionism in Buddhist texts can be found in the Flower Garland Sutra and the Vimalakirti Sutra. The protagonist of the former scripture is a pious boy, who embarks on an odyssey-like pilgrimage to seek Buddhist truth. After visiting hundreds of places and consulting fifty-three sages, he eventually achieves enlightenment. Among the sites he visits, is a tower located in the world of the cosmic Buddha. Looking into the tower, the pilgrim beholds a kaleidoscopic manifestation of three thousand Buddhist universes, with the lives of the Buddhas unfolding in front of his eyes.¹⁰³ The tower is a brilliantly built and adorned structure. However, it is only when the tower transforms into an all-embracing visionary vehicle that the miracle of the episode is fully transmitted. In the Vimalakirti Sutra, which focuses on the famous meeting between a wise layman called Vimalakirti and the wisdom-

¹⁰² Juliano, "Chinese Pictorial Space at the Cultural Crossroads."

¹⁰³ David L. McMahan, *Empty Vision: Metaphor and Visionary Imagery in Mahayana Buddhism* (London: Routledge, 2002), 127.

embodying bodhisattva Manjushri, the physical setting where similar miracles occur becomes Vimalakirti's humble bedchamber, a more striking medium of miraculous vision in comparison with the magnificent tower encountered by the pilgrim.

In an age when the influence of Buddhism reached its zenith in Chinese history, miracles like these were popularized through public lectures, storytelling, adapted brochures and various visual forms. In a Buddhist pictorial stele found in Xunxian county, Henan Province, we see how the Buddhist texts inspired an expression of spatial illusionism in art form.(Fig.2.26)¹⁰⁴ The stele is shaped like a multi-story stone tower, which, as Zhang Zong's study has indicated, might represent a pagoda or the heavenly palace. Each face of the stele shows three rectangular compositions, tightly stacked together. Carved in high relief in a recessed space, these compositions represent a multiplicity of tangible paradises and Buddhist lands, e.g. the Tusita heaven presided over by Metreya Bodhisattva, the western pure land occupied by the Amitaba Buddha, and the historical Buddhist land when Shiakamuni lived. With a strong effect of *trompe de l'œil*, the stele recalls the tower described in the Flower Garland Sutra. It could also be a representation of Vimalakirti's bedchamber, since the bottom scene on the front face is exactly an illustration of the story.

As previous analysis has shown, the surface of Shi Jun's sarcophagus presents space in an illusionistic and miraculous way that recalls what we read in Buddhist texts and see in Buddhist monuments like the Xunxian stele. Without the intricate representation of spaces, the sarcophagus is just a mundane mortuary object. Being either a coffin or a sacrificial hall, the sarcophagus only addresses worldly concerns. However, the illusionistic spaces transform the sarcophagus into a miraculous visual medium, and it is through the miraculous visions the

¹⁰⁴ Mizuno Seiichi 水野清一, *Chūgoku no bukkyō bijutsu* 中国の仏教美術 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1968), 169-186.

sarcophagus invokes that the heavenly palace takes shape. When the audience looks into the space represented on the surface of the sarcophagus, it is transposed from the subterranean domain to a terrestrial landscape, and eventually to a heavenly realm.

4.3 Inside and Outside

As I have pointed out previously, the images on the Shi Jun sarcophagus retain a strong thematic link with those on Han stone shrines. However, to invoke the vision of a heavenly palace, these images are presented on the outer surface of the stone hall, rather than upon the inner surface as we see in their Han antecedents. Stone shrines from the Han dynasty always bear the engraved images in their interior, which helps to create an enclosed liminal space where the living makes contact with the deceased. In this case, the best-known example is the Wu Liang shrine (Fig.2.27). Erected in 155 AD, the stone shrine contains more than one hundred figures, including deities from immortal lands, historical kings and heroes, the founding emperor of the dynasty, and the owner of shrine, a recluse Confucian scholar Wu Liang.¹⁰⁵ As Wu Hung has observed, the interior of the shrine is a spatial construct not only pointing to the past and the afterlife, but also conveying strong moral and political messages to the living, especially members of the Wu family. With the intricate pictorial program inside, the shrine literally internalized the personal aspirations and familial responsibility of the deceased.¹⁰⁶

When house-shaped sarcophagi appeared in the Northern Dynasties, they included images in the interior space. However, these images are concerned primarily with the afterlife of

¹⁰⁵ See Wu, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, 198.

¹⁰⁶ As Wu Hung's monograph shows, these images were arranged like history writing. They demonstrate primarily a linear and categorized outlook of human history in line with the current Confucian ideology. The figures are highly stylized and sometimes patternized, intended to convey the moralistic messages recorded in texts instead of creating any spatial depth or illusion. Ibid., 155.

the deceased. For example, inside Ning Mao's sarcophagus, the attendants are depicted preparing food and drink, and an oxcart and a saddle horse are portrayed on the side walls, awaiting the deceased couple for an excursion. The luxurious afterlife of Yu Hong is also displayed inside his house-shaped sarcophagus. The central scene, as discussed previously, represents a paradisiacal setting against which the deceased couple is presiding over a sensual and convivial banquet. Flanking the central scene are an array of figures hunting or riding on horses, with halos indicating their celestial status. Significantly, one interior scene seems to portray the ascent of the sarcophagus, which is mounted by three angelic figures and lifted up by two sacred figures (Fig.2.28).

Unlike stone shrines, sarcophagi cannot be entered by the living. Consequently, house-shaped sarcophagi have to negotiate the interior and the exterior, taking into account the gaze of both the deceased and the living.¹⁰⁷ In the Ning Mao's sarcophagus, while the afterlife of the deceased is portrayed inside, illustrations of filial piety, promoting the merit of the patrons, are engraved on the outside walls. In addition, as Wu Hung has noted, the portraits of the deceased are represented from three different angles on the back wall. Two of these figures show their faces, while one is turning his back to the audience, as if about to enter the interior space of the sarcophagus. In the Yu Hong sarcophagus, the audience is further invited to look into the interior space. The gabled gate in the front of the house-shaped sarcophagus does not close up as we see in Shi Jun's stone hall (Fig.2.29). Looking through the opening, the audience would see the deceased couple's heavenly banquet. Significantly, the gateway forms a frame that enhances the

¹⁰⁷ See Wu, "The Transparent Stone," 62.

linear perspective adopted by the central scene, encouraging the viewer to envision a real heavenly space inside the sarcophagus.¹⁰⁸

Although the gate of Shi Jun's sarcophagus is closed, the images on its outer faces seem to belong to the interior space in which the deceased resides. From the few traces of paint on the interior walls, archaeologists identified images of grapevines, which probably represented a lush garden as we see on the outer surface. This indicates a strong tie between the inside and the outside of sarcophagus. In addition, as Qi Dongfang has observed, the images on the outer walls look too idealized to be a realistic representation of the lives of the deceased couple. To be sure, in the mind of the living, these images evoke the memory of the immigrant family. More importantly, they create a blissful world for the deceased, and delineate a spiritual path for them to follow.¹⁰⁹ To some extent, the living are only invited to look into a space they cannot enter. The heavenly palace, in short, is an interior space turned outward, a realm permeating through the stone hall now rendered transparent.

V. Conclusion: Harmonizing Spaces

Starting from the dual designations of the Shi Jun sarcophagus, I have reconstruct two contrasting spatial strategies in the Sogdian tomb. On the one hand, the “stone (sacrificial) hall” in Chinese, together with a *bei* stele, establishes a link to classical and historical culture of filial piety, entailing an orchestrated effort to empty and open the tomb chamber to would-be visitors to the stone hall. On the other hand, the “heavenly palace” in Sogdian draws on religious

¹⁰⁸ As many scholars have observed, in early medieval China, Buddhist icons were often positioned to be seen through a framing gateway. In the practices of meditation, practitioners were encouraged to contemplate upon such framed images, conjuring up a spiritual vision of the Buddhist paradise on their mind. See Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra*, 271-92.

¹⁰⁹ A comparable example can be found in the Yuan Mi sarcophagus. See Wang, “Coffins and Confucianism.”

imaginings of the afterlife, leading to an illusionistic pictorial program unfolding on the surface of the sarcophagus. These two strategies also generate distinct relationships between the sarcophagus and its audiences: one is more physical and corporeal, realized mainly in ritual performance and intended to address worldly concerns of the living; the other is primarily pictorial and spiritual, reflected in the visualization of the afterlife from the perspective of the deceased. Given the disparate characters of “stone hall” and “heavenly palace,” we may wonder how these two structures can coexist in a single object. How did a spatial construct of the afterlife, inspired by alien religious doctrines, become suitable in a ritual space governed by Confucian ideology? These questions must be addressed before a conclusion can be drawn.

To begin with, the co-existence of the sacrificial hall and the heavenly palace resides in a dichotomy between outside and inside; that is to say, the interior space of the sarcophagus and the exterior space surrounding it. As preceding discussions have shown, the sacrificial hall is the nucleus of the entire tomb space, which stretches from the underground chamber to the graveyard. Enshrined inside the sarcophagus, the deceased couple is separated from the ritual space invoked by the sacrificial hall and the stele, a space in which the living are expected to participate and socialize. The heavenly palace, however, is a visualized space in which the deceased souls reside and roam. As I have pointed out, to some extent it is an interior space turned outside. The living are allowed to look into this illusionistic space, but they cannot enter into it.

This dichotomy between outside and inside is also implied in the bilingual inscription itself. As mentioned earlier, the inscription probably appeals to two different audiences. The classical Chinese text is addressed, most likely, to Shi Jun and his sons’ Chinese colleagues.¹¹⁰ In

¹¹⁰ Sun Fuxi speculates that the Chinese inscription was composed by a Sogdian who was not

medieval Chinese society, the political system and statecraft were deeply rooted in the text-focused Confucian ideology. Reading and writing classical Chinese, therefore, was a prerequisite for a political career. In fact, without a certain grasp of Chinese texts, Shi Jun could not become an eminent *sabao* leader, a civil official appointed by Chinese emperors. To the Shi Jun family, the Chinese inscription is invested with a social and public function. By contrast, the Sogdian inscription speaks only to Shi Jun's family members and possibly his fellow expatriates, which imparts a strong sense of privacy and intimacy. Consequently, the spatial strategies in the Shi Jun tomb also mirror the dichotomy between outsiders and insiders of the Sogdian family and community.

The spatial and textual dichotomy between inside and outside could have struck a chord in the mind of Chinese intellectuals. During the sixth century, a dichotomous attitude toward Confucian morality and religious spirituality developed. Devoted to reconciling Buddhism with Confucianism, some Buddhist scholars promulgated an inner/outer paradigm, which regarded Buddhism as an inner teaching and Confucianism an outer teaching.¹¹¹ The meaning of "inner" and "outer" has never been strictly defined. Broadly speaking, "inner" refers to the personal, spiritual, meditative, and afterlife-oriented aspects of Buddhism, whereas "outer" points to public, political, rational and life-centered tenets of Confucianism. Relegating Buddhism to a private sphere, the inner/outer dichotomy alleviated the challenges posed by Buddhism to Confucian

very versed in classical Chinese, see Yang, *Shi Jun mu*, 294.

¹¹¹ See Shi Zhiru, "Contextualizing Buddhist Approaches to Religious Diversity: When and How Buddhist Intellectuals Address Confucianism and Daoism (third – ninth century)," in Joachim P. Schmidt-Leukel ed., *Religious Diversity in Chinese Thought* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 81-98; Yuet Keung Lo, "The Formulation of Early Medieval Confucian Metaphysics: Huang K'an's (488–545) Accommodation of Neo-Taoism and Buddhism" in Kai-wing Chow, On-cho Ng and John Henderson, eds., *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 57-84.

ideology in political life on the one hand, and justified and consolidated Buddhist belief among the educated elite on the other.¹¹²

Such binary attitudes toward Confucianism and Buddhism might help to explain how “sacrificial hall” and “heavenly palace” are harmonized in a single object: the heavenly palace reflects an inner pursuit of spiritual welfare, which drew on Buddhism and other foreign religions; the sacrificial hall is adopted to promote the moral merits and the political prospect of the Shi family that follows the outer teaching of Confucianism. Confined within a pictorial space on the surface of the sarcophagus, the heavenly palace does not interfere much with the conveyance of Confucian messages in the physical space of the tomb. The sarcophagus functions as a boundary between two cultural and social spheres, heterogeneous but not contradictory to each other. In this regard, it symbolizes the role that Shi Jun must have been performing throughout his life, mediating the Sogdian immigrant community and the Chinese society, harmonizing his personal faith with his political career.

Lastly, it is necessary to note the transitory nature of Shi Jun’s tomb. Granted, the “sacrificial hall” and “heavenly palace” stemmed from the culture and ideology of sixth-century China. However, both of them have been dislodged from their original contexts and transplanted to an underground tomb space. Compared to most mortuary constructs of the time, Shi Jun’s tomb and sarcophagus are strikingly innovative and unconventional, not to mention its conspicuous foreign elements. The artistic autonomy and ideological ambition underlying the tomb design registers the fleeting political prestige enjoyed by the Sogdian elite during the third quarter of the sixth century. Facing the potent and aggressive Turkish Khaganate, the two

¹¹² For Dao’an’s Treatise on Two Teachings, see “Contextualizing Buddhist Approaches to Religious Diversity: When and How Buddhist Intellectuals Address Confucianism and Daoism” in Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Joachim Gentz, *Religious Diversity in Chinese Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 81-98.

rivaling regimes in North China, the Northern Zhou and the Northern Qi, eagerly solicited the support of the Sogdian community, which kept an intimate and favorable connection with the Turkish power.¹¹³ In 581 C.E., the Turkish Empire disintegrated and China was reunified by the Sui Dynasty, ushering the Central Kingdom into a golden age of stability and prosperity. Sogdian merchants were still active in China for another three centuries, but never again do we see anything recalling the bold expression of cultural confidence of sixth-century Sogdian tombs.

¹¹³ Luo Xin 罗新, "Yu Hong muzhi suojian de Rouran guanzhi 虞弘墓志所见的柔然官制," *Beida shixue* 12 (2007): 50-73.

CHAPTER THREE
LIFE BETWEEN REALITY AND ALLEGORY:
NARRATIVE ILLUSTRATIONS AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

The sixth century witnessed an unprecedented surge of self-awareness and individual expression.¹ Although the top strata of Chinese society did often record their lives and express their feelings in literature and the arts before this period, during the sixth century members from almost every social group found a way to voice their individual identity and life experiences. The most striking evidence for this flowering of individuality comes from tomb epitaphs and votive inscriptions — the number of these skyrocketed to a never-before-seen level at this time.² Commissioned by people from a wide range of classes and backgrounds, these textual inscriptions preserve and reveal to us the multifaceted lives of individuals of the time; such texts include not only their names, professions, family relations, and ethnic or regional origins, but also personal aspirations, emotional feelings, and spiritual pursuits.³

¹ For individualism in early medieval China, see Richard Mather, “Individualist Expressions of the Outsiders during the Six Dynasties,” in Donald Munro ed. *Individualism and Holism: Studies in Confucian and Taoist Values* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1985), 199–214; Yü Ying-shih, “Individualism and the Neo-Taoist Movement in Wei-Chin China,” in *Individualism and Holism*, 121–155.

² In the 100-volume catalogue, *A Compilation of Rubbings of Chinese Historical Stone Inscriptions Held at the Beijing Library*, only three volumes are contributed to inscriptions before 512 in contrast to six for those between 512 and 604. Most of these inscriptions are epitaphs and votive inscriptions. However, these six volumes include only a portion of the inscriptions made during the sixth century. Beijing tushuguan jinshizu 北京图书馆金石组 ed. *Beijing tushuguan cang Zhongguo lidai shike taben huibian* 北京图书馆藏中国历代石刻拓本汇编 vol.1-100 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1989-91).

³ The most recent study on epitaphs of this period, see Timothy M. Davis, *Entombed Epigraphy and Commemorative Culture in Early Medieval China: A Brief History of Early Muzhiming* (Brill, 2015). Using votive inscriptions, Hou Xudong and Liu Shufeng have conducted some exemplary studies on individual involvement in Buddhist activities, see Hou Xudong 侯旭东,

While the popularity of epitaphs and votive inscriptions continued in later eras, the sixth century can be considered unique in that it was a moment in which people eagerly embraced the arts as a powerful way to give expression to the self. During this period, which can be aptly described as a golden age of religious arts, people fervently drew on the wealth of religious imagery at hand to express their individuality: Buddhist and Daoist images permeated the public and private spheres, and exotic motifs from foreign religions, such as Zoroastrianism, were admired by immigrants and natives alike. People fervently drew on the wealth of religious imagery to express their individuality. For example, donor images surviving from the sixth century outnumber those from all other periods in Chinese history; each donor image represents an individual person, usually accompanied by the individual's name.⁴ In tombs, portraits of the deceased and representations of their lives were popular among distinct cultural and ethnic groups; it seems that sixth-century individuals did not just want to preserve physical appearances but also aspired to project their unique life experience and identity into the afterlife.⁵

Beichao cunmin de shenghuo shijie: chaoting, zhouxian yu cunli 北朝村民的生活世界：朝廷、州县与村里 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2005); Liu Shufen 刘淑芬, *Wu liu shiji beifang minzhong fojiao xinyang — yi zaoxiang ji wei zhongxin de kaocha* 五六世纪北方民众佛教信仰——以造像记为中心的考察, second edition (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2015); *Zhonggu de fojiao yu shehui* 中古的佛教與社會 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008).

⁴ Important monographs on donor images of the sixth century include Amy McNair, *Donors of Longmen: Faith, Politics, and Patronage in Medieval Chinese Buddhist Sculpture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007); Kate Lingley, "Widows, Monks, Magistrates and Concubines: Social Dimensions of 6th-Century Buddhist Art Patronage," University of Chicago, Dissertation, 2004.

⁵ For tomb murals of the sixth century, see Zheng Yan 郑岩, *Weijin Nanbeichao bihua mu yanjiu* 魏晋南北朝壁画墓研究 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2002); *Shizhe de mianju: Han Tang muzang yishu yanjiu* 逝者的面具：汉唐墓葬艺术研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2013).

In this chapter, I seek to address the role artisans (or artists) played in the representation of individuals in tombs. In the modern world, the idea of individual expression is intimately related to self-expression; however, in early medieval China, representations of the self were always mediated by other agents.⁶ For example, tomb epitaphs, considered the most important document of a person's life, were seldom composed by the deceased themselves. Rather, epitaphs were commissioned by the family members and written by men of letters or epitaph specialists.⁷ In terms of literary style, epitaphs always followed strict formulas, relying heavily on stock phrases and references to classics. The extent to which an epitaph could effectively represent the life of the deceased or faithfully express the person's individuality largely depended on the talent and expertise of the epitaph writers.

Similarly, it was through the efforts of talented artisans that didactic and religious images came to serve as vehicles for individual expression. In the first part of this chapter, an analysis of the filial piety illustrations on mortuary stones will demonstrate how artisans were free to transform didactic narrative motifs into symbols or images that could address the personal needs of the deceased. Manipulating the conventional sequence of filial tale images, artisans could either create a vitalizing space for the rebirth of the deceased in the afterlife or an allegorical portrait to be used in the ancestor worship that took place during funerals. To be sure, the expression of the self that took place on these mortuary stones is far less direct than that which we see in the calligraphy and paintings of the the cultural elite of the time. Nevertheless, the

⁶ It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss the conceptions of individuality in the modern world and early medieval China. For writings on this topic, see Donald Munro ed. *Individualism and Holism*.

⁷ Davis, *Entombed Epigraphy*.

idiosyncrasies of the pictorial programs in sixth century tombs seem to point to personal traits or qualities that were intended to evoke the individual identities of tomb owners.

The second part of the chapter discusses one of the most ambitious visual expressions of individuality created during the sixth century: the biographical illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus. The outer walls of the sarcophagus feature eleven independent scenes. These depict a series of human activities, such as worshipping, parenting, banqueting, hunting and traveling, journeying to the afterlife and ascending to heaven. While most scholars believe that these scenes illustrate the biography recorded in the epitaph, I argue that they simultaneously imitate illustrations of the life of the Buddha Shakyamuni. Drawing on the narrative structure of the Buddhist illustrations, the artisans of the Shi Jun sarcophagus created a semi-fictional biography of the deceased, situating Shi Jun's personal identity between reality and allegory.

I: The Order of Filial Piety Illustrations: Four Pieces of Stone Mortuary Equipment from the Late Northern Wei Dynasty

The stone mortuary equipment of the Northern Dynasties period (386-581 CE) consists of two major types: sarcophagi and stone couches. Over the past two decades, discoveries of these objects have reshaped our knowledge of the arts in early medieval China. In addition to a number of disassembled parts, more than twenty complete sets have been discovered— all dated to the fifth and sixth centuries CE, nearly doubling the number of examples known before the 1990s.⁸

⁸ In his 2003 survey of stone mortuary equipment from the Northern Dynasties period, He Xilin made a table of extant objects including fragments, see He, “Beichao huaxiang shizangju.” Since the time of his study, more mortuary stones have been excavated. Notable objects include the Cao Lian sarcophagus (Luoyang, He’nan, 528 CE), the Feng Senghui stone couch (Anyang, Henan, 548 CE), the Li Dan sarcophagus (Xi’an, 564 CE), the Kang Ye stone couch (Xi’an, 571 CE), the Shi Jun sarcophagus (Xi’an, Shaanxi, 580 CE), and the Shuicui sarcophagus (Tongguan, Shaanxi, 581- 618 CE). For excavation reports, see Henan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo, “Henan Anyang Gu’an mudi;” Cheng, “Xi’an Beizhou Li Dan mu ;” Kou, “Xi’an Beizhou Kang

Among these new discoveries, the most discussed belonged to Sogdian merchants, who came from Central Asia and settled in the Chinese heartland during the medieval period.⁹ With their unprecedented iconography, these Sogdian objects open up a window onto a forgotten chapter in the history of the Silk Road, creating a heated subject for scholarly study across various fields.¹⁰ In addition to the Sogdian mortuary equipment, an equally large group of objects have been found, characterized by illustrations of filial sons — depictions of moral paragon figures conducting virtuous deeds related to Confucian teachings about filial piety. These mortuary objects predated the Sogdian ones and their pictorial motifs formed a basis for the Sogdian imagery; however, they have attracted much less academic attention.¹¹

In early medieval China, filial stories constituted the most popular subject matter for narrative illustration besides Buddhist themes. Many studies have shown that these stories are

Ye mu;” Yang, *Beizhou Shi Jun mu*; Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiuyuan, *Tongguan Shuicun Suidai bihua mu*. Important objects acquired by museums and private collectors include a house-shaped sarcophagus now in the National Museum of China, a stone couch smuggled out of China and temporarily on display in Musée Guimet, a couch purchased by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts from the antique dealer Gisele Croes, a couch in the Kuboso Memorial Museum of Art (Japan), and a couch in the private collection of Wu Huaqiang. For publications about these objects, see Ge, “Beichao Sute ren dahui;” Musée Guimet, *Lit de pierre, sommeil barbare*; Juliano and Lerner, *Ritual Objects and Early Buddhist Art*; Izumishi Kuboso Kinen Bijutsukan, *Hokugi kanbsho no kenkyu*; Kuroda Akira, “Touan toko: Kureuji gi hokugi ishidoko (nimen) no koshidenzu ni tsuite,” *Bukkyo Daigaku Bungakubu ronshu* 3 (2016): 15-30.

⁹ For the most recent studies on this subject, see *Sogdians in China: New Evidence in Archaeological Finds and Unearthed Texts*.

¹⁰ For a general survey of these objects, see Wertmann, *Sogdians in China*.

¹¹ Notable recent discoveries of mortuary stones with filial piety illustrations include the Cao Lian sarcophagus, the Kobuso couch, the Feng Senghui couch, and the Virginia couch. Studies of these works so far have been conducted almost exclusively by a few scholars in East Asia who specialize in filial piety illustrations. See Kuroda Akira, *Koshidenzu no kenkyu* (Tokyo: Kyuko Shoin, 2007); Zheng Yan, “Beichao zangju xiaozi tu de xingshi yu yiyi,” *Meishu xuebao* 6 (2012): 42-54; Zou Qingquan, *Xingwei shifan*; Lin Sheng-chih “Beiwei Luoyang shiqi zangju de fengge, zuofang, fengge yu tuxiang: yi yitao xin fuyuan shiguanchuang weiping weizhu de kaocha,” *Taida Journal of Art History* 9 (2015): 49-126.

essential to understanding the arts and culture of this period.¹² Nevertheless, we cannot fully address the new findings related to this subject without first examining four central objects: the Yuan Mi sarcophagus in the Art Institute of Minneapolis (Fig. 3.1); a stone couch with an enclosing screen, preserved now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (hereafter the “Boston couch,” Fig. 3.2); and two side slabs of a sarcophagus and four slabs of a couch screen located in the Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas (the “Kansas sarcophagus,” Fig. 3.3, and the “Kansas couch,” Fig. 3.4). Unearthed nearly a century ago, all four of the objects can be dated to the early sixth century and attributed to Luoyang (Henan province), the capital city of the Northern Wei Dynasty from 494 to 534 CE.

Despite the constant increase in new discoveries, these four objects still serve as the best examples of filial illustrations from the early medieval period. This is firstly because of their superb execution, which to some scholars suggests a connection with the imperial workshop of the Northern Wei.¹³ Second, most mortuary equipment discovered from the Northern Dynasties displays no more than four filial stories; in contrast, each of the four objects under our discussion bears at least six stories, which give them proper names such as the “filial-son

¹² In East Asia, where society is still considerably influenced by Confucianism, filial piety illustrations have been an important social topic and academic subject. In the west, they also form a crucial part of the study of Chinese history and culture, as exemplified by Keith Knapp’s works such as *Selfless Offspring: Filial Children and Social Order in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005) and “Sympathy and Severity: The Father-Son Relationship in Early Medieval China” in *Extreme-Orient Extreme-Occident Hors-serie* (2012): 113-136. In the field of art history, Eugene Wang has also made some important studies aiming to bring filial illustrations into broader discussions of the visual culture of early medieval China, see “Coffins and Confucianism,” 56-64; “Refiguring: The Visual Rhetoric of the Sixth-Century Northern Wei ‘Filial Piety’ Engravings,” in Shane McCausland ed. *Gu kaizhi and the Admonitions Scroll* (London: British Museum Press, 2003), 101-121.

¹³ Zou, *Xingwei shifan*.

sarcophagus/couch” or the “filial piety sarcophagus/couch.”¹⁴ Most importantly, these four objects together boast thirteen stories, which cover all the filial tales we have found on extant mortuary stones from the early medieval period. Considering these factors, it is not an exaggeration to say that these four objects constitute the bedrock from which any study of filial illustrations in medieval China must begin.

Since American museums began acquiring them in early and mid-twentieth centuries, the four objects have been extensively studied and frequently cited in general discussions of Chinese painting and sculpture.¹⁵ However, many basic facts about these objects have yet to be investigated. For example, the enclosing screen of the Boston couch, previously known as the C. T. Loo couch, had disappeared from public view for more than half a century until the museum published the screen online in 2008;¹⁶ the original sequence of the screen slabs has only recently become clear.¹⁷ In spite of the intricate compositions of its illustrations, some stories depicted on the Kansas couch were not identified until 2016.¹⁸ While most scholars deem the Kansas

¹⁴ On these objects, filial piety illustrations either stretch the full length of the side slabs of the sarcophagi or occupy most of the surface on the couch screen. There are at least six stories depicted on each. In other objects, there are usually only four or less.

¹⁵ For the most recent studies of these objects, see (on the Boston couch) “Boshidun meishuguan cang Beiwei xiaozi shiguanchuang de fuyuan he xiaozi tuxiang yanjiu,” in Wu Hung, Zhu Qingsheng and Zheng Yan eds., *Gudai muzang meishu yanjiu*, vol. 3 (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2015), 119-140; (on the Yuan Mi sarcophagus) Wang, “Coffins and Confucianism;” (on the Kansas sarcophagus) Covey, “Canon Formation;” (on the Kansas couch) Lin, “Hokuchou jidai niokeru sogu no zuzou to kino.”

¹⁶ Except for the front panel and the gateposts, the museum had never exhibited or published the screen panels before 2008. Consequently, the couch had long been known as the C.T. Loo couch among specialists. In 2006, Roger Covey identified the couch screen at the MFA and mentioned it in his 2012 article. I fully studied the screen in 2013, reconstructing the couch in his 2015 article. See C. T. Loo, *An Exhibition of Chinese Stone Sculptures* (New York, 1940), 29-32; Covey, “Canon Formation;” “Boshidun meishuguan cang.”

¹⁷ “Boshidun meishuguan cang,” 120-122.

¹⁸ For a full study of its iconography, see Nagahiro Toshio, “KB hon koshidenzu ni tsuite” in *Rikuchō jidai bijutsu no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppansha, 1969), 187-224. In Kuroda’s 2016

sarcophagus a canonical masterpiece of Chinese art, suspicion about its authenticity has never disappeared; the most recent doubt was raised by Roger Covey in 2012.¹⁹ Of the four objects, the Yuan Mi sarcophagus is the only one accompanied by a *muzhi* tombstone, which gives it a clear provenance and attribution, but its relationship with the other three objects has never been seriously examined.²⁰

Rather than trying to address all these issues head-on, Part One of this chapter focuses on one specific but critical aspect of the four objects in question: the order of their filial piety illustrations. Sarcophagi and stone couches always present narrative illustrations in a horizontal sequence, which unfolds either along each side of a sarcophagus or on the inner surface of the enclosing screen of a couch. By comparing the sequential order of these illustrations with that in their textual source, this part sheds light on the iconography of filial piety stories, processes of illustration, and the interrelationship between the four mortuary objects; but above all, it reveals the proactive and creative role artisans played in negotiating filial piety illustrations and their textual source in the funerary context.

Part One consists of four sections. It first introduces the sequence of filial stories in *Xiaozhi zhuan*, or *Accounts of Filial Offspring*, a popular didactic text in the early medieval period that is widely believed to be the source of filial illustrations. Two versions of the text have survived in two handwritten manuscripts created in Japan between the twelve and sixteenth centuries CE; with few variations, they demonstrate a sequence of filial stories that we cannot find in any other early texts. Part One next compares the sequences of filial illustrations on the

article, the author identifies Dong An's story with the help of newly discovered materials, see "Touan toko."

¹⁹ See "Canon Formation."

²⁰ Davis, "A Stone Sarcophagus of the Wei Dynasty."

four mortuary objects with the textual one, revealing the consistency and discrepancy between the pictorial and textual sequences. In the third section, this discrepancy leads to the discovery of two organizing principles – “family member” and “life/death” – that artisans adopted to rearrange filial stories on mortuary objects. The final section explores how these principles enabled the artisans to create two distinct pictorial compositions (“iconic” and “dualistic”) and thus transform the filial piety illustrations into symbolic or ritual implements in the mortuary context.

1. *Accounts of Filial Offspring and the Textual Order of Filial Tales*

The textual source of filial illustrations is a literary subgenre called *Xiaozi zhuan* or *Accounts of Filial Offspring*, a biographic compilation of historical paragons of filial piety.²¹ According to Keith Knapp’s study, this genre of literature emerged during the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 CE), when Confucianism became the state ideology and took deep root in Chinese society; its popularity reached its pinnacle during the Northern and Southern Dynasties.²²

Of the numerous versions of *Accounts of Filial Offspring* circulating during the early medieval period, only two versions, later handwritten copies (circa twelfth to sixteenth century

²¹ Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, 272-305; Knapp, *Selfless Offspring*, 46-82; Kuroda, *Koshidenzu no kenkyu*, 187-216.

²² Knapp, *Selfless Offspring*, 46-82; “Xiaozi zhuan,” in Cynthia L. Chennault and Keith N. Knapp eds., *Early Medieval Chinese Texts: A Bibliographic Guide* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2014), 409-413. Although *Accounts of Filial Offspring* was aimed at educated cultural elites, the text, as Knapp has suggested, was often accompanied by illustrations. See Knapp, *Selfless Offspring*, 65. Thus, filial piety engravings on mortuary stones could also be copies of the pictures present in illustrated manuscripts. None of these manuscripts have survived, but their formats can be imagined from some extant hand-scroll paintings of similar didactic function, such as the famous *Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies* (Fig. 3.5). For studies on this artwork, see Shane McCausland ed., *Gu kaizhi and the Admonitions Scroll* (London: British Museum Press, 2003).

CE), have survived: the Yomei and Funabashi manuscripts, named after their initial sites of collection.²³ Created between the twelve and sixteenth centuries CE, both manuscripts were string-bound in the format of a book rather than a hand scroll, the original medium of the texts.²⁴ Nonetheless, the texts prove to be composed during the early medieval period and thus provide scholars with a unique opportunity to study the literary references of early filial illustrations.²⁵

As previous studies have shown, one of the most important points of comparison between *Accounts of Filial Offspring* and filial illustrations on mortuary stones is the order by which the stories are arranged into a sequence.²⁶ To begin with, the two manuscripts contain the same forty-five stories, divided into two volumes; except for the last two (Ci Wu and Mei Jianchi), these forty-five stories follow an identical sequential order. In the Funabashi manuscript, the stories are even marked with serial numbers. Thus we have a textual sequence of filial tales that proceeds like this:

Volume I (“Upper Scroll”):

No.1 Shun No. 2 Dong Yong No. 3 Xing Qu No. 4 Han Boyu No. 5 Guo Ju

No. 6 Yuan Gu No. 7 Wei Yang No. 8 Sanzhou No. 9 Ding Lan

No.10 Zhu Ming No.11Cai Shun No.12Wang Lin No.13 Lao Laizi

²³ The two manuscripts are transcribed and annotated in Yogaku no Kai ed., *Koshiden chukai* (Tokyo: Kyuko Shoin, 2003).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ For the most comprehensive study of these two manuscripts, see Kuroda Akira, *Koshiden no kenkyu* (Kyoto: Hatsubai Shibunkaku Shuppan, 2001).

²⁶ Many scholars have noticed the correspondence between the textual order and the pictorial sequences of filial piety illustrations; however, a systematic study of this relationship has never been conducted. For discussions of this issue, see Lin, “Hokuchou jidai niokeru,” Zou, “Xingwei shifan,” 50. On the basis of such connection, Kuroda has convincingly proved the authenticity of the pictorial carvings on the Wu Liang Shrine, see Kuroda Akira, Keith Knapp trans., “Are the Wu Liang Shrine Pictorial Stones Forgeries? Examining the Han Era Evidence,” *Asia Major*, 2 (2010): 129-151.

No.14 Song Shengzhi No.15 Chen Shi No.16 Yang Wei No.17 Cao E
No.18 Mao Yi No.19 Ou Shang No.20 Zhong You No.21 Liu Jingyi
No.22 Xie Hongwei No.23 Zhu Bainian

Volume II (“Lower Scroll”):

No.24 Gao Chai No.25 Zhang Fu No.26 Meng Ren No.27 Wang Xiang
No.28 Jiang Shi No.29 Shu Xianxiong No.30 Yan Wu No.31 Xu Zi
No.32 Lu Yishi No.33 Min Ziqian No.34 Jiang Xu No.35 Boqi No.36 Cen Shen
No.37 Dong An No.38 Shen Sheng No.39 Shen Ming No.40 Qin Jian
No.41 Li Shan No.42 Yang Gong No.43 Donggui Jienü No.44 Mei Jianchi (Ci
Wu in Funabashi manuscript) No.45 Ci Wu (Mei Jianchi in Funabashi manuscript)

Except for Gao Xing of the Liang (or Liang Gao Xing) on the Kansas couch, all thirteen of the filial stories depicted on mortuary stones of the Northern Dynasties can be found in this sequence. If they were arranged on mortuary stones according to the textual order, they would form a sequence like this:

No. 1 Shun No. 2 Dong Yong No. 4 Bo Yu No. 5 Guo Ju No. 6 Yuan Gu
No. 9 Ding Lan No. 11 Cai Shun No. 12 Wang Lin No. 13 Lao Laizi
No. 33 Min Ziqian No. 35 Boqi No. 37 Dong An No.44 Mei Jianchi

It is notable that although each of the two manuscripts comprises only a single book, the stories are divided into two volumes, designated as the “Upper Scroll” and the “Lower Scroll” in Chinese. This format might reflect the original medium of the manuscripts: a pair of hand scrolls

in either silk or paper.²⁷ On such scrolls, the stories would have been arranged sequentially in a horizontal composition, similar to the way in which the illustrations are arranged on the side slabs of the sarcophagus or the screen of the stone couch. The reason why only a small selection of the forty-four stories appears on the mortuary objects could be ascribed to the limited space these objects offer for illustration. It is also possible that the illustrations are based on abridged versions of the text.

The thirteen stories found on the mortuary equipment under our discussion represent some of the best known paragons of filiality during the early medieval period: seven had been popular since the Han Dynasty and all the rest appear more than once on extant mortuary objects.²⁸ When these filial stories were arranged on the mortuary stones, they formed their own pictorial sequences. This raises the first question to be answered in Part One: do these pictorial sequences follow the textual order as marked with serial numbers on the Funabashi manuscript? In the next section, I will investigate each of the four mortuary objects, examining the sequences of the filial illustrations and comparing them with the textual order of *Accounts of Filial Piety*.

²⁷ For formats of silk and paper books, see Tsuen-Hsuei Tsien, *Written on Bamboo and Silk: The Beginnings of Chinese Books and Inscriptions* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 119–174.

²⁸ Kuroda has made a list of filial piety illustrations appearing on extant mortuary objects before the Tang Dynasty, see *Koshidenzu no kenkyu*, 187–216.

2. Pictorial Sequences of Filial Tales

Yuan Mi Sarcophagus

The sarcophagus and the tombstone of Yuan Mi (? ~523 CE) were unearthed in 1930 from a tomb at Lijia'ao northwest of present-day Luoyang.²⁹ The tomb is located in the royal cemetery of the Northern Wei on Mt. Mang, adjacent to the Mausoleum of Emperor Xuanwu (483-515 CE). In 1946, the Minneapolis Institute of Art acquired the sarcophagus and the tombstone, which have been on display in the MIA's Chinese gallery ever since.³⁰

Compared to indigenous Chinese coffins, which are constituted by a rectangular shape, Northern Wei sarcophagi are characterized by a curved cover and a higher and wider head end, features probably originated in the nomadic conventions of the Xianbei people.³¹ While most extant Northern Wei sarcophagi bear images on all the visible surfaces (including the cover, the four side slabs, and the edges of the pedestal), illustrations of filial sons are always lined up in

²⁹ Guo Yutang, a local scholar at Luoyang, documented the excavation of mortuary stones in his hometown during the first half of the twentieth century. In his record concerning Yuan Mi's tomb, the author only mentions the tombstone but not the sarcophagus. See Guo Yutang, Guo Peiyu ed., *Luoyang chutu shike shidi ji* (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chuban she, 2005), 28. Nevertheless, the Minneapolis Institute of Art acquired the sarcophagus and tombstone as though they were a single tomb. See Davis, "A Stone Sarcophagus of the Wei Dynasty." In my field research, I found that the tomb-stone and the sarcophagus are made of the same type of limestone, known as "flowery bluestone" in the Luoyang region. Following this, we can further discern that the pieces share a peculiar texture and unique colors, which distinguish them from extant mortuary stones of the time and attest to their connection. As a prince of the Northern Wei, whose uncle was the famous Xiaowen Emperor, Yuan Mi is given a brief biography in the dynastic history. A sarcophagus, bearing similar compositions and motifs, was excavated in Luoyang in 2012. The tomb's occupant is Cao Lian, a descendent of Cao Cao, the founder of the Wei Kingdom (220-265 CE). Cao Lian's sarcophagus was made in 528 CE, four years after Yuan Mi's burial. This new find further substantiates the attribution of the Minneapolis sarcophagus to Yuan Mi. For Cao Lian's sarcophagus, see Wang, "Luoyang shi luonan."

³⁰ Davis, "A Stone Sarcophagus of the Wei Dynasty."

³¹ Albert E. Dien, *Six Dynasties Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 194-201.

the horizontal compositions on the two side slabs. Thus, in the case of sarcophagi, we have two parallel sequences of filial tales, each filling horizontally one long side of the sarcophagus.

Of all the extant stone mortuary equipment from the Northern Wei period, the Yuan Mi sarcophagus boasts the most filial stories in a single piece, exhibiting ten stories composed of eleven pictorial scenes. The stories on the left side, proceeding from the head to the foot end, include Yuan Gu, Shun, Lao Laizi, Dong Yong and Boqi (with two scenes) (Fig. 3.1 a); those on the right side are Ding Lan, Han Boyu, Guo Ju, Min Ziqian and Mei Jianchi (Fig. 3.1 b). These filial tales constitute two parallel sequences:

Left Slab:

No. 6 Yuan Gu – No.1 Shun– No. 13 Lao Laizi – No. 2 Dong Yong – No. 35 Boqi

Right Slab:

No. 9 Ding Lan – No.4 Han Boyu – No.5 Guo Ju –No.33 Min Ziqian –No. 44 Mei Jianchi

Comparing these pictorial sequences with the sequential order in the Funabashi manuscript, we see both consistency and discrepancy. On the right side, except for no.9, the stories all follow the textual order, proceeding from small to large numbers. However, the sequence on the left side seems at great odds with the textual one: the stories move from no.6 back to no. 1, then jump forward to no. 13, come back again to no.2, and eventually stop at no.35. This discrepancy on the left slab is so severe that, even though the right side shows certain fidelity to the textual sequence, it looks as if the textual order could have been but of little priority to the artisans.

Boston Couch

Excavated in Luoyang, the Boston couch was first published in C.T. Loo's antique catalogue in 1940; in 1962, it went to the permanent collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.³² The couch consists of a front panel, a pair of gateposts, and four slabs that form a three-sided enclosing screen (Fig. 3.6). This is a unique type of mortuary equipment that emerged for the first time in the late Northern Wei period in Chinese history; it quickly disappeared toward the end of the Northern Dynasties.³³ The Boston couch is one of the few complete sets of its type dated to the Northern Wei Dynasty.³⁴ Based on the thematic and stylistic affinity between the couch and the Yuan Mi sarcophagus, I have elsewhere suggested that the deceased belonged to the upper-class strata of society.³⁵

As on sarcophagi, decorations are applied on all visible surfaces of stone couches from the Northern Dynasties. The main area for decoration is the front or inward-facing surfaces of the enclosing screen, which are usually composed of four slabs of identical size. Each slab is further divided into three rectangular panels by line-carved borders that simulate wooden frames, a design derived from the wooden screened couches used in daily life.³⁶ These panels therefore form a succession of pictorial spaces, in which filial stories and other major mortuary subjects are engraved.

³² Loo, *An Exhibition of Chinese Stone Sculptures*, 29-32.

³³ Wei Zheng, Jin Xu trans., "The Formation of High-legged Screen Couches in the Northern Dynasties," *Chinese Cultural Relics* (forthcoming).

³⁴ The other two are now preserved in Luoyang Museum and the Kuboso Memorial Museum of Art, see Huang, *Luoyang Beiwei shisu*, 73-76; Izumishi, *Hokugi kanbsho no kenkyu*. Northern Wei stone mortuary equipment was produced predominantly in Luoyang. After the fall of the Northern Wei, mortuary stones began to be made in the newly emerging political centers, such as Ye (present-day Anyang city) and Xi'an, the capital cities of the Northern Qi and Northern Zhou respectively.

³⁵ "Boshidun meishuguan cang," 125.

³⁶ Lin, "Hokuchou jidai niokeru," 220-223.

The twelve panels of the Boston couch encompass seven stories in total. Starting from the left side, they are: Yuan Gu (two panels) on Slab 1 (left side-slab, Fig. 3.2a); Ding Lan, Cai Shun and Lao Laizi on Slab 2 (left central slab, Fig. 3.2b); Dong Yong and Shun (two panels) on Slab 3 (right central slab, Fig. 3.2c); and Guo Ju on Slab 4 (right side-slab, Fig. 3.2d). In addition to filial stories, the couch also depicts a saddled horse and an oxcart — representing the mounts of the deceased husband and wife — on the two side slabs respectively. The filial tales on the Boston couch form the following pictorial sequence:

Slab 1- No.6 Yuan Gu; **Slab 2-** No.9 Ding Lan, No. 11 Cai Shun, No.13 Lao Laizi; **Slab 3-** No.2 Dong Yong, No.1 Shun; **Slab 4-** No. 5 Guo Ju

Compared to the pictorial sequences on the Yuan Mi sarcophagus, that on the Boston couch demonstrates a more intimate connection with the textual sequence in the Funabashi manuscript. To be sure, if we take the depiction of tale no.6 on Slab 1 as the starting point of the sequence, the textual order in the Funabashi manuscript is not correctly followed by the carved scenes. However, if we take the carved scenes as beginning with tale no.1 carved on Slab 3, and proceed clockwise to tale no. 13 (depicted on Slab 2), we discover a pictorial sequence that adheres exactly to the sequence found in the written texts (Fig. 3.7). In this way, except for tale no.2 (represented on Slab 3), all the carved stories conform to the textual order. Nevertheless, this observation raises a critical question: why did the artisans not place tale no.1 (Shun) on Slab 1 so that the scenes they carved for the stone screen would align with the sequential order established by the written texts? In fact, if the artisans had switched the filial stories depicted on Slab 3 and 4

with those represented on Slab 1 and 2, the pictorial sequence would follow the textual order in a more straightforward and explicit way. This puzzle will be addressed in the following section.

Kansas Sarcophagus

With only its side and foot slabs surviving, the Kansas sarcophagus first came to awareness when it came into the possession of an antique store called Chinese Antique Mountain Studio (Huagu shanfang) in Beijing.³⁷ The owner of the store is Zhu Xuzhai, a reputable antiques dealer who had worked with C.T. Loo for decades and maintained strong connections with the Luoyang market.³⁸ In 1933, Laurence Sickman purchased the sarcophagus for the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. It was subsequently sent to the historic 1935 exhibition of Chinese art in London.³⁹ Since then, the sarcophagus, now on display in the Chinese gallery of the museum, has become an icon of Chinese art history.⁴⁰

³⁷ Covey, "Canon Formation," 64.

³⁸ Zhu opened Huagu shanfang after he had separated his business from C.T. Loo. See Chen Zhongyuan, *Jian shang shu wang shi* (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1999). Guo Yutang records several sarcophagi with clear attribution. Based on Guo's description, Huang Minglan suggests that the Kansas sarcophagus belongs to Wang Yue, whose sarcophagus and tombstone were unearthed in 1927. See Huang, *Luoyang Beiwei shisu*, 117. However, Guo mentions that the Wang Yue sarcophagus was sold to Shanghai instead of Beijing, so it could not be the one purchased by Sickman. If the Kansas sarcophagus is one of those mentioned in Guo's records, the most likely option would be Yuan Wen's sarcophagus, which was unearthed at a village called Houhaizi (Luoyang) in 1920 and preserved in a nearby temple after its excavation. Yuan Wen was a cousin of Yuan Mi, who died seven years earlier. See Guo, *Luoyang chutu shike*, 44.

³⁹ Laurence Sickman, "The Sarcophagus of Filial Piety: Its Date and Iconography," in E. Chaney and N. Ritchie eds., *Oxford, China, and Italy: Writings in Honour of Sir Harold Acton on His Eightieth Birthday* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 71-79.

⁴⁰ Of the four mortuary objects in this paper, the Kansas sarcophagus, with its intricate representation of landscape and human figures, is the most famous. Roger Covey has traced the process of its canonization in great detail. However, as soon as the sarcophagus became known to American audiences in the mid-twentieth century, some of the most established scholars of Chinese art, such as George Rowley and Harrie Vanderstappen, expressed doubts concerning its authenticity. Their suspicion focuses primarily on the unprecedented, novel style of the pictorial carvings on the sarcophagus. Over the past decades, as increased archaeological evidence has

The Kansas sarcophagus displays three filial stories on each side. From the head to the foot end, they are Dong Yong (two scenes), Cai Shun (two scenes), and Wang Lin (two scenes) on the left side (Fig. 3.3a); and Shun (two scenes), Guo Ju (three scenes) and Yuan Gu (two scenes) on the right side (Fig. 3.3b). Like on the Yuan Mi sarcophagus, here we have two parallel sequences:

Slab Left: No.2 Dong Yong –No.11 Cai Shun –No.12 Wang Lin

Slab Right: No.1 Shun –No.5 Guo Ju –No.6 Yuan Gu

The link between these two sequences and the sequential order in the Funabashi manuscript is clear.⁴¹ Taken separately, each pictorial sequence follows the textual order. Even if we see the

revealed far more unusual styles, the great majority of scholars have accepted that the Kansas sarcophagus is an authentic piece. Nevertheless, in a recent article, Covey strongly argues that the sarcophagus is a forgery created by Chinese antique dealers during the early twentieth century – though he does not notice the fact that the seller of the sarcophagus is Zhu Xuzhai, a famous dealer with strong reputation. In addition, like previous scholars, Covey concentrates his suspicion on style and visual quality, which have proved to be extremely diverse and versatile during the sixth century CE, as we can see on the Sogdian mortuary objects. This paper does not directly respond to Covey’s argument on styles and forms. However, my analysis of the pictorial sequences will demonstrate that the Kansas sarcophagus cannot be a forgery because of its inextricable ties with the manuscripts of *Account of Filial Offspring* and other mortuary stones. For the issue of authenticity about the Kansas sarcophagus, see Covey, “Canon Formation.” In a recent paper, Annette Juliano rebukes Covey’s argument from the perspective of pictorial style, see “The Authenticity of the Early Sixth Century Stone Sarcophagus in The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and the Central Asian Beds and Sarcophagi,” in Rong Xinjiang and Luo Feng 荣新江 罗丰 eds., *Sute ren zai Zhongguo: kaogu faxian yu chutu wenxian de xin yinzheng* 粟特人在中国: 考古发现与出土文献的新印证 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe), 207-211.

⁴¹ At the time the Kansas sarcophagus was purchased, there was not a single text existing in China that included all the six stories. The manuscripts found in Japan became widely known to scholars only after the Second World War. As a result, it seems quite impossible that any modern artisans could have put together these six stories and arranged them in an order only located in two manuscripts unknown at the time. For a comprehensive study of texts related to *Accounts of Filial Offspring*, see Kuroda, *Koshidenzu no kenkyu*.

two slabs as a continuous composition from right to left, the original textual order is still highly respected: except for no. 2, the stories proceed orderly from no. 1 to no. 12.

Kansas Couch

The Kansas couch was purchased in 1933, probably together with the Kansas sarcophagus. Only four screen slabs of the couch have survived. From the holes for metal clasps in their surfaces, we can reconstruct the screen and infer that initially the couch possessed a pair of gateposts in the front, which were connected to the two side slabs.⁴² Thus, the original appearance of the object would have been similar to the Boston couch.

The Kansas couch presents the only extant case in which all twelve panels on the enclosing screen are occupied by narrative stories. It is also the only extant Northern-Wei couch for which the outside surfaces of the screen are decorated with images, i.e. fantastic beasts confined within line-carved frames (Fig. 3.8). The filial illustrations, however, remain the focus of the pictorial program. From left to right, these stories are: Lao Laizi, Yuan Gu and Guo Ju on

⁴² The slabs have been preserved in a disassembled condition. In his 2003 article, Lin Sheng-chih tried for the first time to reconstruct the enclosing screen by matching the holes for metal clasps on the slabs. While correctly putting Slab 2 and 3 on the back of the couch, Lin failed to restore Slab 1 and 4. He noticed that the holes in the scenes of Lao Laizi (left end of Slab 1) and Ding Lan (right end of Slab 4) are situated further into the pictures than the other holes. Assuming that the clasps connecting the side slabs to the rear ones should be wider, he took Lao Laizi and Ding Lan as the places where the clasps connect the rear slabs, and subsequently positioned Slab 1 on the right side of the couch and Slab 4 on the left. See Lin, “Hokuchou jidai niokeru,” 217. However, Lin did not consider the existence of the two gateposts, which, as demonstrated by the Boston and the Feng Senghui couches, are always attached to the side slabs with the widest clasps. These gateposts cause the clasp holes on the adjacent pictorial scenes to move further into the pictures than any other holes. Consequently, the holes on the scenes of Lao Laizi and Ding Lan would have been made for the gateposts; this firmly places Slab 1 to the left side and Slab 4 to the right.

Slab 1(Fig. 3.4a); Guo Ju⁴³ and Dong An (two panels)⁴⁴ on Slab 2(Fig. 3.4b); Liang Gao Xing,⁴⁵ Wang Lin,⁴⁶ and Cai Shun on Slab 3(Fig. 3.4c); Dong Yong (two panels) and Ding Lan⁴⁷ on Slab 4(Fig. 3.4d). These nine stories form a pictorial sequence like this:

⁴³ Because the enclosing screen of the Kansas couch has never been correctly reconstructed, the story on this panel remained unidentified in previous studies. In light of the restored sequence, we see the picture is probably the final episode in Guo Ju's story. The story of Guo relates that, struck by a famine, the filial paragon decides to bury his infant son alive so the family can save food for his elderly mother, but as soon as he deepens the pit, a jar of gold appears — a gift from heaven for his filial piety. Adjacent to this picture on Slab 1 is the illustration of Guo Ju digging a pit in the ground with a spade. In both the Kansas sarcophagus and the Boston couch, this "digging" episode is followed by a scene in which Guo Ju comes back home with the gold and pays respect to his mother. The picture here also depicts a gentleman kneeling in front of a lady (Fig. 3.9). Accompanied by an attendant holding a vessel filled with almond-shaped objects, this figure should be Guo Ju returning home with the heaven-bestowed gift. It is not unusual that the infant son is not present here, as we see on the Boston couch.

⁴⁴ In Dong An's story, the filial son beheads his half-brother Wang Ji, who had abused Dong's mother to death. Accompanied by an inscription, the first scene of this story depicts Wang Ji's mistreatment of Dong's mother, while the following scene has recently been identified by Kuroda as the final episode of Dong An's story which represents Dong's visit to his mother's tomb, marked by two gateposts and a grassy tumulus (Fig. 3.10). See Kuroda, "Touan toko." A recently-discovered piece of evidence further supports his speculation: a screen slab, which I attribute to a mortuary couch of the Northern Wei Dynasty on the basis of its formal and stylistic features (Fig. 3.11). This slab contains two scenes illustrating Dong An's story. In the first, a man beats a lady with one hand and forces a vessel to her mouth with another, corresponding exactly to the textual description of Wang Ji's mistreatment of Dong's mother. The next scene depicts a man standing beside a tomb mound, on top of which is a human head. This is a graphic but straightforward illustration of the ending of the story: Dong offers Wang's head as a sacrifice at his mother's gravesite. Inscribed on the border between these two scenes is a character *wang*, which must refer to the villain Wang Ji. Thus the tomb-visiting scene on the Kansas couch, beside Wang Ji's mistreatment of Dong's mother, should imply Dong's revenge for his mother's death. The head might have been left out here for its brutal implication. At the bottom of the composition, two hunters are shooting a deer with a bow, an episode not to be found in the text. However, it could have been mentioned in some lost version of the story. In the newly-found slab, for example, the hunting scene also appears, right below Dong An's mother and Wang Ji.

⁴⁵ Nagashiro identified the scene as Liang Gao Xing. Known as a paragon from *Biographies of Exemplary Women*, a literary subgenre as popular as *Accounts of Filial Offspring*, the beautiful widow Liang Gao Xing disfigured herself in order to reject the king's proposal for marriage. Although the story does not appear in any extant mortuary stones of the Northern Dynasties, the iconographic details of its illustration here correspond closely to the text as well as its Han pictorial precedents. See Nagahiro, "KB hon koshidenzu ni tsuite;" Wu, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, 253-254.

Slab 1- No.13 Lao Laizi, No.6 Yuan Gu, No.5 Guo Ju ; **Slab 2** - No.5 Guo Ju, No.37

Dong An; **Slab 3** - Liang Gao Xing, No.12 Wang Lin, No.11 Cai Shun; **Slab 4** - No.2

Dong Yong, No.9 Ding Lan

While the stories on Slab 1 adhere to the sequential order in the Funabashi manuscript, the Kansas couch overall seems to disregard it completely. On Slab 1 and 3, the stories proceed from large to small numbers (no. 13 to no.5 on Slab1, no. 12 to no. 11 on Slab 3), but on Slab 2 and 4,

⁴⁶ The composition and iconography here are similar to those in the illustrations of Wang Lin's story on the Kansas sarcophagus, which depict the filial son offering himself to the peasant rebels in exchange for the release of his brother (Fig. 3.12). However, compared to the plain-dressed rebels on the Kansas sarcophagus, the soldiers here are clad in magnificent uniforms. On the basis of such difference in costumes, Nagahiro excludes the possibility that the soldiers could be peasants, and takes the protagonist as Shen Ming, a filial son from *Accounts of Filial Offspring* who is not to be found in any pictorial forms to date. See Nagahiro, "KB hon koshidenzu ni tsuite," 194-195. With the increased evidence amassed during the past two decades, Nagahiro's costume-based argument seems far-fetched. As Qi Dongfang and Zheng Yan have pointed out, human figures on mortuary stones demonstrate a strong tendency to take on an idealized form, which could aptly explain why on the Kansas couch the peasant rebels look magnificent and stately. See Qi Dongfang, "Lixiang yu xianshi zhijian – An Jia, Shi Jun, Yu Hong mu de shike tuxiang de jiedu wenti," in Wu Hung and Zheng Yan eds., *Gudai muzang meishu yanjiu*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2011), 205-218; Zheng Yan, "Notes on the Stone Couch Picture from the Tomb of Kang Ye in Northern Zhou," in Institute of Archaeology CAAS ed., *Chinese Archaeology* 9 (2009), 39-46. Most importantly, as we see on the Kansas sarcophagus, Wang Lin, Cai Shun and Dong Yong seem to form a popular sequence on mortuary stones.

⁴⁷ The picture here has never been identified. However, if we compare it with Ding Lan's story as illustrated on the Boston couch and the Ning Mao sarcophagus, it seems plausible that the picture represents the same story (Fig. 3.13). In all these illustrations of Ding Lan, the filial son is sitting or standing face-to-face with his late mother's wooden statue, which is rendered like a living person. In the text, Ding Lan serves his mother's statue so reverently that he does not want to lend an ax to his neighbor simply because the statue's face shows reluctance. When the indignant neighbor cuts an arm off the statue, Ding Lan makes his revenge by decapitating the neighbor. In this picture, Ding Lan is slightly raising his right hand, which might imply that he is consulting the statue about the neighbor's request. This gesture can also be found in Ding Lan's story on the Wu Liang Shrine. See Wu, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, 282-285.

they move in the opposite direction (no. 5 to no.37 on Slab 2, no.2 to no. 9 on Slab 4). Moreover, the story of Liang Gao Xing, a lady known for her loyalty to her late husband, does not appear in any existing versions of *Accounts of Filial Offspring*. In sum, it appears that the artisans neither seriously considered the textual order nor limited themselves to a single textual source.

Summary

A comparison of the pictorial sequences of filial stories on the four mortuary objects with the sequential order of these stories in the Funabashi manuscript of *Accounts of Filial Offspring* reveals that the extent of the correspondence between pictorial and textual sequences varies widely, ranging from close adherence, as in the Boston couch and the Kansas sarcophagus, to the almost complete disregard exemplified by the Kansas couch. However, even on the former two objects, reference to the textual order is not verbatim: the sequential order of the text does not align with the physical form of the screen on the Boston couch; and it is interrupted by the story of Dong Yong in both cases. Could these discrepancies be ascribed to some different but lost versions of the text? Or could they be an intentional alteration or change of the textual source? Or perhaps, could they simply result from artisanal ignorance? To answer these questions, we need to consider the four objects as a whole, investigating the underlying organizing principles of their pictorial sequences.⁴⁸

3. Organizing Principles of Pictorial Sequences

To account for the discrepancy between the pictorial sequences on the mortuary stones and the textual one in the Funabashi manuscript, we need to look into the principles organizing the filial

⁴⁸ Zou Qingquan has suggested that the mortuary stones under discussion were all executed by the royal workshop of the Northern Wei. See Zou, *Xingwei shifan*, 37-57.

tales, namely the logic according to which the stories are arranged into a sequence. First of all, in *Accounts of Filial Offspring*, the filial stories do not simply follow a historically chronological order, as is common in biographic anthologies, but instead tend to be arranged according to certain principles rooted in Confucian teachings about family, society, and history. For example, Shun as no.1 has not only chronological but also ideological significance: he is one of the five legendary sage kings in the ancient history of China, an apotheosis of the Confucian ideal of rulership and morality, and most importantly, the only royal character in the text.⁴⁹

The most recurrent principle of organization in the text, however, seems to be based on types of family members, i.e. stories are grouped together if the senior protagonists, namely the beneficiaries of filial deeds, belong to the same type of family member.⁵⁰ For example, as Kuroda has noted, in stories no.2 to no.5, the common senior protagonists are father (no.2 and no.3) and mother (no.4 and no.5).⁵¹ In addition to parents, who are the principal beneficiaries of filial deeds, grandparents, siblings, or even stepparents are also taken into account in the organization of filial tales in the text.⁵² Nevertheless, the “family member” principle seems to be applied in only a piecemeal manner in the Yomei and Funabashi manuscripts; the stories as a whole do not show any overriding principles of arrangement.

If, however, we shift our focus from sequential order to organizing principle, the apparent incoherence between the pictorial and textual sequences can be easily solved. In this section, it

⁴⁹ For the significance of Shun in filial piety stories, see Luo Feng 罗丰, “Cong diwang dao xiaozi: Han Tang jian tuxiang zhong Shun gushi zhi liubian 从帝王到孝子:汉唐间图像中舜故事之流变,” in Xu Pingfang xiansheng jinian wenji bianji weiyuanhui ed., *Xu Pingfang xiansheng jinian wenji* 徐萍芳先生纪念文集(Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), 637-671.

⁵⁰ Zhao Chao, “Ribei liuchuan de liangzhong gudai ‘Xiaozizhuan’,” *Zhongguo dianji yu wenhua* 2 (2004): 4-10.

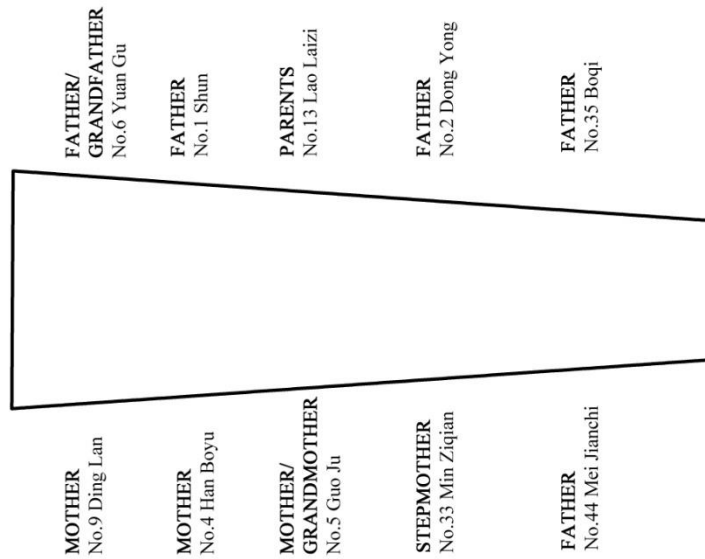
⁵¹ See *Koshiden chukai*, 11-12.

⁵² Ibid.

will be demonstrated that the filial illustrations on the four mortuary objects in question are arranged according to two distinct principles: the “family member” principle and the principle of life/death. While the former principle might have been inherited from the text, the life/death principle, which separates stories of nurturing the living (life) from those of caring for the dead (death), seems to have been created specifically for the mortuary context. Curiously, while the first principle dictates the pictorial sequences on the Boston couch and the Yuan Mi sarcophagus, the second determines the order of scenes on the Kansas sarcophagus and couch. In both cases, these visual principles supersede the sequential order of the text as the artisans’ primary concern.

First Principle: Family Members

On both the Yuan Mi sarcophagus and the Boston couch, the filial illustrations are arranged according to the “family member” principle. On the Yuan Mi sarcophagus, if we add to the names of the filial sons the types of family members they serve in each story, the two pictorial sequences transform into a familial diagram like this:



Slab Left: Father or Grandfather (Yuan Gu no.6)⁵³ – Father (Shun no.1) – Parents (Lao Laizi no.13) – Father (Dong Yong no.2) – Father (Bo Qi no.35)

Slab Right: Mother (Ding Lan no.9) – Mother (Han Boyu no.4) – Mother or Grandmother (Guo Ju no.5)⁵⁴ – Stepmother (Min Ziqian no.33)⁵⁵ – Father (Mei Jianchi no.44)

⁵³ The protagonist in this story is the filial grandson Yuan Gu, who dissuades his father from deserting Yuan's aged grandfather in the wilderness. Moved by Yuan's filial piety, Yuan's father changes his behavior and also becomes a filial son. See *Koshiden chukai*, 62-63.

⁵⁴ The story here pivots upon Guo Ju burying his son so that his mother will not starve during a famine. While the protagonist is the filial son Guo Ju, the beneficiaries of his filial deed are both his mother and the grandmother of his son. See *Koshiden chukai*, 56-57.

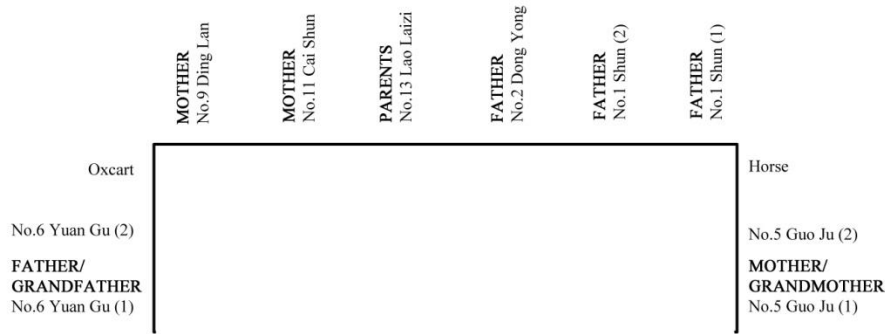
⁵⁵ Usually the role played by stepmothers in *Accounts of Filial Offspring* is very negative. The Min Ziqian story is one of the few that features a stepmother as the senior protagonist. Nevertheless, unlike other malicious stepmothers, Min Ziqian's becomes repentant and reconciles with her filial stepson. See *Koshiden chukai*, 177-184.

From this diagram, we can tell that the stories on the left slab are characterized primarily by senior male members (except for the “parents” scene of Lao Laizi); those on the right focus on senior females (except for the Mei Jianchi story).

On each side, the “family member” principle entails a symmetrical layout that concentrates on the portraits of the parents depicted in the scenes about Lao Laizi and Guo Ju. With the exception of these two scenes, situated close to the center of each side respectively, all the other illustrations display either one senior family member or none at all (Fig. 3.1). Interestingly, while Lao Laizi’s parents are indeed the main characters in the text, Guo Ju’s father dies early and plays no part in any extant versions of the story.⁵⁶ So the composition, which depicts Guo sitting respectfully in front of a couple, could only be an artistic fabrication to make the “parents” (absent in the text) the pictorial focal point on the right side of the sarcophagus (Fig. 3.14). Significantly, on each side, stories flanking the “parents” scene proceed centrifugally from small to large numbers, further reinforcing the impression of symmetry. In this way, the designers utilized the textual order to serve their own pictorial scheme.

Filial illustrations on the Boston couch are also arranged by the “family member” principle. Yet the symmetrical layout is articulated in a more consistent and prominent way, as can be seen in the diagram below:

⁵⁶ For illustrations of Guo Ju, see Zheng, “Beichao zangju xiaozi.”



Slab 1: Father or Grandfather (Yuan Gu no.6)

Slab 2: Mother (Ding Lan no. 9) – Mother (Cai Shun no.11) - Parents (Lao Laizi no. 13);

Slab 3: Father (Dong Yong no. 2) - Father (Shun no. 1)

Slab 4: Mother or Grandmother (Guo Ju no.5)

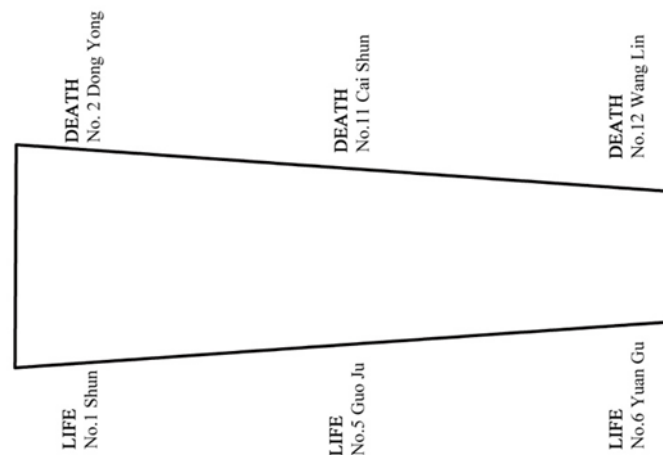
Here, as on the left side of the Yuan Mi sarcophagus, the story in the middle of the diagram is Lao Laizi (Fig. 3.15). The other stories, all featuring only one senior protagonist in any textual sources, are symmetrically positioned on the two sides of the “parents” scene of Lao Laizi.⁵⁷ Significantly, on the Boston couch, the symmetrical layout of the filial stories is closely aligned with the physical form of the three-sided screen. On Slab 2 and Slab 3, which form the central part of the screen, the “parents” (Lao Laizi) story is flanked to the left by two “mother” stories (Cai Shun and Ding Lan), and two “father” ones (Dong Yong and Shun) to the right. These

⁵⁷ In addition to the Lao Laizi scene, the Shun and Guo Ju scenes also depict both parents: father/stepmother in the former story and father/mother in the latter. However, in the text, Shun’s stepmother is a villain and Guo’s father plays no part. Their importance cannot be compared to that of Lao Laizi’s parents in the illustrations.

nuclear-family stories are supplemented by stories of grandparents on the side panels, with the “grandfather (Yuan Gu)” on Slab 1 and the “grandmother (Guo Ju)” on Slab 4.

Second Principle: Life/Death

In contrast to the previous two objects, the Kansas sarcophagus and couch adopt a unique and distinctive principle of organization: the filial tales are divided into two oppositional groups according to whether their main theme concerns serving the living or caring for the dead. The Kansas sarcophagus is the best example of this life/death principle:



Slab Left (“Death”):

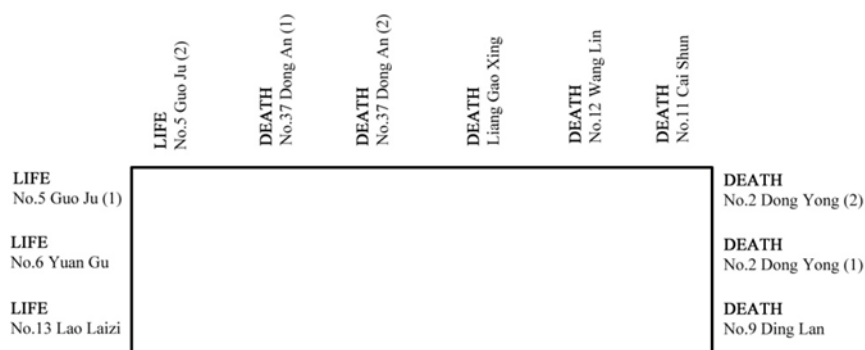
Preparing the Funeral (Dong Yong no.2) - Protecting the Coffin (Cai Shun no. 11)
 – Guarding the Tomb (Wang Lin no. 12)

Slab Right (“Life”):

Obedying Father (Shun no. 1) - Feeding Mother (Guo Ju no. 5) - Nurturing
 Grandfather (Yuan Gu no. 6)

In the diagram above, the life/death opposition is crystal clear. The stories illustrated on the right side all focus on nurturing one's parent or grandparent, even in the face of extreme adversities and hardships: Shun remains respectful and subservient even after his father attempts to murder him several times; Guo Ju wants to bury his infant son so that his mother will not starve; Yuan Gu dissuades his father from deserting the aged and infirm grandfather. In contrast, the protagonists on the left side, though also diligent in nurturing their parents, are best-known for their virtuous deeds related to mourning or burial: Dong Yong sells himself to offer his father a proper burial; Cai Shun sacrifices his life to protect his mother's coffin; Wang Lin spends years in the wilderness to guard his parents' tomb.⁵⁸ The illustrations on the two sides, therefore, epitomize the teaching of the last sentence of the *Classic of Filial Piety*: "the righteous claims of life and death are all satisfied, and the filial son's service of his parents is completed."⁵⁹

On the Kansas couch, the filial stories are rearranged according to the same life/death principle:



⁵⁸ For this type of death-related story, see Knapp, "'Exceeding the Rites' Mourning and Burial Motifs," in *Selfless Offspring*, 137-163.

⁵⁹ James Legge, *The Sacred Books of the East*, Volume 3 (1861), *Chinese Text Project*, www.chinese.dsturgeon.net (as of 4 June 2016).

Slab 1 (“Life”): Entertaining the Parents (Lao Laizi no. 13)-Nurturing Grandfather
(Yuan Gu no.6)- Feeding Mother(Guo Ju no. 5)

Slab 2 (“Life”/“Death”): Feeding Mother (Guo Ju no. 5)-Avenging the Death of
Mother (Dong An no. 37)

Slab 3 (“Death”): Remaining Faithful to the Late Husband (Liang Gao Xing) -
Guarding the Tomb (Wang Lin no. 12) -Protecting the Coffin(Cai Shun no. 11)

Slab 4 (“Death”): Preparing the Funeral (Dong Yong no. 2) - Serving the Post-
mortem Portrait (Ding Lan no.9)

From the diagram, we can recognize that the leftmost three stories — Lao Laizi, Yuan Gu and Guo Ju — concern the living; the remaining scenes deal with death. The life/death principle explains the puzzling inclusion of Liang Gao Xing, a story featuring a beautiful widow who disfigures herself to avoid being remarried.⁶⁰ Since no filial story touches upon the motif of serving a deceased husband, the tale may have been included for a widowed wife among the audience, especially considering its central position on the screen.⁶¹

As pointed out previously in the second section, the discrepancy between the pictorial sequences of the filial stories on the mortuary stones and their sequential order in the Funabashi manuscript is greatest on the Kansas couch. However, considered in light of the life/death division of the illustrations, this discrepancy revealed to be a product of a constructive scheme. If we look at the “life” and “death” groups separately, it becomes obvious that the textual order is

⁶⁰ For the story of Liang Gao Xing and its earliest illustrations on Wu family shrines, see Wu, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, 253-254.

⁶¹ The precedent of using the illustration of Liang Gao Xing for specific audiences can be traced to the Wu Liang Shrine. See *Ibid.*

in fact closely followed. Except for Dong Yong (no. 2), the filial illustrations in both groups proceed from small to large numbers (“Death”- no.9, *no. 2*, no. 11, no. 12, no.37; “Life” – no.5, no.6, no.13). It is notable that instead of displaying the two groups of stories evenly on the screen, the designers give a dominant role to the death-related stories, which occupy eight out of the twelve panels on the screen. This might have been a deliberate arrangement to suit the mortuary environment.⁶²

Textual Order Reconsidered

Though, as we have seen, the designers of filial illustrations prioritized organizing principles over the sequential order possessed by the text, yet in none of the four cases was the textual order entirely ignored. It was instead closely followed within a thematic group (the Kansas sarcophagus and couch) or even utilized to enhance the pictorial scheme (the Yuan Mi sarcophagus). It is clear that the artisans meticulously sought to integrate the sequential order of the text into the pictorial programs. Bearing this in mind, we find that only one major puzzle remains: the recurrent exception of the Dong Yong story. On the Yuan Mi sarcophagus, with the exception of Dong Yong (no.2) and Boqi (no.35), stories flanking the central “parents” scene are not too far from each other in the textual sequence (Yuan Gu-Shun/ no.6- no.1; Ding Lan - Han Boyu/ no.9-no.4; Min Ziqian -Mei Jianchi / no. 33 - no. 44); on the Boston couch, except for

⁶² Were the gateposts of the Kansas couch still existing, they would mirror their pictorial counterparts in the second scene of Dong An, in which the protagonist makes a sacrifice at his mother’s gravesite. (Fig. 3.10) The possibility that the life/death division reflects the structure of a lost text cannot be completely excluded, especially considering Knapp’s observation about the great popularity of death-related motifs in the early medieval period. See Knapp, “Exceeding the Rites’ Mourning and Burial Motifs.”

Dong Yong, all the stories can be fit into a clockwise sequence that follows the sequential order of the text (Shun no.1, Guo Ju no.5, Yuan Gu no. 6, Ding Lan no. 9, Cai Shun no. 11, Lao Laizi no. 13, *Dong Yong no.2*); on the Kansas sarcophagus, other than Dong Yong, the stories on the left side all follow those on the right (Right: Shun no.1, Guo Ju no.5, Yuan Gu no.6; Left: *Dong Yong no.2*, Cai Shun no.11, Wang Lin no.12); on the Kansas couch, were it not for Dong Yong, the “death” group would conform to the textual order just as the “life” one does (Ding Lan no.9, *Dong Yong no.2*, Cai Shun no.11, Wang Lin no.12, Dong An no.37). In other words, in all of the objects under discussion, were it not for the recurrent exception of Dong Yong, the sequential order in the Funabashi manuscript of *Accounts of Filial Offspring* would be fully respected after the artisans applied the organizing principles.

The constant exception of the Dong Yong story encourages us to reconsider the textual source of the filial illustrations on the mortuary stones in discussion. Since the two manuscripts preserved in Japan display different orderings for the last two stories (Mei Jianchi and Ciwu), we may have reason to speculate that in some lost version(s) of the text Dong Yong also had a different placement. Curiously, if we move Dong Yong from no.2 to the place of no. 14 (or to any number between 14-35) in the textual sequence of the stories, the exception raised by its placement on the Yuan Mi sarcophagus becomes less anomalous (*Dong Yong no.14*/ Boqi no.35) and that on the Boston couch is completely resolved (Shun no.1, Guo Ju no.5, Yuan Gu no. 6, Ding Lan no. 9, Cai Shun no. 11, Lao Laizi no. 13, *Dong Yong no.14*). On the other hand, if we suppose that Dong Yong were at the place of no.10 in the text, the textual order on the Kansas sarcophagus (Right: Shun no.1, Guo Ju no.5, Yuan Gu no.6; Left: *Dong Yong no.10*, Cai Shun no.11, Wang Lin no.12) and the Kansas couch (Ding Lan no.9, *Dong Yong no.10*, Cai Shun no.11, Wang Lin no.12, Dong An no.37) would both be rectified. In this case, we have reason to

believe that the four objects under our discussion are probably based on two other versions of *Accounts of Filial Offspring*, which differ slightly from the Yomei and Funabashi manuscripts but have not survived over time.⁶³

⁶³ This might explain why the illustrations of the four objects exhibit two disparate pictorial styles. Images on the Yuan Mi sarcophagus and the Boston couch demonstrate an intimate affinity: human figures tend to look generic and stereotypical, with little differentiation as to costumes, gestures, ages, and social roles; most figures are static, rendered as sitting or standing face-to-face, and bears no specific reference to the episodes they are meant to represent; mythical creatures roam in the sky above the human world. For a detailed analysis of their formal and stylistic similarity, see “Boshidun meishuguan cang,” 121. The Kansas sarcophagus and couch likewise share several common features, which draw a marked contrast to images on the other two objects. Here, human figures are rich in detail, showing considerable differences from one another; their movements are active and expressive, often illustrating the most dramatic episode in the story; there are no mythical creatures. While the formulas for the figuration of humans on the Yuan Mi sarcophagus and the Boston couch draw heavily on the Han and Jin traditions, images on the Kansas objects seem to represent the latest fashion. According to Wu Hung’s study, the Wang Lin scene on the Kansas sarcophagus and the Liang Gao Xing picture on the Kansas couch both epitomize the aestheticizing trend of painting in the early medieval period, and the Kansas objects’ stressing of death-related motifs, according to Knapp’s observation, is also intimately related to current thoughts and practices. See Wu Hung, “The Transparent Stone: Inverted Vision and Binary Imagery in Medieval Chinese Art,” *Representations*, vol. 46 (1994), 58-86; Knapp, “Exceeding the Rites’ Mourning and Burial Motifs.” In terms of the contents of the two possible lost versions, I have some speculations: one situates Dong Yong at no. 14 or higher numbers and the other places the story at no. 10; the serial numbers of major stories otherwise seem identical to those in the Japanese manuscripts. Besides, the first possible lost version (with Dong Yong at no.14), perhaps illustrated on the Yuan Mi sarcophagus and the Boston couch, seems likely closer to the Japanese manuscripts than the second possible lost version (with Dong Yong at no.10), upon which the Kansas cases may have been based. The key to this distinction lies in the stories of Wang Lin and Cai Shun. In the Kansas cases, the Wang Lin scenes are concentrated on his guarding of his parents’ tomb and the Cai Shun scene on the filial son’s protecting of his mother’s coffin, but there is no mention of either episode in the Japanese manuscripts (Fig. 3.3a and 3.4c). Instead, both manuscripts relate that Cai Shun takes residence beside his mother’s tomb, a motif characterizing the illustration of the story on the Boston couch (Fig. 3.16). This testifies to the affinity between the first possible lost version and the Japanese manuscripts. The story of Wang Lin’s guarding of his parents’ tomb is included in *Dong guan Han ji* and *Taiping yulan*, see *Koshiden chukai*, 89-100. Cai Shun’s heroic protection of his mother’s coffin can be found in the filial illustrations on a Northern Wei lacquer coffin excavated in Guyuan, see Guyuan bowuguan, *Guyuan Beiwei mu qiguan hua* (Yinchuan, Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 1988).

Recovering in this way the possibility of two lost versions of the text (with the story of Dong Yong at the place of no.14 and no.10 respectively instead of no.2), we can now reconsider the creation processes of the filial piety illustrations, in particular how the sequential order of filial stories in the lost versions of text might have been transferred to the surfaces of mortuary stones.⁶⁴ In the case of the Yuan Mi sarcophagus, the designers first created the two “parents” scenes (Lao Laizi and Guo Ju), anchoring them near the centers of the respective side slabs. Then, following the sequential order in the text, they selected subsequently two pairs of stories concerning fathers (no. 1/no. 6, no. 14/no.35), arranging them centrifugally on both sides of Lao Laizi (no.6/no.1-Lao Laizi – no.14/no.35). Moving to the other side of the sarcophagus, the designers placed two “mother” stories (no.4/no.9) to the left side of Guo Ju, and then placed a “stepmother” story (no.33) and a “father” one (no.44) to the right (no.9/no.4- Guo Ju – no.33/no.44). It is unclear why the designers did not choose two “mother” stories in the last step of their illustration.⁶⁵

On the Boston couch, the designers first put the “parents” story (Lao Laizi, no.13) onto the panel with the closest position to the center of the entire screen (the third panel of Slab 2). Then, they selected the “father” story of Dong Yong (no.14), situating the story to the right side of Lao Laizi (no. 13). Afterwards, starting over from the very beginning of the textual sequence,

⁶⁴ Throughout this section of the paper, I assume the physical medium bearing the textual order is some hand-scroll manuscript of *Accounts of Filial Offspring*, with or without illustrations. However, the designers could also have based their engravings on abbreviated versions of the text, which only contained the most prevalent stories for that time. This supposition may explain the narrow scope of the stories we see on mortuary equipment during the early medieval period.

⁶⁵ Mei Jianchi’s story focuses on the filial son’s revenge for his father’s death. As Knapp has suggested, the placement of this story among the mother related tales might allude to a sixth-century conception that Mei has served his mother by taking revenge for his father. Personal communication, June 19, 2016.

they subsequently chose an array of stories (Shun no.1, Guo Ju no.5, Yuan Gu no. 6, Ding Lan no. 9, Cai Shun no. 11), fitting them into a pictorial program organized around “family member” principle. It is remarkable that the designers could fulfill the pictorial principle without having to jump back and forth in the textual sequence. But while their talent is praiseworthy, we should not exclude the role played by serendipity in this process of “select and match.”

The creation processes of the illustrations on the two Kansas objects seem simpler and much more straightforward. In both cases, following the textual sequence in another lost version of the text (with Dong Yong at the place of no.10), the designers first selected a succession of stories concerning the “life” theme, applying them on one side of the object (no.1, no.5, no.6 on the right side of the sarcophagus; no.9, no.10, no. 11, no.12, Liang Gao Xing, no.37 on the right side of the couch). Then he chose another succession related to the “death” motifs, which were applied on the other side (no.10, no.11, no.12 on the sarcophagus; no. 5, no. 6, no.13 on the couch). Clearly, in selecting stories from the text, the sequential order is much easier to follow with the “life/death” principle than with the “family member” one.

4. Ritual and Symbolic Functions of Filial Piety Illustrations

We cannot fully understand the complex creation processes of filial piety illustrations on the mortuary stones without considering the visual logic of mortuary arts. Examining the ritual and symbolic contexts of the four mortuary objects may show how artisans devised their own ways of interpreting stories from the *Accounts of Filial Offspring*. Following this line of inquiry, this section will show that by prioritizing the organizing principles (“family member” and “life/death”) over the sequential order in the text, the artisans were able to create on mortuary stones two unique compositional structures — iconic and dualistic, imbuing the filial illustrations with ritual and symbolic functions. The iconic composition offers a focal point—the portraits of

the deceased parents — as the subject of ancestral sacrifice; the dualistic structure harmonizes the Yin and Yang forces in the afterlife.

Centralized Iconic Structure and Ancestral Sacrifice

The centralized iconic structure is best exemplified by the illustrations on the Boston couch: here the “parents” scene performs the function of an icon in the center, flanked by stories of mother, father, grandfather and grandmother. In his study of stone mortuary couches, Lin Sheng-chih notes that the portraits of the deceased couple usually occupy the center of the enclosing screen, serving as the subject of ancestral sacrifice and worship in the tomb space.⁶⁶ On the Boston couch, a similar structure is carefully created. First, it is done by placing the parents of Lao Laizi at the center of the screen (Fig. 3.15). Here the parents stand in for the deceased couple.⁶⁷ As mentioned above, among the seven stories on the stone couch, the tale of Lao Laizi is the only one featuring both parents of the filial son in any textual source. Literally enshrined in an audience hall in the picture, Lao Laizi’s parents become allegorical portraits of the deceased couple. Significantly, the cartouche accompanying the images reads, “Lao Laizi’s father and mother are in the audience hall (*fu mu zai tang*),” a phrase that carries the implied meaning, “the parents are alive.” This emphatic statement of the presence of the parents recalls the Confucian teaching about ancestral worship: “He sacrificed to the dead, as if they were present.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Lin, “Hokuchou jidai niokeru,” 222.

⁶⁷ We do not have any information about the owners of the Boston couch. However, it is common to place the corpses of a couple on one single stone couch, especially when their portraits are represented on the screen. A good case in point is the stone couch excavated in Gu’an, see Henan sheng, “Henan Anyang Gu’an.”

⁶⁸ James Legge, trans., “The Analects of Confucius,” in www.chinese.dsturgeon.net (as of 4 June 2016).

Second, the oxcart and the saddle horse on the Boston couch, which conventionally accompany couple portraits, corroborate the allegorical tie between the portraits of Lao Laizi's parents and the deceased couple in the tomb (Fig. 3.17). In Chinese mortuary tradition, portraits of the deceased did not become popular until the early imperial period (221 BCE- 589 CE). In indigenous tradition, the presence of the dead soul was often indicated by non-representational methods, such as an empty space or objects like their personal mounts.⁶⁹ For example, inside Ning Mao's house-shaped sarcophagus (527 CE), we see a saddled horse and an oxcart displayed on the two sidewalls; but the center of the back wall is a blank space, implying the presence of the souls of the horse's and oxcart's riders. On the Boston couch, the allegorical portraits present an unprecedented way of representing the deceased, a middle way between the non-representational convention and the direct portrayal of the deceased.

Third, the iconic status of Lao Laizi's parents as allegorical portraits of the deceased is stressed by the centripetal manner in which the filial narratives develop on the screen (Fig. 3.17) of the Boston couch. When a story consists of two scenes (or panels) — as with Yuan Gu (left and middle panels) on Slab 1, Shun (middle and right panels) on Slab 3, and Guo Ju (middle and right panels) on Slab 4, it proceeds from one scene to another toward the center of the couch, and thus toward Lao Laizi's parents. In other words, the two scenes of Yuan Gu move clockwise toward the center (from the left to the middle panel) and the two scenes of Shun and those of Guo Ju move counterclockwise (from the right to the left) again toward the center. It is noteworthy that on the Kansas couch, stories with two scenes (Guo Ju, Dong An, and Dong Yong) are treated in the same centripetal way. Although in this case the “parents” portraits are

⁶⁹ For a detailed survey of how the soul is represented in tombs, see Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs*, 63-84.

replaced with the tomb-visiting scene of Dong An, the emphasis on ancestral sacrifice does not change. Such subtle compositional treatments of individual stories reflect the designers' insightful understanding of both the literary narrative and the ritual requirements of the mortuary space.

Unlike the Boston couch, the Yuan Mi sarcophagus, with its four-sided shape, cannot present all the stories in a single iconic structure. Nonetheless, when we face either side of the coffin, the “parents” portraits, which may again have represented the deceased couple, also constitute a focal point on the side slabs. The imperfect iconic structure here implies a different agenda, which I will discuss in the next section.

Dualistic Structure and Yin/Yang Balance

The dualistic structure — female/male on the Yuan Mi sarcophagus and life/death on the Kansas sarcophagus and couch — stems from the Yin/Yang dichotomy underwriting Chinese cosmology, which traditionally serves as a guiding principle in Chinese life. In particular, Chinese geomancy stresses that, when searching for a burial site and constructing a tomb, people must consider the balance of Yin and Yang forces. The harmony of Yin and Yang cultivates the *qi* energy, vital for the regeneration of the dead soul and the good fortune of the offspring. In the renowned *Zangshu*, or *Book of Burial*, a text allegedly composed by the Eastern Jin philosopher Guo Pu, it is written that:

Without Yin and Yang, things would violate heaven and deviate from their origin.

Yang cannot beget things alone; Yin cannot accomplish things on its own. Only when

Two (the number of Yin) and Five (Yang) correspond and transform to each other, the *qi* energy can be generated.⁷⁰

In the five-phase theory, Yin and Yang manifest as a multitude of dualistic symbols: west/east; female/male; black/red, etc.⁷¹ In tombs of early and medieval China, these symbols are extensively exploited to harmonize the Yin and Yang forces in the afterlife. The best case in point is a Northern Wei sarcophagus from Luoyang (Fig. 3.18).⁷² Occupying its two long sides are a flying tiger and a soaring dragon respectively, symbols of west and east as well as of Yin and Yang. While a female divinity is riding on the tiger, a male deity is mounted on the dragon. Set against a lush ethereal landscape, these figures are accompanied by celestial musicians and fantastic creatures; most importantly, they are surrounded by scrolling clouds, the physical manifestation of the *qi* vapor. Bridging the two long sides, the inner surface of the lid of the coffin is etched with the sun and the moon, a symbol of the union of Yin and Yang.⁷³ The fusion of these cosmic motifs on the Luoyang sarcophagus creates a revitalizing environment that surrounds the corpse inside.⁷⁴

The female/male dichotomy of the Yuan Mi sarcophagus may have been devised to satisfy the same desire for Yin/Yang balance in the mortuary context. With the exception of Mei

⁷⁰ Guo Pu 郭璞, *Zangshu* 葬书 (Book of Burial), *Chinese Text Project*, www.chinese.dsturgeon.net (as of 4 June 2016).

⁷¹ For a comprehensive study of the Yinyang theory, see Robin Wang, *Yinyang: The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁷² Patricia Karetzky, "A Scene of the Taoist Afterlife on a Sixth Century Sarcophagus Discovered in Loyang," *Artibus Asiae* 1 (1983): 5-20.

⁷³ Cheng Te-k'un, "Yin-yang wu-hsing in Han Art," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 20 (1957): 182- 183.

⁷⁴ Stephen Little discusses the symbolism of Yin and Yang on a sarcophagus with similar dragon/tiger motifs, though the authenticity of the object is questionable. See Stephen Little and Shawn Eichman, *Taoism and the Arts of China* (Chicago/Berkeley: The Art Institute of Chicago/University of California Press, 2000), 130.

Jianchi, the filial tales on the two slabs form a dualistic structure composed of those focused on serving senior male figures and those focused on serving senior female ones. This gender-based division can be aptly translated into the Yin/Yang dichotomy. Moreover, like the Luoyang sarcophagus, the pictorial program here embraces the motifs of tiger and dragon, which fly above the mundane world of the filial paragons along with other immortals and celestial creatures (Fig. 3.1). Curiously, the tiger, the symbol of Yin, is placed on the “male” side of the coffin, and the Yang dragon on the “female” side. This might be an intentional design choice to join the two opposite forces, one that can be traced to the mortuary arts of the Han Dynasty.⁷⁵ Considering the prevalence of the sun/moon and similar symbols as indices of the Yin/Yang union (e.g. Fuxi/Nüwa; Queen Mother of the West/ King Father of the East) on existing coffin covers from the Northern Dynasties, we have reason to believe the Yin/Yang interaction on the Yuan Mi sarcophagus was also manifest on its lost lid.⁷⁶

Unlike the widespread female/male symbols, the life/death composition seems unprecedented in the arts of early medieval China. Nevertheless, its association with the Yin/Yang dichotomy is of little doubt. In Chinese philosophy and medicine, it is widely acknowledged that the balance of Yin and Yang decides death and life.⁷⁷ As the Western Han scholar Dong Zhongshu puts it, “Yang force is to give life and Yin force is to give death.”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ See Chen Liang, “Handai muzang menqu fulu yu yinyang bieqi guannian yanjiu,” in *Zhongguo hanhua yanjiu*, vol.3, (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010), 64-65.

⁷⁶ For these coffin-lid decorations, see Huang, *Luoyang Beiwei shisu*.

⁷⁷ In Robin Wang’s words, “it is the movement of yinyang qi that leads to the life or death of any living thing.” See *Yinyang*, 14. A good example of the Ying/Yang principle as applied to tomb arts can be found in Eugene Wang’s study on the Mawangdui tomb no.1, see “Ascend to Heaven or Stay in the Tomb? Paintings in the Mawangdui Tomb 1 and the Virtual Reality of Revival in Second-century BCE China,” in Amy Olberding and Philip Ivanhoe eds., *Mortality in Traditional Chinese Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011), 37-84.

⁷⁸ Robin Wang, “Dong Zhongshu’s Transformation of ‘Yin-Yang’ Theory and Contesting of Gender Identity,” *Philosophy East and West* 2 (2005), 218.

Under this logic, death-related filial acts can be seen as responses to the Yin force and life-related ones to the Yang. Thus, the filial stories can be transformed into another type of Yin/Yang symbol, facilitating the rebirth of the dead soul and bestowing good fortune upon the living.⁷⁹ Notably, on the back of the Kansas couch, each panel depicts two fantastic creatures. Ferocious and forceful, they look as if they are wrestling on top of one another (Fig. 3.8).⁸⁰ Surrounded by swirling clouds, these creatures may have been used to enhance the Yin/Yang dynamic underlying the life/death composition on the front surface of the screen.

The dualistic Yin/Yang structure of the Yuan Mi sarcophagus and the Kansas objects points to the artisans' profound understanding of correlative Confucianism, a school of thought which incorporates human relations and acts into an all-encompassing moral universe. For example, the founder of the school, Dong Zhongshu, correlates father and mother with Yang and Yin respectively; this accounts precisely for the dualistic composition (female/male) on the Yuan Mi sarcophagus.⁸¹ More specifically, Knapp has observed that, since the Eastern Han Dynasty

⁷⁹ Knapp has noted that although the tales of Wang Lin and Dong Yong stress their mourning of their parents, their illustrations on both the Kansas sarcophagus and couch portray life-related episodes: Wang Lin's willingness to die to save his brother and Dong Yong's taking care of his living father. Thus, he suggests that these illustrations were still held as life-related instead of death-related scenes, and the life/death principle was not neatly followed. Personal communication, June 19, 2016. However, the reason for this discrepancy might be that there was no illustration of the mourning episodes of these two stories circulating during the sixth century. Besides, by linking life/death principle to the Yin/Yang balance, the artisans have already severely undermined the didactic function of the filial tales, which are reduced to alternative symbols of the Yin and Yang. In this case, even if the illustrations do not portray the death-related scenes of Wang Lin and Dong Yong, they could still serve as "death" symbols by a sole reference to these two figures best known for their death-caring deeds.

⁸⁰ For a study of these fantastic creatures, see Susan Bush, "Thunder Monsters and Wind Spirits in Early Sixth Century China and the Epitaph Tablet of Lady Yuan," *Boston Museum Bulletin* 72 (1974): 25-54.

⁸¹ Wang, "Dong Zhongshu," 213-214.

writers and scholars consistently attributed spiritual correspondence to filial stories.⁸² Most stories under discussion in Part One embrace some forms of divine correspondence, e.g. Dong Yong's encounter with a daughter of god, Guo Ju's receiving of gold from heaven, the miraculous animation of the wooden statue of Ding Lan's mother. In light of the popularity of such human-spiritual interactions, it is all but natural that the artisans of the mortuary objects would make their own connections between filial stories and cosmic forces. Compared to the iconic structure, this dualistic composition pays even less attention to the narrative contents of filial stories, further divorcing them from the textual and didactic context, in order to fulfill the symbolic requirement of mortuary arts.

Conclusion

In his 1992 article "What is *Bianxiang*?" Wu Hung investigated the relationship between Buddhist narrative tales and their illustrations.⁸³ Focusing on Dunhuang painting and literature, he noted that "a new form (of illustrations) emerged in the early Tang and transformed the text into a spatial representation with its own logic."⁸⁴ Dislodged from their narrative and didactic contexts, Buddhist tales at Dunhuang were rearranged to meet the requirements of various ritual activities: the sacred protagonist in a storytelling text could be rendered an icon of worship in the mural illustration; dramatic narrative episodes might be divided into pictorial groups of oppositional themes that would flank the central deity. These illustrations were so attractive that, as Wu suggests, they might even have shaped the way people wrote about Buddhist stories.⁸⁵

⁸² Knapp, "Filial Miracles and the Survival of Correlative Confucianism," in *Selfless Offspring*, 82-112.

⁸³ Wu Hung, "What is *Bianxiang*? — On the Relationship between Dunhuang Art and Dunhuang Literature," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 1 (1992): 111-192.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 169-170.

In my study of filial piety illustrations, I have revealed similar transformations of textual tales into ritual and symbolic diagrams. Yet in this case the transformations took place in tombs instead of cave chapels and predated the Tang masterpieces at Dunhuang by more than a century. In these filial illustrations, the artisans demonstrate an equally, if not more, proactive and creative approach to their textual sources; it is hard to imagine that they could have engaged in such an intricate dialogue between text and image without both a profound grasp of literary knowledge and significant skills of craftsmanship and mortuary arts. Bearing this in mind, we may need to reconsider the role artisans might have played in creating the many paintings and engravings of early medieval China, especially those whose images are associated with strong literary traditions, like Sogdian mortuary stones to be discussed in the next section.

II: An Allegorical Life: Biographical Illustrations on the Shi Jun Sarcophagus

With their unique references to the deceased's personal experiences and their multifaceted religious elements, the illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus have attracted more scholarly attention than any other mortuary object from the sixth century (Fig.3.19).⁸⁶ However, when it comes to the meaning of each scene, almost every scholar has a different opinion.⁸⁷ The

⁸⁶ For a review of the scholarship on the Shi Jun sarcophagus, see Rong Xinjiang and Yang Junkai 荣新江 杨军凯, "Beizhou Liangzhou Sabao Shi Jun mu yanjiu zongshu 北周凉州萨保史君墓研究综述," in Rong and Luo eds. *Sute ren zai Zhongguo*, 572-583.

⁸⁷ Interpretations of the illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus, see Albert Dien, "Observations Concerning the Tomb of Master Shi," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 17 (2003), 105-15; Frantz Grenet and Pénelope Riboud, "A Reflection of the Hephthalite Empire: The Biographical Narrative in the Reliefs of the Tomb of the Sabao Wirkak (494-579)," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, 17 (2003), 133-143; Yoshida Yutaka, "The Sogdian Version of the New Xi'an Inscription," in É. de la Vaissière, and É. Trombert, eds., *Les Sogdiens en Chine* (Paris, 2005), 51-71; Sofukawa Hiroshi 曾布川寛, "Chugoku shutsudo no Sogude sekkoku gazo shiron 中國出土のソグデ石刻画像試論," in Sofukawa Hiroshi ed. *Chugoku bijutsu no zuzo to yoshiki*:

divergences in scholarly interpretations of these illustrations are so radical that one unfamiliar with the sarcophagus might wonder if its imagery manifests any kind of coherent narrative at all. Building on the observations made in Part One, in Part Two of the dissertation I aim to demonstrate that the biographical illustrations of the Shi Jun sarcophagus present a coherent narrative that not only relates the deceased's sixth-century life, but also their previous life and their afterlife. Consequently, these illustrations can no longer be seen as the mere pictorial translation of the biographical epitaph that most scholars hold them to be. Instead, they are best understood as elaborating an allegorical account of the life of the deceased, which, I argue, derives from the prevailing illustrations of the life of the Buddha Shakyamuni during the sixth century.

Part Two is comprised of two sections. The first section investigates the precedents for pictorial biographies in early Chinese history. Examining the mural paintings of the Helinge'er tomb and the stone carvings on the Wu family shrines, this section traces the origin of biographical illustrations back to the mortuary tradition of the Eastern Han dynasty, thereby establishing the cultural and visual conventions that lay the grounds for a biographical interpretation of the illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus. Going against the grain of many of the interpretive assumptions made by scholars that have studied this object, the second section

kenkyu hen 中国美術の図像と様式:研究篇 (Tokyo: Chuo koron bijutsu shuppan, 2006), 97-182; Frantz Grenet, "Religious Diversity among Sogdian Merchants in Sixth-century China: Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Manichaeism, and Hinduism," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27 (2007), 463-478; Dien, "The tomb of the Sogdian Master Shi: Insights into the Life of a Sabao," *The Silk Road* 7 (2009), 42-50; Mie Ishiwata, "Northern Dynastic Tombs of the Sogdians Living in China: Focusing on the Tomb of Shi Jun," *Journal of the Japanese Archaeological Association* no.5 (2011), 21-37; Qi Dongfang, "Lixiang yu xianshi zhijian;" Yang Junkai and Shaanxi Sheng kao gu yan jiu suo, *Bei Zhou Shi Jun mu* 北周史君墓 (Beijing: Wen wu chu ban she, 2014).

makes three interrelated proposals about the meaning of the Shi Jun narrative illustrations.

Firstly, I argue that the protagonists of the illustrations are the Shi Jun couple and Shi's parents, and that there are no solid grounds for identifying any other human figures on the sarcophagus.

Secondly, I posit that a symmetrical structure is embedded in the sequential narrative, and that this structure evokes the binary nature of an immigrant life divided between Central Asia and China. Thirdly, and most importantly, I propose that the illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus were modeled on Buddhist narrative art and so constitute an allegorical account of the pre-life, sixth-century life, and afterlife of the deceased, a personal saga concerning both migration and transmigration.

1. Pictorial Biography and Its Historical Precedents

Inscription, Body, and Personal Identity

Before delving into the illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus, we need first to answer one critical question: in what ways could images in tombs have been associated with particular tomb owners and their individual experiences? As many scholars have observed, artisans of mortuary imagery tended to adopt stock motifs, which resulted in stereotypical and schematic depictions of human figures and activities.⁸⁸ As a result, despite a nearly unanimous scholarly consensus on the biographical nature of illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus, Qi Dongfang has cast doubt on any approach that treats mortuary images as realistic reflections of an individual person's life.⁸⁹ As he has pointed out, the motifs on the sarcophagus, such as banqueting and traveling, were widespread during the sixth century, and thus not necessarily related to the life of an

⁸⁸ Zheng, "Notes on the Stone Couch Picture from the Tomb of Kang Ye Qi;" Qi, "Lixiang yu xianshi zhijian;" Lin, "Boku cho jidai ni okeru kizoku no boso no zuzo."

⁸⁹ Qi, "Lixiang yu xianshi zhijian," 212-213.

individual; furthermore, the figures look generic and standardized, and the pictorial compositions repetitive and schematic.⁹⁰ His work suggests that neither the modern concept of portraiture nor that of realism can be applied to images in tombs. Instead of seeing the illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus as a continuous narrative about personal lives, Qi suggests that these images constitute a loosely connected amalgamation alluding to some collective memory of the Sogdian ancestors.⁹¹

Qi's skepticism gives us cause to consider the oft-unexamined assumption that the illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus are biographical. We might approach this larger issue through a narrower, more specific lens, and ask: how could stock images have been used to represent individual identity and experiences? I argue that the answer lies in the textual and corporeal aspects of the illustrations. Textual inscriptions enabled artisans to signify personal identity and to create pictorial narratives about individuals. Since the Warring States Period (475-221 BCE), personal identity had been intimately associated with an individual's name: for government officials and educated elites in medieval China, seals inscribed with names were among the most important of personal belongings (Fig.3.20).⁹² Countless numbers of these seals have survived from early medieval China, though their owners have disappeared without a trace. Less central to personal identity than names were portraits; these were regarded as a commendable but supplemental indicator of personal identity.⁹³ It was not until the sixth century, when donor images prevailed across different levels of the society, that pictorial representations

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Liu Jiang 刘江, *Zhongguo yinzhang yishu shi* 中国印章艺术史 (Hangzhou: Xiling yinshe chubanshe, 2005), 87.

⁹³ Xi Wenqian 郗文倩, "Handai tuhua renwu fengshang yu zangti de shengcheng liubian 汉代图画人物风尚与赞体的生成流变," *Wenshizhe* 3 (2007), 86-93.

became important markers of individual identity, especially among the lower classes and marginal social groups.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, names were still privileged over portraits: they are always inscribed beside donor images, often in cartouches no smaller than the human figures they accompanied (Fig.3.21). It was likely because of this reliance upon and emphasis on inscriptions as signifiers of personal identity that artisans never felt the urge to individualize donor images.

Beyond simply recording names, textual inscriptions had also been used as components of pictorial biographies of the deceased in tombs constructed prior to the sixth century. One famous case in point is that of the mural paintings found in a tomb at Helinge'er, an outpost city of the Eastern Han.⁹⁵ In the front and middle chambers of the tomb, the political career of the deceased unfolds in an expansive composition. The mural paintings depict various human activities (e.g. traveling, working, gathering). These activities are presented against a background that shifts between buildings, open landscapes, and city maps (Fig.3.22).⁹⁶ With the exception of the city maps, these depictions of the tomb owner's experiences are composed entirely of contemporary stock motifs; their biographical references are clear only if one reads the accompanying inscriptions, which are composed of cartouches indicating the posts that the deceased had held and the places where he had been stationed.⁹⁷

In another example from the Eastern Han dynasty—the Wu Rong shrine—we see inscriptions accompanying illustrations on a stone shrine that refer directly to the memorial text

⁹⁴ For the study of donor images in the sixth century, see Kate A. Lingley, "Widows, Monks, Magistrates and Concubines: Social Dimensions of Sixth-century Buddhist Art Patronage," PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2004.

⁹⁵ Neimenggu zizhiqu bowuguan 内蒙古自治区博物馆, *Helinge'er Hanmu Bihua* 和林格尔汉墓壁画 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1978); Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs*, 176.

⁹⁶ Neimenggu zizhiqu bowuguan, *Helinge'er Hanmu Bihua*, 30.

⁹⁷ Wu, *Yellow Springs*, 176.

inscribed on a nearby stele; these inscriptions thus serve as the nexus between pictorial and literary biographies. Inside this shrine, a small freestanding sacrificial hall made of stone, some parts of the wall are engraved with processions of horses and chariots, which are stock motifs for Han pictorial stones. However, the accompanying cartouches tell us “this is when the lord served as a so-and-so official,” and each official title in these cartouches can also be found in the nearby stone tablet bearing a biography of the deceased (Fig.3.23).⁹⁸ Such a pairing of biographical texts and images may have been a well-established practice for mortuary spaces in the Han Dynasty. Indeed, it is possible that the cartouches in the Helinger tomb might have been citations of an epitaph inscribed on a lost stone tablet located above ground.

Along with textual inscriptions, I argue that the fact of the proximity of stereotypical images to the corpse allowed them to function as signifiers of personal identity and individual experience. In the literature on donor images, some scholars have pointed out that the audiences for such images were primarily the donors themselves or their family members. Rather than a realistic representation, what these viewers sought out in donor images was a physical bond between the depicted human figures and Buddhist icons. Buddhist soteriology puts great emphasis on physical presence in front of the Buddha; the spiritual identity of a Buddhist practitioner, therefore, cannot be fully fulfilled without establishing a physical bond between their body and the Buddha.⁹⁹ Moreover, stereotypical donor images might even have been favored over individualized ones, because they could be seen as speaking to the universality of

⁹⁸ For Wu Rong Shrine, see Jiang Yingju and Wu Wenqi 蒋英炬 吴文祺, *Handai Wu shi muqun shike yanjiu* 汉代武氏墓群石刻研究 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2014), 20, 61-72.

⁹⁹ Gregory Schopen, “Burial Ad Sanctos and the Physical Presence of the Buddha in Early Indian Buddhism: A Study in the Archaeology of Religions,” in Gregory Schopen, *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997), 114-147.

the Buddha's nature. Particularly in collectively sponsored tablets and cave chapels, images of groups of donors are often juxtaposed with the motif of the Ten Thousand Buddhas. This juxtaposition vividly illustrates the prevalent teaching that anyone and everyone can become the Buddha.¹⁰⁰ It follows that through the contemplation of the standardized images that represented them, donors would be encouraged to pursue an abstract Buddha nature rather than to remain attached to their mundane individual attributes.

Thus, we can see how, in spite of their schematic nature, tomb images were inevitably related to particular individuals because of their proximity to the dead body. In tombs of the sixth century, images of the deceased were always arranged closely around the corpse, the body imparting an indelible identity to tomb images (Fig.3.24). Take the Boston couch for example: the reason the depiction of Lao Laizi's parents could have functioned as an allegorical portrait of the deceased lies largely in the conflation of the images and the bodies in the eyes of the audience. As the focal point of the stone couch, the image of Lao Laizi's parents would have mirrored the bodies of the deceased couple laid on the couch. While the body confers an identity upon the tomb portraits, the portraits, as Zheng Yan has pointed out, invest the deceased with an idealized appearance, rendering them like gentry and nobles.¹⁰¹ Allegorical portraits on the Boston couch further indicate that tomb images served as an effective visual device that bridged personal identity with distinct cultural, moral or spiritual paradigms.

In sum, the expression of personal identity and individual experiences through ritual arts during this earlier period placed more emphasis on textual aids and connections with the dead body than on formal verisimilitude or realistic representation. In fact, the personal details of

¹⁰⁰ Tsiang, "Resolve to Become a Buddha."

¹⁰¹ Zheng, "Notes on the Stone Couch Picture from the Tomb of Kang Ye."

individual appearance might have been deliberately reduced to facilitate a visual dialogue between individual identity and collective ideals. Rather than deriving directly from individual experience, the articulation of personal identity is rooted in the coordination of texts, bodies, and pictorial paradigms. Recognizing these three components of individual expression in this earlier period allows us to fully comprehend the biographical nature of the illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus.

Inscription, Body, and Shi Jun's Pictorial Biography

Taking into account the inscriptional and corporeal aspects of the Shi Jun sarcophagus, it becomes clear that the biographical nature of its illustrations should not be dismissed as a subjective projection of modern viewers. Rather, these illustrations are part of an intentional design that both draws on the tradition of the Han funerary art and takes advantage of the meaningful proximity of the illustrations and the body. Like those of the Wu Rong shrine mentioned in the previous discussion, the illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus are accompanied by an epitaph that provides a bilingual biography of the deceased couple. Shi Jun's tomb stands apart from other sixth-century excavations in that its epitaph is not inscribed on an independent tombstone but on the lintel of the house-shaped sarcophagus itself. On a tombstone, a biographical inscription would be covered by a stone lid, not to be seen by anyone; in contrast, on the lintel, the text is readily visible and so is an integral part of the images on the sarcophagus (Fig.2.3). Although cartouches do not accompany each individual scene, the conspicuous juxtaposition of the epitaph and this group of images speaks directly to the artisans' desire to inform their pictorial program with the written biography.

Furthermore, the illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus form an enclosure surrounding the corpse, just like an enclosing screen surrounds a stone couch. Although these illustrations are

carved on the outer walls (west, north, and east) of the sarcophagus, the way in which they are divided into an array of vertical compositions recalls this type of screen as well. Indeed, the body of the deceased are laid on a stone couch inside the sarcophagus, and the remaining paintings on the inner walls reveal a paneled screen enclosing the deceased.¹⁰² Thus, the illustrations on the outer walls seem to have been designed as a counterpart to those inner illustrations. Because of this, the outer illustrations can be thought of as creating an inside-out screen whose scenes address both a deceased and a living audience. Thanks to such a physical resonance between the illustrations and the arrangement of the bodies, we are able to discern the pictorial references to the tomb owners that occur in the Shi Jun illustrations.

In sum, an interpretation of the illustrations carved upon the surfaces of the Shi Jun sarcophagus as a form of pictorial biography can be justified by accounting for the mortuary conventions of the period and by analyzing the physical bond between the illustrated sarcophagus and the dead bodies it houses. Consequently, we can identify the Sogdian husband and wife that are the major figures in the Shi Jun illustrations as the deceased couple. We can then understand the consistent clockwise direction of the couple's movement in the illustrations as an indication of their migration from Central Asia to China, and the scenes of settled life, interspersed with journey scenes, can be seen as representing the major cities the couple had lived in. The epitaph itself appears to be part of this pictorial biography: its Chinese inscription seems to serve as a preface for Shi Jun's life and the Sogdian one seems to be a conclusion. Mindful of the precedents for such a pictorial biography, we need not take the biographical theme of the illustrations for granted, as most scholars have. What is more, this approach to the

¹⁰² Yang, *Beizhou Shi Jun mu*, 61-62.

ensemble of illustrations allows us to decipher the meaning of each of the sarcophagus's individual scenes.

2. Interpretation of the Pictorial Biography

Having recognized the connection between the illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus and the life of the deceased couple, the question of how the textual biography informs its pictorial counterpart remains a difficult one. Nearly all of the scholars who have studied these illustrations propose distinct interpretations of specific scenes. It suffices to mention a few examples. As to the overall sequence, while most scholars suggest that each scene follows a clockwise order, Yang Junkai argues that the secular episodes on both sides proceed from the two sides toward the central panel on the back wall, therefore forming a symmetrical structure instead of a sequential sequence.¹⁰³ In terms of individual figures, a prominent character identified by some scholars as Shi Jun is seen by others as Shi Jun's father, and by still others as Shi Jun's grandfather or even some historical king.¹⁰⁴ Minor characters are identified as attendants in some scholarly articles but as the deceased's offspring in others.¹⁰⁵ As to pictorial themes, most scholars tend to consider the secular scenes (west 2-3; north 1-4) as a separate sequence from the supernatural scenes (west 1; north 5; east 1-3), but a few interpreters try to find the connection between the two

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ For example, the couple on W2 is identified alternatively as Shi Jun and his wife (Sofugawa, 2006), Shi Jun's parents (Yang, 2014), Shi Jun's grandparents (Dien, 2003, 2009), the Hephtalite king and queen (Grenet, 2003). See Sofugawa, *Chugoku bijutsu no zuzo to yoshiki*, 125; Yang, *Bei Zhou Shi Jun mu*, 169; Dien, "Observations Concerning the Tomb of Master Shi," 107; Dien, "The tomb of the Sogdian Master Shi," 46; Grenet and Riboud, "A Reflection of the Hephtalite Empire," 136-39.

¹⁰⁵ Yoshida (2005) and Dien (2003, 2009) both assume that some of the human figures are Shi Jun's offspring. Yoshida, "The Sogdian Version of the New Xi'an Inscription," 32; Dien, "Observations Concerning the Tomb of Master Shi," 107; Dien, "The tomb of the Sogdian Master Shi," 46.

groups.¹⁰⁶ In a word, recognizing the biographical contents of the illustrations raises more questions than it answers.

Such divergences in scholarly interpretations of the Shi Jun pictorial biography are rooted in certain problematic assumptions made by scholars about the sarcophagus. By challenging the validity of three faulty assumptions or premises found in the literature, the following sections aim to propose three new interpretations of the Shi Jun biographical illustrations. The three premises I will contest can be described as follows: 1. Each figure in the illustrations can be identified and every family member of the deceased is depicted. 2. The narrative scenes of the Shi Jun sarcophagus all move either in a single clockwise direction or from two directions, moving inward from two side walls toward the center of the back. 3. The pictorial biography is based solely on the textual epitaph. Arguing against these premises and taking into consideration the discussion of the filial son illustrations in the first part of this chapter, I make the following claims: 1. The primary focus of the pictorial biography is the deceased couple, particularly the husband Shi Jun. 2. The illustrations are both sequential and symmetrical. 3. The narrative structure draws both on the epitaph and on the traditional illustrations of the life of the Buddha Shakyamuni.

¹⁰⁶ Grenet (2007) and Dien (2009) see the supernatural scenes as independent from the biographical sequence. See Grenet, "Religious Diversity among Sogdian Merchants," 464-68; Dien, "The tomb of the Sogdian Master Shi," 43. In contrast, Yang (2014) suggests that the two sequence form a single continuous narrative, see Yang, *Bei Zhou Shi Jun mu*, 169-170.

2.1. Picturing Migration

Premise One

About one hundred human figures appear in the biographical illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus. A few major figures serve as the focal points of each scene; these figures are prominently positioned and rendered in a scale larger than that used in rendering of other figures. Compared to these major personages, the smaller, minor figures look generic and auxiliary. The contrast between the two kinds of figures makes it seem quite unlikely that all of these secondary characters are meant to possess a specific identity. However, most scholars tend to believe that beyond the deceased couple, more figures can be identified. This premise leaves the secondary human figures open to subjective speculation. For example, Yoshida and Dien both suggest that Shi Jun's children are represented along with the deceased couple, because the epitaph records the names of Shi Jun's three sons.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, no iconographic trait is reliable enough to distinguish them firmly from generic attendant figures. As a result, the identification of a figure as Shi's child as opposed to an attendant is largely a matter of the scholars' personal imagination.

Suffice it to mention two places where the urge to identify the Shi Jun offspring clearly goes awry. Yoshida and Dien identify four travelers at the bottom of W3 and N1 as Shi Jun and his three sons (Fig.3.25).¹⁰⁸ By doing so, they take these figures as a group independent from the scene on the upper register of each panel, in which they also see the main figure as Shi Jun.¹⁰⁹ However, on both W3 and N1, all of the figures are integrated into a single and continuous space, which indicates that the four figures at the bottom are part of the entourage accompanying

¹⁰⁷ Dien, "The tomb of the Sogdian Master Shi," 46; Yoshida, "The Sogdian Version of the New Xi'an Inscription," 32.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Shi Jun, the most prominent figure on W3 and N1. Were Shi Jun represented twice on the upper and lower registers, as both scholars have assumed, the artisans would have created a natural boundary between the two groups, as we see not only on the eastern wall of the sarcophagus but also in the majority of sequential illustrations created during the early medieval period.¹¹⁰ Moreover, the unremarkable appearance and subordinate position of the lower groups further testify to their role as attendants. It is unwarranted to assume that they represent Shi Jun and his three sons simply because they happen to form a group of four figures.¹¹¹

Along with this misguided attempt to identify the Shi Jun offspring, there also exists in the scholarship an impulse to make a connection between the figures in the illustrations and historical persons. For instance, Grenet uses his knowledge of Central Asian history to put forth a contrived interpretation of the main figures on W2 and N1. Based primarily on a comparison of headwear, he argues that these two figures represent respectively two distinct generations of the Hephthalite rulers who subjugated Sogdian city states in the sixth century.¹¹² Considering Shi Jun's Sogdian origin, we may take Central Asian history as a historical context for Shi's life. However, this history has no bearing on Shi's life as far as the biographical epitaph is concerned. Moreover, there is no contemporary parallel for the appearance of ruler imagery in tomb settings, let alone the depiction of rulers of a remote foreign state. This fact lends force to the view, convincingly argued by Dien, that the magnificent headwear should be seen as nothing more than a generic symbol of status, one that likely signifies the political achievement of Shi Jun as a

¹¹⁰ Chen Pao-chen, "Time and Space in Chinese Narrative Painting of Han and the Six Dynasties," in Huang Chun-chieh and Erik Zürcher eds., *Time and Space in Chinese Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 247-262.

¹¹¹ Besides identifying the sons, Dien goes even further to single out a group of young ladies in N2 and 3 as Shi Jun's daughters, a speculation which has neither textual nor iconographic basis. Dien, "The Tomb of the Sogdian Master Shi," 46.

¹¹² Grenet and Riboud, "A Reflection of the Hephthalite Empire," 136-140.

sabao, or a leader of immigrant communities.¹¹³ Thus, Grenet's flawed interpretation shows us one interpretive pitfall resulting from the premise that the biographical illustrations may feature more protagonists than the Shi Jun couple.

New Interpretation

Dismissing this first premise, I suggest that we focus our interpretation to the most prominent figure(s) on each panel, analyzing their connection with the Shi Jun couple, as opposed to trying to uncover the identities of secondary figures. Only in so doing can we gain a clear understanding of how the textual biography informs the pictorial one. In the first part of this chapter, I described the way in which sixth-century artisans focused on the senior protagonists of each story in order to adapt filial piety illustrations to the purposes of ancestral sacrifices; in such illustrations, the senior figures serve as the focal point of each composition and are meant to evoke images of the deceased in the mind of their offspring. Since the epitaph tells us that the sarcophagus was built by Shi Jun's three sons for their parents, it is reasonable to take this use of filial son illustrations into account and to regard the senior figures, namely Shi and his wife, as the major protagonists on each pictorial panel.

Take the secular illustrations (W2 – N4) for example. If we focus on the most prominent figure(s) on each panel, the illustrations can be said to depict the following sequence of persons: a couple with a baby (W2); a man (W3); a man (N1); a couple (N2); a couple (N3); a couple and their guests (N4). Except for W2, the rest of the figures can be aptly matched to Shi Jun and his wife. Both Yang and Dien suggest that the baby in W2 is the new-born Shi Jun. If we accept this speculation, the secular illustrations entail a tripartite sequence: 1. Infant Shi Jun and his parents

¹¹³ Dien, "The Tomb of the Sogdian Master Shi," 45.

(W2); 2. Adult Shi Jun (W3-N1); 3. The Shi Jun couple (N2-4). This triadic schema corresponds to the three major phases of Shi Jun's life that are recorded in his epitaph. This would mean that, from the perspective of the patrons, both parents and grandparents were depicted in the illustrations, and such ancestral representation is consistent with what we see on the Boston couch.

It is also noteworthy that the secular illustrations alternate between settled life scenes and scenes of travel, a design most likely grounded in Shi Jun's experiences as an immigrant. The three settled scenes are W2, N1-N2 and N4; these are connected by two traveling scenes, W3 and N3. The three aforementioned groups of settled scenes correspond not only to the three stages of Shi Jun's life but also to their distinct geographic contexts; the biography of Shi Jun tells us that he settled down in three major regions. Thus, we can understand these groups as representing: 1) Shi Jun's hometown in Central Asia, 2) the Hexi region (Liangzhou and Xiping) in Northwest China where Shi Jun took an official post and got married, and 3) Chang'an in Central China, where the couple would spend the rest of their lives. The traveling scenes, both moving clockwise, indicate Shi Jun's journey from Central Asia to Central China.¹¹⁴

In conclusion, if we focus our interpretation on the principal figures, the secular illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus are revealed to be as a pictorial biography of the deceased, one that is closely related to the epitaph's biographical account. Crucially, the "family member" principle operates here just as it does on the Boston couch: the main characters are the parents or grandparents of Shi Jun's three sons, the patrons of the tomb. This emphasis on

¹¹⁴ Most scholars agree on the theme of journey here.

ancestors conforms to the ritual context of the tomb, serving the purpose of ancestral sacrifice discussed in the second chapter.¹¹⁵

2.2. Worshiping the Ancestors

Premise Two

The second premise has to do with the arrangement or spatial composition of the biographical illustrations. The back wall of the sarcophagus is divided into five panels, rendered in different scales individually but exhibiting a perfect symmetry as a whole. In his interpretation of these illustrations, Yang Junkai assumes that this symmetrical structure is incompatible with a sequential narrative.¹¹⁶ To reconcile the symmetry with the narrativity that he detects in the biographical illustrations, Yang posits a zigzag sequence for the scenes on the back wall. On this view, the narrative sequence of the illustrations would start from the central panel (N3), proceed counterclockwise to N2 and then clockwise to N4, then counterclockwise again to N1, until eventually ending at N5.¹¹⁷ However, this zigzag sequence strikes one as being so confusing that Qi Dongfang's suggestion that there is no narrative connection between these panels at all seems more likely.¹¹⁸

If we take into account the filial piety illustrations discussed in Part One of the chapter, we can see how the flaw of the second premise derives from its underestimation of the abilities of sixth-century artisans to exploit a range of different compositional effects. On the Boston

¹¹⁵ In light of this ancestral orientation of the illustrations, it seems possible that Shi Jun's sons also appear with their parents in N2, N3 and N4., simulating those filial paragons in the Boston couch; however, there is no justification for the appearance of Central Asian rulers, let alone taking the place of the ancestors.

¹¹⁶ Yang, *Bei Zhou Shi Jun mu*, 169-170.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Qi, "Lixiang yu xianshi zhijian," 212-213.

couch, for example, the artisans ingeniously created a symmetrical structure that features allegorical portraits of the deceased at its center but also maintains a narrative sequence that moves in a clockwise direction and in so doing retains the textual order of the manuscripts (*Accounts of Filial Sons*). The illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus seem to be rendered in a similar fashion —collectively they elaborate a biographical sequence that unfolds in a clockwise direct with a symmetrical composition.

New Interpretation

Unlike the illustrations on the Boston couch which pivot around one “parents” scene, the back wall of the Shi Jun sarcophagus boasts two focal points: the panels N2 and N4, both featuring a couple.¹¹⁹ These two panels are almost twice the size of the others on the sarcophagus, and each depicts a banquet scene in a settled environment. As previously discussed, N2 likely represents the couple drinking together at their home in the Hexi region, while N4 illustrates them as they receive guests at their residence in Chang’an. Despite its central position on the back wall, N3 serves more like a nexus between N2 and N4, with the wife heading forward toward Chang’an and the husband turning back, seemingly bidding farewell to their friends in Hexi.

Significantly, the division of the back wall into a binary composition that depicts both Hexi and Chang’an creates a spatial analogue for the bilingual epitaph hung on the façade of the sarcophagus. The Hexi region had been one of the largest Sogdian settlements on the Silk Road, whereas Chang’an was the cultural and political center of the newly unified North China (577

¹¹⁹ Taking the middle panel N3 as the starting point of the sequence, Yang Junkai deems this departure scene as the most important image on the north wall. Yang, *Bei Zhou Shi Jun mu*, 169-170.

CE.).¹²⁰ For Shi Jun, in particular, migrating from Liangzhou to Chang'an signified a critical transition in his personal and professional lives: he was no longer just the leader of local Sogdian communities and the head of a Sogdian family, but a civil official under the direct command of the Chinese emperor. Thus, the geographical binary of Liangzhou/Hexi represented on the back wall of the sarcophagus underscores the dual cultural identity signified with its Sogdian and Chinese inscriptions.

2.3. An Allegorical Life

Premise Three

The third premise held by scholars speaks to the biographical illustrations as a whole. This premise holds that the bilingual epitaph functions as the sole source of the entire pictorial biography, including the five supernatural panels and the six secular ones. However, while the Chinese and Sogdian inscriptions record the many worldly experiences of the deceased couple, they do not give many details about their spiritual life and afterlife. Except for the ending sentence of the Sogdian script, which alludes to the scene of ascent to heaven on the east wall, not a single word in the epitaph can be associated with the salient religious or supernatural activities depicted on W1, N5, and E1-3. If we only rely on the epitaph, we are left in an interpretive limbo.

Consequently, the third premise leads to two disparate iconographic approaches. On the one hand, some scholars choose to discuss the supernatural scenes as if they were independent illustrations of the deceased's religious beliefs, separate from the biographical sequence from

¹²⁰ Rong xinjiang 荣新江, "Beichao Sui Tang Sute ren zhi qianxi jiqi juluo bukao 北朝隋唐粟特人之迁徙及其聚落补考," in *Zhongguo wenming yu Sute wenming* 中古中国与粟特文明 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2014), 22-41.

W2 to N4.¹²¹ Consequently, they shift their analytical focus from the details of Shi Jun's personal life to the general religious motifs of the time. On the other hand we have scholars like Yang Junkai and Rong Xinjiang, who insist that these supernatural scenes should be taken as integral parts of the pictorial biography. However, these scholars have neither visual nor textual evidence to ground their speculations about the biographical relevance of these scenes. In the following discussion, it will be demonstrated that both iconographic approaches have their limitations. In addition to the epitaph, I suggest that we need to consider other points of reference for the Shi Jun pictorial biography, such as narrative paintings made during the sixth century. I argue that the illustrations of the life (and previous lives) of the Buddha Shakyamuni, which represent the foremost type of pictorial biography circulating in early medieval China, are crucial precedents for the pictorial narrative of the Shi Jun sarcophagus. Recognizing this pictorial tradition, I believe, will help us understand the illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus as a continuous narrative sequence integrating both the political *and* spiritual life of the deceased.

According to the first group of scholars described above, the supernatural scenes on W1, N5, and E1-3 are construed as representing Shi Jun's diverse religious beliefs. This approach is best exemplified by Frantz Grenet's article "The Religious Diversity among Sogdian Merchants in Sixth-Century China: Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Hinduism."¹²² Drawing on a comparison of the religious arts and texts discovered on the Silk Road, the author identifies the god-like figure on W1 as Mani, the founder of Manichaeism. On the east wall, in addition to identifying Zoroastrian priests, Grenet finds visual allusions to Hindu deities and Manichean teaching about salvation.¹²³ In short, the author takes these images as a testimony to Shi Jun's

¹²¹ Grenet, "Religious Diversity among Sogdian Merchants," 464.

¹²² Grenet, "Religious Diversity among Sogdian Merchants Diversity."

¹²³ Ibid., 469-478.

diverse religious activities, which presumably were motivated by the deceased's experience migrating from Central Asia to the western regions of China.

Grenet's approach, however, is problematic in many respects. Firstly, since the sarcophagus is not a religious shrine, the sacred icons are all treated as lesser, subsidiary motifs. Of all the figures represented in the supernatural scenes, there are only two god-like figures: one on W1, sitting on a lotus pedestal against a halo, identified by Grenet as Mani; the second on E1, an equally haloed icon sitting on top of three cows. Notably, both figures are placed in the top right corners of their respective walls (west and east); neither functions as the focal point of their wall and neither occupies the center of any particular panel. If these images were invested with such weighty religious messages, as Grenet has implied, why did the artisans not give them more prominent places in the pictorial scheme?

Secondly, both of these two god-like figures seem to be subordinated to a pictorial narrative: the one on W1 is actively exchanging gestures with a man kneeling in front of him, while that on E1 seems to preside over a ritual in which dead souls are receiving some kind of sacred drink. In both cases, the god is not the only protagonist. Regardless of what deities they represent, they were not intended to be independent icons for worship. Instead, they are depicted as participants in an ongoing event, a divine intervention in Shi Jun's life. In other words, Grenet's interpretation of the deities on W1 and E1 as signs of an important distinction between these images related to spiritual life and those of the biographical narrative is flawed insofar it overplays the importance of the religious elements in the illustrations.

Thirdly, except for these two god-like figures, all the other deities in the supernatural scenes are generic representations of heavenly beings, simultaneously recalling Buddhist asparas, Daoist immortals or the western goddess of victory. Consequently, it is difficult to decisively pin

down their iconographic identity, let alone to understand them as illustrations of specific religious doctrines. Take the scene on the upper register of E2, for example (Fig.3.26). Drawing on the soul/body division in the soteriology of Manichaeism, Grenet suggests that, while the figure falling from the sky represents the discarded body of the deceased, a statuette-like object in the hand of a soaring deity symbolizes his saved soul.¹²⁴ However, this interpretation has no grounding in any extant Manichaean iconography. Even worse, the author fails to point out that the scene is a standard depiction of a pair of asparas in contemporary Buddhist art: the falling movement is a popular way to portray the asparas' freely rotating body in the sky; the so-called statuette looks more like a simplified form of lotus bud, a common handheld object for the asparas (Fig.3.27).

In short, recourse to religious doctrines does not make for a convincing account of the scenes not described in the epitaph. Grenet's argument about the distinct nature of the supernatural scenes suggests that the religious icons are to be subordinated to the narrative of the deceased's life; somewhat paradoxically then, Grenet's account would have the supernatural scenes retain their connection to the worldly illustrations and so would not make them legible as an independent group. Consequently, we can see that attempting to separate these two groups of images creates more problems than it solves.

In contrast to Grenet, Yang Junkai adopts a more holistic approach, regarding the illustrations from W1 to E3 as a continuous sequence about Shi Jun's life.¹²⁵ However, in so doing, he also has had to wrestle with the supernatural elements on W1 and N5, onto which no word in the epitaph sheds light. The theory Yang proposes is that, on W1, Shi Jun's parents are

¹²⁴ Ibid., 474-475.

¹²⁵ Yang, *Bei Zhou Shi Jun mu*, 169-170.

praying to the god-like figure to have a son, which would make the scene a prelude for the birth of Shi Jun on W2. On N5, Yang suggests, the elderly figure on the top register is Shi Jun toward the end of his life, and this is the last episode related to the couple's worldly existence before they ascend to heaven on the east wall. Although Yang's theory gives the illustrations a coherent narrative, he cannot corroborate his identification of individual figures on W1 and N5 with either textual or visual evidence.

Both Grenet and Yang's studies have their merits. While the former calls our attention to the presence of religious iconography in the illustrations, the latter reminds us of the centrality of the deceased to the overarching narrative and the interconnection between the worldly and supernatural scenes. Nevertheless, the shared assumption that the epitaph is the only source of the pictorial biography leaves both scholars struggling with the limitations of the epitaphic text, supplementing their interpretations either with intricate religious literature or personal speculation. In the face of these formidable attempts to overcome the difficulties created by the epitaph for the vivid narrative in the supernatural illustrations, we may wonder if it is possible at all to decipher the pictorial messages without any textual aids?

A Pictorial Biography

In his study, Grenet notices the compositional affinity between N5 and the traditional mode of representing the Buddha Shakyamuni's life.¹²⁶ This connection, which Grenet does not make much of, also resonates with the allegorical portraits on the Boston couch. If the protagonists in

¹²⁶ Grenet, "Religious Diversity among Sogdian Merchants Diversity," 476. Some other scholars also notice the impact of Buddhist narrative paintings on Sogdian mortuary images. Wu, "Mortuary Art in the Northern Zhou China," 146-47.

the didactic filial piety illustrations of the Boston couch could be adapted to represent the deceased, could it also be possible that the narrative structure of the Buddha's life was used to construct Shi Jun's pictorial biography? In other words, could the Buddhist narrative be another source, in addition to the epitaph, for the pictorial narrative on Shi Jun's sarcophagus? As one of the most widespread narrative subjects in the early medieval Chinese art, the life of Buddha was often represented in its full circle, encompassing the Buddha's past life, his birth, his experiences as a prince, his enlightenment, and his death or nirvana.¹²⁷ In the following section, I argue that Shi Jun's pictorial biography draws heavily on the illustrations of the Buddha's life, and that this narrative backbone may have allowed the artists to integrate both the worldly and the supernatural scenes into a single coherent sequence on the sarcophagus.

In medieval China, illustrations of the Buddha's life circulated widely in different materials, mediums, and formats. In terms of their compositions, two types of illustrations can be distinguished: episodic and emblematic. In episodic illustrations, major episodes of the Buddha's life are arranged in a diachronic sequence. Sometimes these mingled with text. This is the case on the hand-scroll manuscripts of *The Sutra on Cause and Effect*; the episodic scenes on the hand-scroll form a pictorial sequence that parallels with lengthy written accounts of the Buddha's life (Fig.3.28). In a Northern-Zhou cave chapel (Cave 290) at Dunhuang, as many as 87 scenes are arranged into a multilayered composition — this may be a mural adaptation of the hand-scroll format (Fig.3.29). Stone carvings in the cave display only a selection of episodes.

¹²⁷ For this subject, see Patricia E. Karetzky, *Buddhist Narratives: Illustrations of the Life of the Buddha from Central Asia, China, Korea, and Japan* (Latham: University Press of America, 2000).

Nevertheless, these are generally representative enough to convey the core narrative of the Buddha's life.¹²⁸ (Fig.3.30)

In contrast to the episodic illustrations, the emblematic type focuses either on a single episode (such as the Buddha's enlightenment under a bodhi tree, his preaching in various occasions, or his death paranirvana), or on a pair of episodes, e.g. "entering the womb (to be reborn) on an elephant" and "abandoning the home by flying over the walled-city." Emblematic illustrations were associated with icon worship rather than with story telling. Because of their frequent usage as religious icons, emblematic illustrations tend to portray the Buddha during or after his enlightenment, his transfiguration from a mundane prince to a sacred figure. When two-episode illustrations are used to represent the Buddha as a prince, they are always arranged as a pair to flank an icon.¹²⁹ The episodic and emblematic compositions, therefore, serve two disparate but not incompatible functions.

The first type of illustrations may have inspired the artisanal decision to tell the story of Shi Jun and his wife as a semi-fictional spiritual journey; episodic illustrations of the Buddha's life provide us with a critical clue to understand the connection between the secular Shi Jun scenes (W2-N4) and the supernatural ones (W1, N5, and E.). We can start by noting that the human protagonist on W1 might refer to Shi Jun in a previous life. The focal point of W1 is the interaction between a god-like figure and a man kneeling in front of him, which is a popular motif in *jataka* illustrations, the depictions of the historical Buddha's past lives.¹³⁰ Indeed, the

¹²⁸ Chen Qingxiang 陳清香, "Maijishan 133 ku 10 hao zaoxiangbei de tuxiang yuanliu yu zongjiao neihan 麥積山 133 窟 10 號造像碑的圖像源流與宗教內涵," *Zhonghua huoxue xuebao* 中華佛學學報 7 (2005): 75 – 104.

¹²⁹ For adaptations of Buddhist narrative paintings within ritual spaces, see Wu, "What is *bianxiang*."

¹³⁰ Most scholars, including the writers of the archaeological report, identify the kneeling man and a female figure behind him as a couple. However, there are several reasons the latter cannot

closest sixth-century counterpart of this god-like figure is not the Buddha, Mani, or Laozi, as different scholars have suggested, but the protagonist of a contemporary *jataka* painting, such as Sakra in a cave chapel at Kizil (Cave 14, Fig.3.31). In the Kizil painting, Sakra is gesticulating wildly toward a rabbit, an incarnation of the Buddha who offered his flesh to the starving deity.¹³¹ During the sixth century, the Indian notion of Samsara, or reincarnation, already became deeply embedded in Chinese society.¹³² Therefore, in drawing on a story of the Buddha's previous life, artists might have been attempting to represent an earlier incarnation of Shi Jun as a pious devotee in his earlier incarnation — this would have given the narrative of his spiritual journey a crucial starting point.¹³³

If W1 is derived from depictions of the Buddha's previous life, then the adjacent scene on W2, in which a couple holds an infant, would likely be related to the birth of the historical Buddha. In Cave 290 at Dunhuang, several scenes are devoted to the birth of the Buddha, some of which show the infant Buddha in the arms of his parents — such scenes seem to be close visual parallels for what we see on W2 (Fig.3.32). In the illustrations depicting the complete circle of the Buddha's life, birth scenes would be preceded by or coexist with an episode from his previous life, as shown on a Buddhist stele at Maijishan (Fig.3.30).¹³⁴ Stemming from the

be a wife: she is rendered in much smaller scale; she is standing instead of kneeling down with the man; and most importantly, if we compare them with other donor images of the time, it becomes clear that the female is a typical attendant figure.

¹³¹ Yang Fuxue 杨富学, "Huihuwen *Tuwang bensheng ji xiangguan wenti yanjiu* 回鹘文兔王本生及相关问题研究," *Zongjiaoxue yanjiu* 宗教学研究 3 (2006): 64-71.

¹³² Stephen R. Bokenkamp, *Ancestors and Anxiety: Daoism and the Birth of Rebirth in China* (University of California Press, 2007), 1-32.

¹³³ In his study of the relationship between merchants and the Buddha, Ji Xianlin points out that many Bodhisattvas are said to be merchants in their previous lives. Ji Xianlin 季羨林, "Shangren yu Fojiao 商人与佛教," in *Ji Xianlin xueshu zhuzuo zixuanji* (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe), 416-538.

¹³⁴ Chen, "Maijishan 133 ku 10 hao zaoxiangbei."

notion of reincarnation, this pairing of the Buddha's previous life with his rebirth might have led the artists of Shi Jun's pictorial biography to create an analogous opening chapter for Shi Jun's spiritual journey.

Taking into consideration contemporary illustrations of the Buddha's life also sheds light on the secular scenes on W3 and N1 to N4. Most scholars tend to discuss these secular images in the context of the conventional mortuary images found in other Sogdian and Chinese tombs.¹³⁵ However, as my study of the filial piety illustrations has shown, mortuary images during the sixth century drew heavily on other popular visual forms related to daily life. The secular scenes on the Shi Jun sarcophagus can be broken down into three major categories: banqueting, hunting, and traveling. Tellingly, illustrations of the Buddha's life as a prince also fell into these three categories. Furthermore, in the extant hand-scroll paintings, the prince's life can even be divided into two phases, one before and one after his marriage, which is just like what we see on the Shi Jun sarcophagus. Thus the secular scenes could have been intended both as illustrations of the life of the Shi Jun couple recorded in their epitaph and as an integral part of their spiritual journey.

N5 is the last episode of Shi Jun's life before he and his wife embark on their journey to heaven on the east wall. As Grenet has noted, it might have been derived from the illustrations of Prince Siddhartha's effort to achieve enlightenment.¹³⁶ Consequently, it seems appropriate to place N5 as a prelude to the couple's ascent to heaven. On the top register of N5 is an old figure sitting in a cave, gesturing toward a monkey-like creature kneeling in front of him; below, three heavenly goddesses fly down toward a couple arising from a body of water, with one goddess

¹³⁵ Zheng, "Shizhe de mianju;" Qi, "Xianshi yu lixiang zhijian."

¹³⁶ Grenet, "Religious Diversity among Sogdian Merchants Diversity," 476.

holding vessels in both hands and the other two stretching their arms to catch the couple. As Grenet has pointed out, the composition here recalls two episodes in the Buddha's life illustrated in a painting from the Library Cave at Dunhuang: first, the prince practices ascetic meditation in a cave after renouncing his family life; second, a heavenly goddess comes to help the prince rise from a river after he loses his strength (Fig.3.33).¹³⁷ Both episodes represent the prince's effort to achieve the Buddhahood.

Therefore it seems likely that by drawing upon this pictorial precedent, the artists of Shi Jun's pictorial biography were able to create a meaningful transition between the representations of the deceased's secular life and images of his spiritual achievements in the afterlife. It is noteworthy that the episodes on the Dunhuang painting both take place after the Buddha's renouncement of a worldly life, initiating a new phase characterized by a succession of spiritual pursuits. Referencing these episodes, the scenes on the sarcophagus might have been intended to communicate the spiritual activities of Shi Jun and his wife, activities not recorded in the epitaph. Considering the longevity of the couple, these activities might have constituted a major part of their late life. In fact, the kneeling monkey on N5 is a popular motif in Buddhist paintings — the monkey is said to be offering honey to the preaching Buddha.¹³⁸ The presence of the monkey here testifies to the spiritual achievement of Shi Jun. If we juxtapose this scene with the one depicting Shi Jun's previous life (W1), his spiritual journey seems have full circle; the illustrations show Shi Jun eventually transforming into a sacred figure like the ones he had worshiped in his previous life. (Fig.3.34)

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Dunhuang yanjiu yuan 敦煌研究院, *Dunhuang shiku quanji: dongwu huajuan* 敦煌石窟全集: 動物畫卷 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1999), 138.

Unlike the life of the Buddha, which ends with his nirvana, Shi Jun's pictorial biography comes to an end with the spectacular scene of his ascent to heaven alongside his wife, an episode that is denoted in the Sogdian epitaph. Despite this departure from standard narrative of the Buddha, this final scene of the couple's life, in which they are ascending on winged horses escorted by a band of heavenly musicians, does recall one of the most celebrated episodes in the Buddha's life — his escape from the palace or "crossing the wall-city to escape the home." In numerous illustrations of this episode from the early medieval period, the prince is invariably riding on a flying horse, accompanied by a group of asparas or heavenly goddesses. (Fig.3.35) As the turning point of the Buddha's life, this episode is often singled out as a symbol of the Buddha's enlightenment, on par with depictions of the Buddha meditating under the bodhi tree and his nirvana.¹³⁹ The appropriation of this episode on the sarcophagus, therefore, illustrates the couple's ascent to heaven on the one hand and symbolizes their spiritual enlightenment on the other.¹⁴⁰

Conclusion

It is my contention that the artists of Shi Jun's sarcophagus ingeniously drew on the representational tradition associated with the Buddha Shakyamuni's life in order to compose a pictorial epic telling the story of an individual who not only traveled along the Silk Road from Central Asia to China, as recorded in his epitaph, but also completed a spiritual journey from a

¹³⁹ Dunhuang yanjiu yuan 敦煌研究院, *Dunhuang shiku quanji: Fozhuan gushi huajuan* 敦煌石窟全集: 佛传故事画卷 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2004), 21.

¹⁴⁰ The ascent to heaven on the east wall and the birth of Shi Jun on the west wall form a pair, which mirrors the widespread composition which displays the rebirth of the Buddha ("entering the womb on an elephant") and his escape from the palace in symmetry, see *ibid.*

previous life to his afterlife. My conclusion is based on two major insights, the first being that the epitaph could not function as the sole source of the illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus, because it covers primarily the worldly activities of the deceased and cannot fully account for the supernatural elements that constitute a substantial portion of the illustrations. Secondly, I hold that these supernatural scenes are an integral part of the narrative of Shi Jun's pictorial biography. Furthermore, in order to decipher the part played by these images in the overall narrative we can turn to the pictorial conventions of the time, and do not need to resort to subjective speculation, as some scholars have. Since Part One has already demonstrated the tendency among sixth-century artists to represent their contemporaries in allegorical terms, it seems quite reasonable to suggest here that Buddhist narrative illustrations were adapted by artists to portray a Sogdian immigrant merchant and his wife in such a manner that the resulting images could articulate Shi Jun's personal identity within both the mundane realm and the karmic cycle.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation starts with the question of how people in medieval China defined themselves through mortuary stones. As my three chapters have demonstrated, mortuary stones provided a versatile medium that could be used to articulate various kinds of identities. The case studies at the heart of each chapter have shown how this versatility was produced by the multifaceted material qualities of the stones, their rich associations with different spaces, and their relation to the personalization of didactic narrative paintings. Furthermore, each of these case studies reveals important aspects of these versatile objects that have never before been discussed in the literature. Through careful analysis of individual mortuary stones, I have argued for the significance of the Northern Wei stone mortuary equipment in terms of marking social hierarchy, described the transformation of stone into brocade on the Anyang sarcophagus, shown the natural aesthetic quality of the AIC stones, elaborated on the dualistic spatial strategy of the Shi Jun sarcophagus, given an interpretation of the adaptations of filial piety illustrations on four pieces of mortuary equipment in American collections, and given evidence for the intentional construction of a Buddha-like biography on the Shi Jun sarcophagus. These case studies constitute the primary contribution of this dissertation to the field of Chinese art history.

Because of their versatility, we can consider mortuary stones to have been crucial vehicles for the articulation of the diverse political, cultural, and personal identities emerging in sixth-century China. As the first chapter shows, regardless of whether they were Xianbei, Chinese or Sogdian, people could shape and perpetuate their unique images through mortuary stones. For the Xianbei ruling class, mortuary stones served to reinforce their royal identity and

consolidate their legitimacy; for Chinese scholarly officials, beautiful natural stones in tombs made manifest their self-perception as the cultural elites in a foreign dynasty; for Sogdian immigrant merchants, mortuary stones represented a cosmopolitan vision of the world and their community. Taking advantage of the versatility of the stone material, each group found a way to establish their distinct identity. Thanks to the ethnic and cultural diversity of all of these sixth-century subjects seeking to mediate their identities in the context of the tomb, mortuary stones became a cosmopolitan material.

It should be noted that during the sixth century, the boundaries of identity were porous and constantly shifting. Because of their versatility and their association with a certain kind of cosmopolitanism, mortuary stones became sites where different identities could converge and harmonize. This is seen in the first chapter, which illustrated the manner in which Northern Wei rulers granted stone coffins to both Tuoba royalty and the royal descendants of the preceding Chinese dynasty, thus creating an imperial lineage that superseded the distinction between the Tuoba and the Chinese; the Anyang sarcophagus presents its occupant simultaneously as a Sogdian leader, a Chinese gentleman, and a Buddhist devotee. Similarly, in the second chapter, I showed how the Shi Jun sarcophagus generated two distinct but complementary spaces that spoke to both the deceased's political obligation as a Chinese official and his spiritual engagement as a religious leader — the mortuary stone created a cosmopolitan space accommodating the Sogdian immigrant's multi-faceted social identity.

The versatility of mortuary stones gave artisans a significant measure of freedom to address the individuality of the deceased. Consequently, personal identity takes many forms on mortuary stones. On Sogdian mortuary couches, portraits and biographical scenes evoke the memory of the deceased among the living and transmit the individual identity of the deceased

into the afterlife. In filial piety illustrations on mortuary stones, the images of the deceased merge with historical moral paragons, and thereby take on aggrandizing allegorical appearances. On the Shi Jun sarcophagus, the artisans went even further to enhance the personal identity of the deceased by not only illustrating his biography but also modeling his life on the Buddha Shakyamuni. The result is a pictorial epic about a mundane Sogdian couple, who traversed both worldly territories and the path of the karmic circle. Such an epic is unprecedented and spectacular.

However, the question of exactly how people in medieval China defined themselves through mortuary stones appears slightly less important when we take note of the urgency with which they wanted to create for themselves a secure position in a rapidly changing social, cultural, and even cosmological environment. Such urgency was the tenor of the age, just as it is of our own times; it establishes an intimate bond between sixth-century China and the twenty-first-century world. Given that the sixth century anticipated the incipient golden age of Chinese civilization, one of the most peaceful, prosperous and cosmopolitan stage in East Asian history, can we expect a better future ahead of us? A better world in which everyone becomes content about who they are? Looking back through the chapters of this dissertation, I indeed feel encouraged to say yes.

APPENDIX 1

The Chinese inscription:

The Stone Hall of His Honor Shi, [Sa]bao of [Liang]zhou of the Great Zhou

His Honor's name was []. [His ancestors] came from the state of Shi.

They originally lived in the Western [Regions]. [6 missing characters] Later, they migrated to Chang'an.

He had [][][][], a perpetual reputation that met expectations;

and his virtues were known in the Central Plain. [][][][] gained prosperity day by day, [] and had a moral character.

[His] grandfather, A-shi-pan-tuo (Rashtvantak) was a *sabao* in his native country; and his father, A-nu-jia (Wanuk) possessed excellent virtues (literally “embracing a fine *jin* jade and holding a beautiful *yu* jade,”) and acted according to strict rules (literally, “following the precise shapes shown with the compass and the ruler.”)

[He] excelled among others with his remarkable establishments, and [he] undertook great affairs and achieved great merits.

(He) was [] when he was young [] and he already had an excellent reputation.

His Honor was endowed with the spirit of lofty mountains, [][][] (his) ambition.

At the beginning of [the reign of Datong] (ca. 535 C.E.), (he was) recommended by his hometown community and became the *sabao panshi chaozhu*.

In the fifth year of [][], he was given the title of the *sabao* of Liangzhou by an edict.

However, the way of Heaven is vast and obscure; (his) name will be left in obscurity for thousands of years.

At the seventh day of the [fifth] month of the first year of Daxiang (579 C.E.), [he] died at home at the age of eighty-six.

His wife Kang died at the day [] [] [] [] [] [].

The second year of Daxiang (the year of *gengzi*), in the first month (*dinghai shuo*), on the twenty-third day (*jiyou*), [Shi Jun and his wife] were buried together within the boundary of [] county.

His eldest son, Pisha, the second son, Weimo, and the third son, Fu [] duo all possess the merit of filial piety. They thus built a stone hall, and erected a *bei* stele on the tomb path, in order to spread [][] forever.

大周[凉]州[萨]保史君石堂

君[讳][]，[其先]史国人也

本居西[域]，土[][][][][][][]及延[派?]，迁居长安

目[自?]他有[][][][][]永运应期

中原显美。[][][][]日昌[?]具德

祖阿史盘陀，为本国萨保

父阿奴伽，并怀瑾握瑜，重规叠矩

秀杰不群，立功立事

少挺[]石，又擅英声

而君秉灵山[岳]，[][]志，

[大][统]之初，乡闾推挹，出身为萨保判事曹主

[卅] 五年，诏[授]凉州萨保

而天道芒芒，[沉]芳永岁

大象元年[五]月七日，薨于家，年八十六

妻康氏，其[][][][][]日薨

以其二年岁次庚子正月丁亥朔廿[三][日]己酉，合葬永[]县界，

长子毗沙，次维摩，次富[]多，并有孝行，乃为父造石堂[一]区，刊碑墓道，永播

[][]¹

The Sogdian inscription:

(It was in the period) Tay Zan of Great Chu (Dazhou Daxiang). The year two. In the first month of the year of the mouse. On the 23rd (day). Thus, there was a man of a family from Kish [domiciled?] in (a city called) Kachan. He [obtained?] a [title?] sabao of Kachan from the Emperor and was a grandee in the Sogdian land. He is named Wirkak, Wanuk's son. Wanuk, sabao Rashtvandak's son. His wife was born in Senpen and was named Wiyusi. Wirkak married his wife in Senpen in the year of the pig, in the sixth month, on the seventh day (which was) the day of the rabbit. Then, here in Khumtan (Chang'an), he himself died in the year of the pig, in the fifth month, on the seventh day (16th June 579 CE). And again his wife died in the 6th month, on the seventh day, on the day of the rabbit, in this given year, in this month, on this day (15th July 579 CE). There is no such living being who would be born and would not be owing death (Nobody cannot avoid the fate to die.)

¹ The translation is based on Wu Jui-Man's dissertation. See Wu, "Mortuary Art in the Northern Zhou China," 209-210.

It is also difficult to complete a period of time in the living world. (It is difficult to live out one's natural span of life.) However, this is even more difficult that in the world of men (i.e. life on earth) a husband and a wife see each other (i.e. live together?) without recognizing (it) (i.e. unintentionally or by accident) during these (same) years, these (same) months, and these (same) days, and that they would have life together during this (same) period of time also in the paradise. This tomb (i.e., god-house) made of stone was constructed by Vreshmanvandak, Zhematvandak, and Protvantak (or Parotvandak) for the sake of their father and mother in the suitable place.²

² Yoshida Yutaka 吉田豊, "The Sogdian Version of the New Xi'an Inscription," in *Les Sogdiens En Chine*, edited by Étienne de La Vaissière, Éric Trombert (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2005): 59.

APPENDIX 2

[... ...

Lowering the Coffin:

Present the bier (use mat instead if the official rank of the dead is below four). Set up a canopy behind the funeral carriage and lower the coffin onto the bier. Men on the east of the coffin and women on the west step forward in turn to wail by the coffin. After giving full vent to their grief they return to their places. The inferior inside and outside bow twice in farewell to the dead. The officer in waiting leads men from the presiding mourner downwards to wail on the east of *the passageway*, with their faces to the west, inclining to the north as the most honorable position. Women from wives and daughters downwards are veiled behind the curtain and they wail on the west of *the passageway*, with their faces to the east, inclining to the north as the most honorable position.

Entering the Grave:

Put a mat on the west inside *the grave chamber* (Lower the coffin directly into the grave if the official rank of the dead is below four). Attendants holding the rope attached to the coffin tie the rope to the bier (there are no attendants holding the rope attached to the coffin if the official rank of the dead is below six). Lower the coffin onto the mat inside *the grave chamber*, with the head (of the dead) turned to the north. Cover the coffin with a coverlet.

Arrangement of Vessels within the Grave and Its Sequence:

Remove the bier from the grave (there are only attendants holding the feathery ornaments, but no bier, if the dead's official rank is below four). Attendants holding the feathery ornaments enter *the grave chamber* and put the ornaments against the two side walls. Thereupon set up the low canopy to the east of the coffin, with the canopy's face to the south. Place rice, wine and slices of dried and spiced meat to the Northeast of the low canopy, the eating plates in front of the canopy, wrapped animal sacrifices in the four corners of the chamber, and the vinegar and pickles, supported by a tray on the south of the eating plates. Arrange *the spirit vessels* on the left and the right inside *the grave chamber*.

Covering the Grave Chamber

The funeral presider gives dark-colored and light red silk to the presiding mourner, who passes it to the officer of prayer. The officer of prayer enters *the grave chamber* and puts the silk on the spirit seat as an offering to the dead. The presiding mourner bows and then lays his forehead on the ground. Place the name banner and *tomb stone* behind *the gate of the grave chamber*. After this, close the grave chamber, set up the entrance lock, and thereupon cover the chamber with earth (three times ?). Those from presiding mourner downwards wail with their foreheads touching the ground. After giving full vent to their grief they leave the grave and all go to wail at the spirit place.

... ..³(italics by the author)]

³ Du You 杜佑, *Tongdian* 通典 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988). Translation is based on Legge's translation of *Li ji*, see *Li Chi: Book of Rites*.

FIGURES



Fig.1.1. Sarcophagus with Immortals Riding Dragons and Tiger. Late Northern Wei Dynasty (495 -534). From Luoyang, Henan. After *Sekai bijutsu daizenshu, toyo*, vol.3, fig.68.



Fig.1.2. An Jia Couch. 579 C.E., Northern Zhou Dynasty (557-581 C.E.). From Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. Length 228 cm, width 103cm, height 117cm. After *Zhongguo lingmu diaosu quanji*, vol. 4 (Xi'an, 2007), fig.64.



Fig. 1.3. Stone Funerary Couch. 6th century C.E., Northern Dynasties (386-581 C.E.). Width 93.35 cm, length 210.19 cm, height 100.01 cm. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.



Fig.1.4. Stone Funerary Couch. 549 C.E., Eastern Wei Dynasty (534-550 C.E.). From Gu'an, Anyang City, Henan Province.

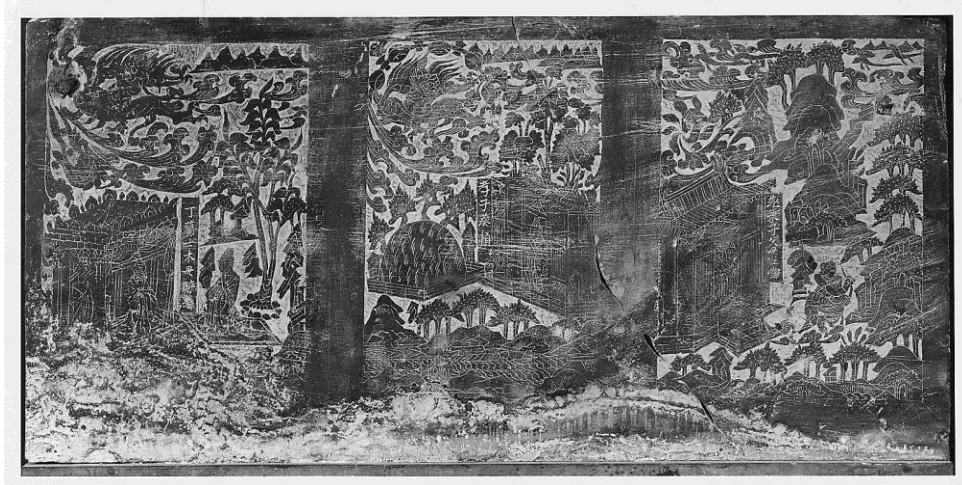


Fig.1.5. Stone panel of a funeary couch. 6th century C.E., Northern Wei Dynasty. From Luoyang, Henan. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Fig. 1.6. Stone panel A from a funerary couch. 6th century C.E., Northern Wei Dynasty. From Luoyang, Henan. The Art Institute of Chicago.



Fig. 1.7. Stone panel B from a funerary couch. 6th century C.E., Northern Wei Dynasty. From Luoyang, Henan. The Art Institute of Chicago.

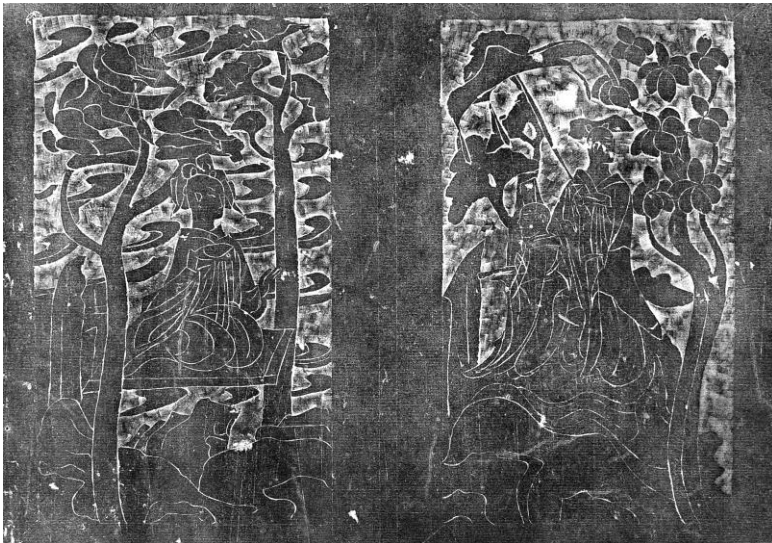


Fig.1.8. The Couple Portraits on Panel A



Fig. 1.9. Depiction of Shan Tao and Wang Rong in “Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove and Rong Qiqi.” Southern Dynasties (420-589 C.E.). From Nanjing, Jiangsu. Molded brick relief. From “Nanjing Xishanqiao Nanchao mu jiqi zhuanke bihua,” *Wenwu*, no.8-9, 1960, fig.1.



Fig. 1.10. Portraits of Ning Mao on the back exterior wall of the Ning Mao Shrine. 527 C.E., Northern Wei Dynasty. From Luoyang, Henan. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Fig.1.11. Buddhist stone tablet. 1347 C.E., Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368 C.E.). Shaolin Temple, Henan Province. (Photography by the Author)

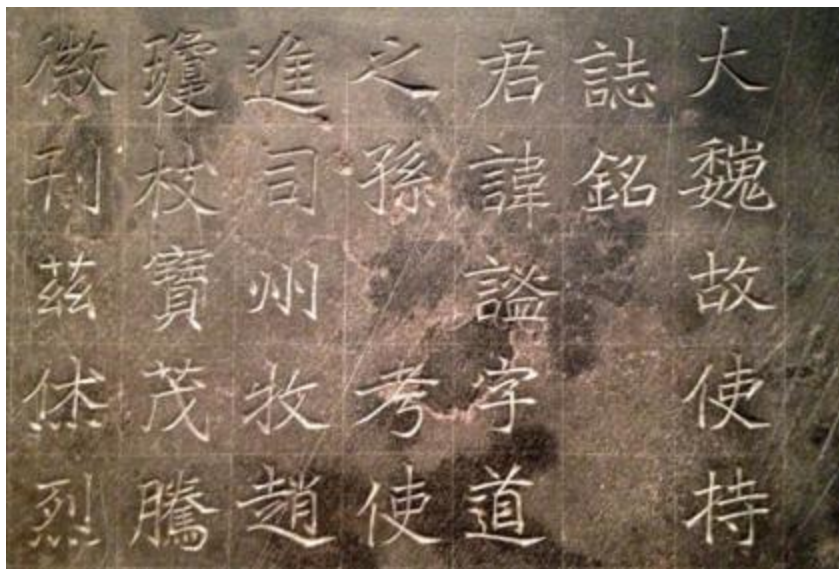


Fig.1. 12. Tombstone of Yuan Mi. 523 C.E., Northern Wei Dynasty. From Luoyang, Henan. Limestone. Minneapolis Institute of Art. (Photography by the Author)

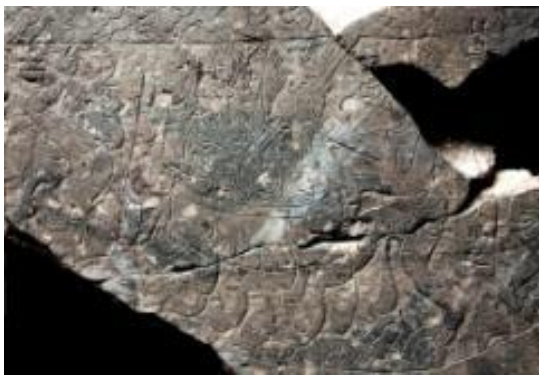


Fig.1. 13. Fragment of a Buddhist stone tablet. Northern Wei Dynasty. From Luoyang, Henan. Limestone. Private Collection, Luoyang. (Photography by the Author)



Fig. 1.14. Fragment of a stone funerary couch. Northern Wei Dynasty. From Luoyang, Henan. Limestone. Private Collection, Luoyang. (Photography by the Author)



Fig.1. 15. Dali marble screen “Clear Sky after Rain.” Liu Garden, Suzhou City.

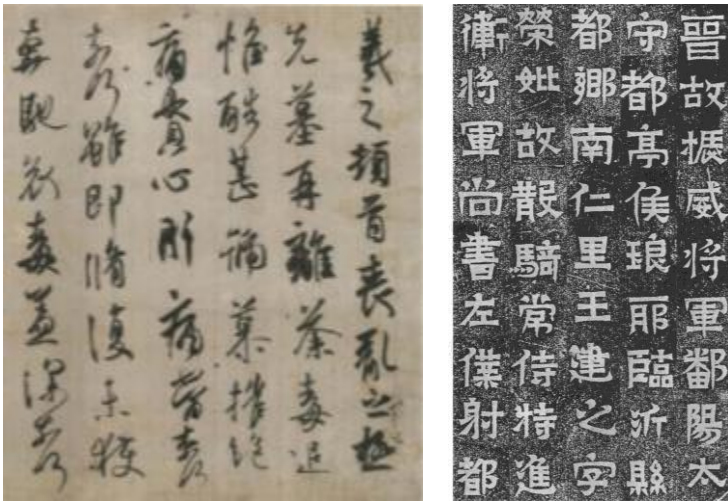


Fig. 1.16. Reproduction of Wang Xizhi’s “Sangluan Album.” Tang Dynasty (618-907 C.E.).The Museum of the Imperial Collections, Sannomaru Shozokan, Tokyo. After *Sekai bijutsu daizenshu, toyo*, vol.3, fig.134.

Fig. 1.17. Rubbing of the epitaph of Wang Jianzhi. 372 C.E., Eastern Jin Dynasty (265-420 C.E.).Nanjing Museum.



Fig. 1.18. Detail of panel B and cursive calligraphy on a tomb brick. 514 C.E., Liang Dynasty (502 -557 C.E.). Nanjing Museum. After *Liuchao fengcai* (Beijing, 2004), fig.282.

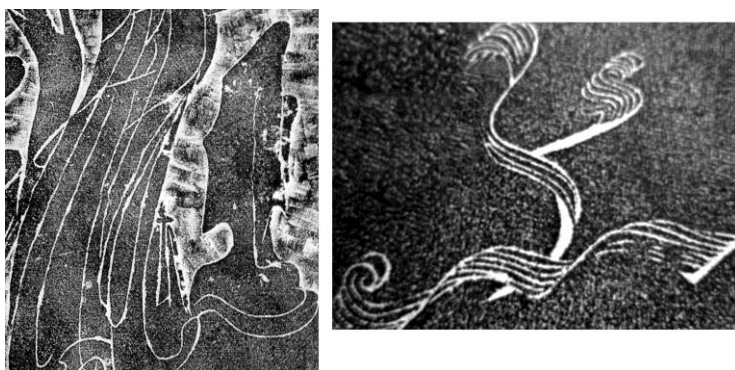


Fig. 1.19. Detail of panel B and a “Flying White” character from the epitaph of Yuchi Jingde (658 C.E., Tang Dynasty).



Fig.1.20. Brocade with horned animals in a pearl roundel. 7th to 9th century C.E. From Xinjiang Autonomous Region or Central Asia. 25.4 x 39.4 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Fig.1.21. “Five Stars Rise in the East” arm protector. Eastern Han (25–220 C.E.) to Jin Dynasty (265–420 C.E.). From Niya, Xinjiang Autonomous Region. Warp-faced Brocade. 18.5×12.5×21cm. After *Sekai bijutsu daizenshu, toyo*, vol.3, pl. 158.



Fig.1.22. Brocade with lion hunting. 7th century C.E. Weft-faced brocade. 250 × 134.5 cm. The Horyuji Temple, Nara, Japan. After *Sekai bijutsu daizenshu, toyo*, vol.3, pl. 250.



Fig.1.23. Ewer showing Greek mythological scenes. 5th – 6th century. Excavated from the tomb of Li Xian (569), Guyuan, Ningxia. Height: 37.5 cm; diameter: 12.8 cm. After A.L. Juliano and J. Lerner eds., *Monks and Merchants*, pl.31.



Fig.1.24. House-shaped sarcophagus of Shi Jun. 579 C.E. From the tomb of Shi Jun, Xi'an, Shaanxi. Width: 246cm; depth: 155cm; height: 158cm. After Zhang Daoyi and Li Xingming eds., *Zhongguo lingmu diaosu quanji 4* 中国陵墓雕塑全集 4 (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin meishu chubanshe, 2007), pl.73.

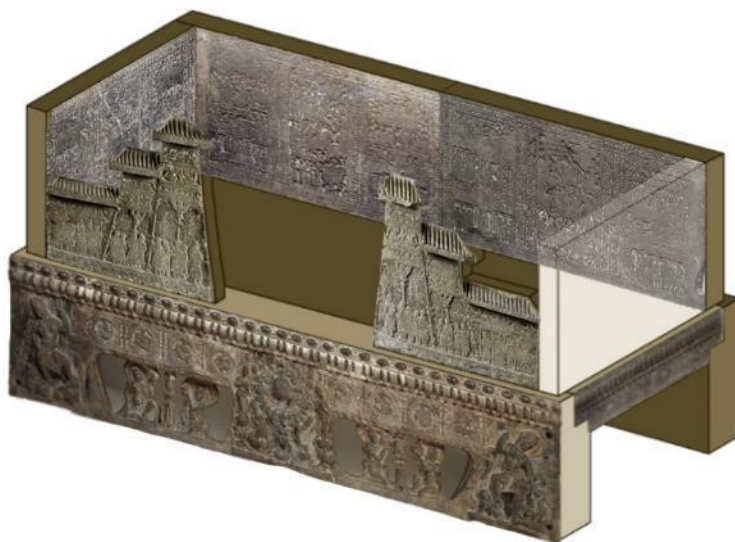


Fig.1.25. Funerary couch. Northern Qi Dynasty (550–577). From Anyang, Henan Province. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Musee Guimet, Paris; Museum of East Asian Art, Cologne; Freer Gallery of Art, DC.

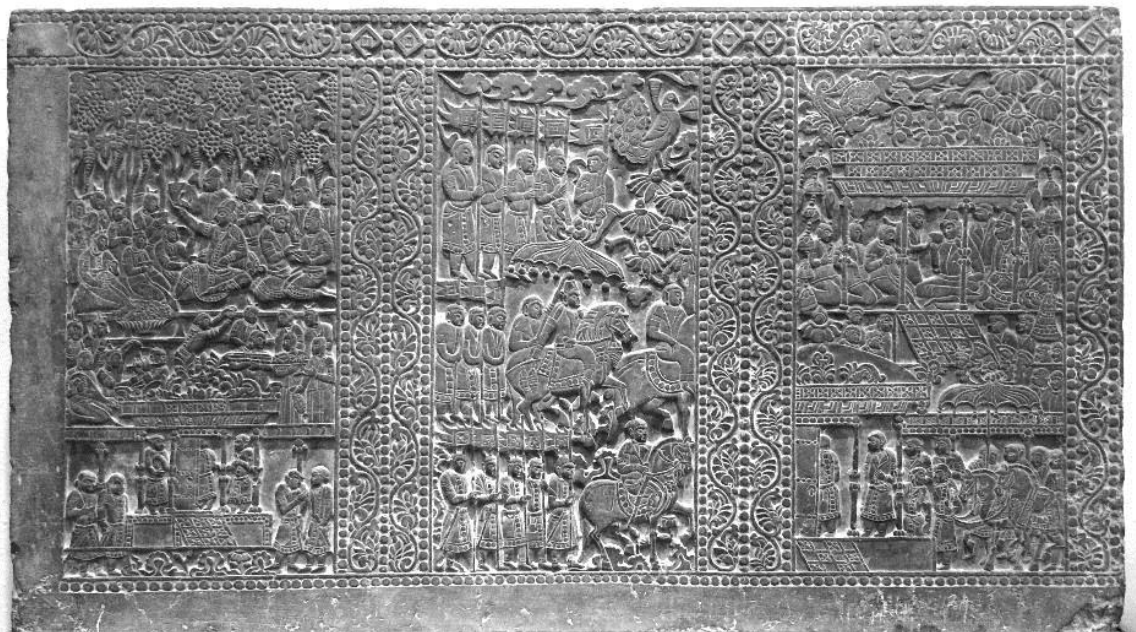


Fig.1.26. Back of the Anyang Couch. Gray marble with traces of pigment. 63.8 x 116 x 10 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. (Photo by the author)

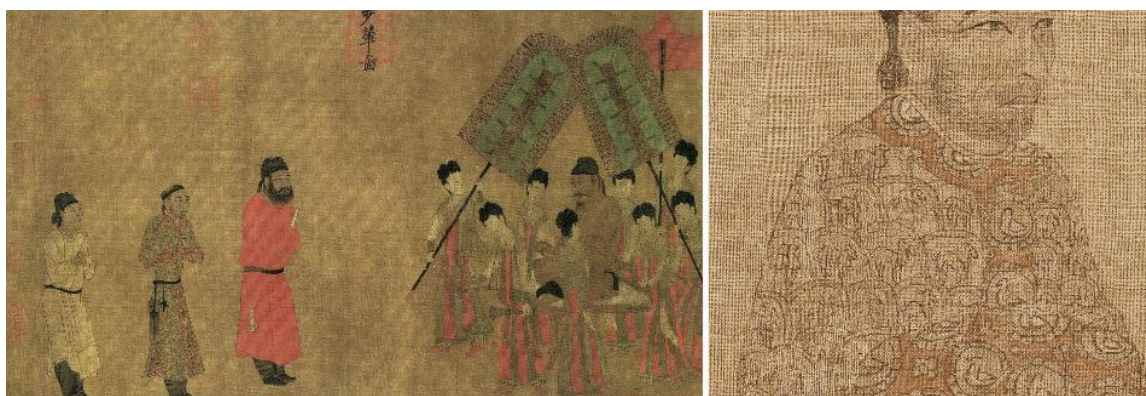


Fig.1.27. *Imperial Sedan Chair*. Attributed to Yan Liben (601-673).Tang Dynasty(618-906). Colors on silk. 38.5 x 129.6 cm. The Palace Museum, Beijing. After Zhongguo gudai shuhua jianding zu ed., *Zhongguo huihua quanji1* 中国绘画全集 1 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1997), pl.131.



Fig.1.28. Stone Coffin. 582 C.E. From the tomb of Li He, Sanyuan, Shaanxi. Limestone. Xi'an Beilin Museum, Shaanxi.



Fig.1.29. Maids in the Xu Xianxiu tomb. 571 C.E. From the tomb of Xu Xianxiu, Taiyuan, Shanxi Province. After Taiyuan shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo ed., *Beiqi Xu Xianxiu mu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2005), pl. 23 and pl. 19.



Fig.1.30. Figurine of a Sogdian merchant. 597 C.E. From the tomb of Hulü Che, Taiyuan, Shanxi Province. Pottery. 45.5cm. Shanxi Provincial Museum, Shanxi.



Fig.1.31. Envoys at Samarkand. 7th Century C.E. Western Wall of Room 1 at Afrasiab, Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Historical Museum of Samarkand, Uzbekistan. After Tanabe Katsumi and Maeda Kosaku, eds., *Sekai bijutsu daizenshu. Chuo Ajia* 世界美術大全集. 中央アジア (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1999), pl. 180.



Fig.1.32. Brocade face cover. Tang Dynasty (618-907 C.E.). From Tomb 138, Asitana, Xinjiang. 45 x 36cm. After Xinjiang Weiwu'er Zizhiqu bo wu guan, ed., *Sichou zhi lu: Han Tang zhiwu* 丝绸之路: 汉唐织物(Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1973), pl.38.

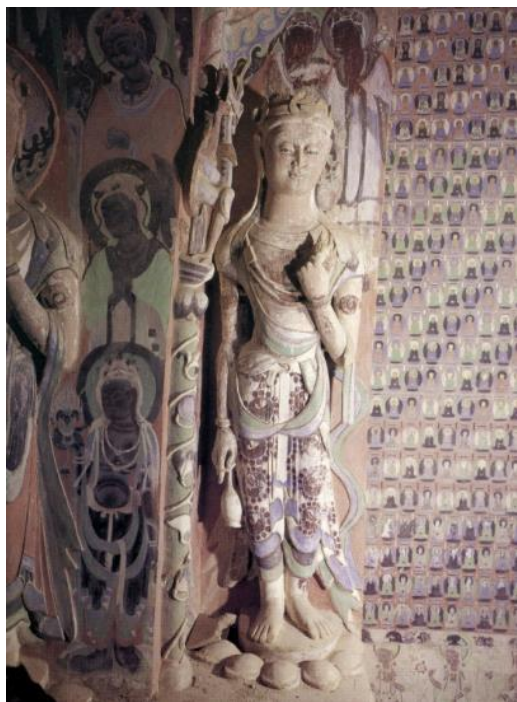


Fig.1.33. Mogao Cave 420. Sui Dynasty (581-618 C.E.). Dunhuang, Gansu. After Yang Xiong and Duan Wenjie eds., *Dunhuang shiku yishu. Mogaoku di 420 ku* 敦煌石窟艺术. 莫高窟第四二〇窟(Nanjing: Jiangsu meishu chubanshe), pl.8.



Fig.1.34. Buddha and its donor images. Northern Qi (550-577C.E.). From Qingzhou, Shandong. Limestone. 118 cm. After Qingzhou bowuguan ed., *Qingzhou Longxing si fojiao zaixiang yishu* 青州龙兴寺佛教造像艺术 (Jinan: Shandong meishu chubanshe, 1999), pl. 127 and pl. 131.



Fig.1.35. Detail of the back of the Anyang couch. (Photo by the author)



Fig.1.36. Frontal of the Anyang couch. Gray marble with traces of pigment. 71.5 x 74 x 14 cm. Museum of East Asian Art Cologne.



Fig.2.1. Shi Jun tomb. After Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiu suo, *Beizhou shijun mu* 北周史君墓 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2003), fig.30.



Fig.2.2. Structure of the Shi Jun tomb. After *Beizhou Shi Jun mu*, fig 24.



Fig.2.3. Shi Jun sarcophagus. Front and north side. *Beizhou Shi Jun mu*, fig. 77.



Fig.2.4. Stone plaque with a bilingual epitaph. *Beizhou Shi Jun mu*, fig.39.

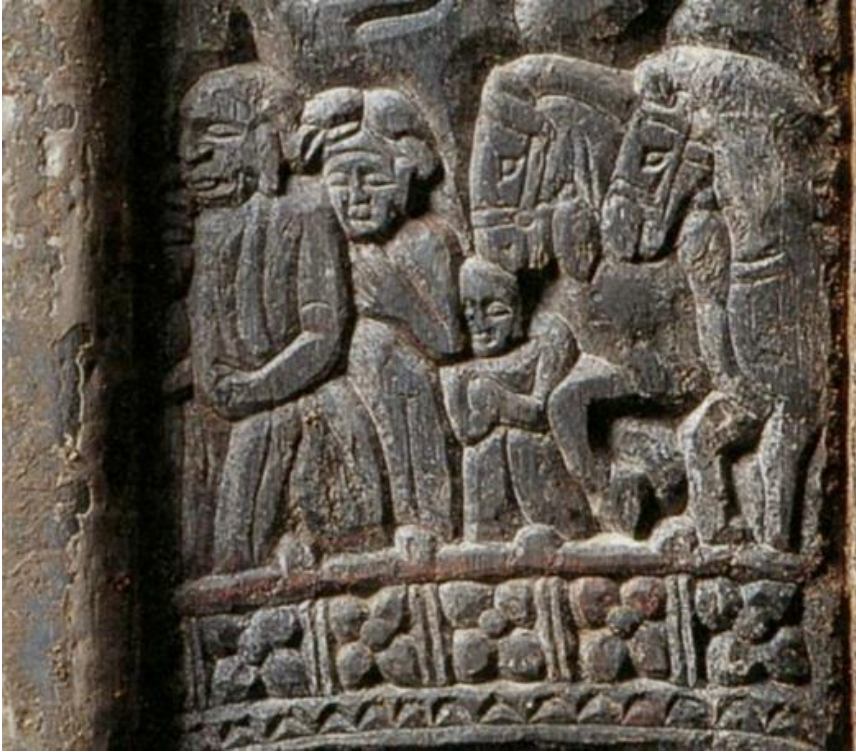


Fig.2. 5. The Shi Jun couple depicted on the east side. *Beizhou Shi Jun mu*, fig.40.



Fig.2. 6. Tombstone of Shangguan Wan'er (664-710 CE). From Xianyang, Shaanxi.



Fig.2.7. Panel from an Eastern Han stone shrine. Honglou, Tongshan. After Jiang Yingju 蒋英炬 ed., *Zhongguo huaxiangshi quanji* 中国画像石全集 vol.1 (Ji'nan: Shangdong meishu chubanshe, 2000), fig. 46.



Fig.2.8. Panel from an Eastern Han stone shrine. Honglou, Tongshan. *Zhongguo huaxiangshi*, fig. 41.



Fig.2. 9. The Ning Mao sarcophagus. Late Northern Wei. From Luoyang, Henan. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

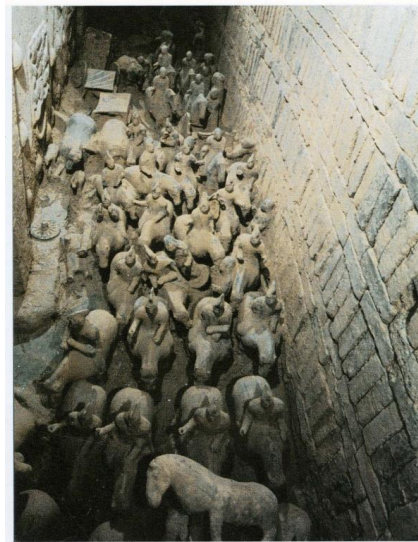
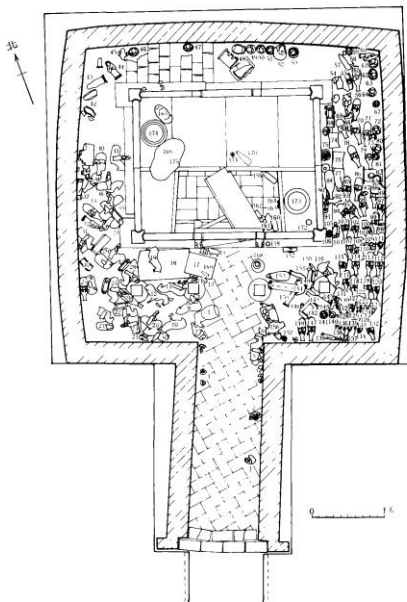


Fig.2. 10. (Left) Plan and the inner view of the Song Shaozu tomb. 499, Northern Wei. From Datong, Shanxi. (Right) Placement of grave goods. After *Wenwu* 7 (2001), fig.6 and fig.17.

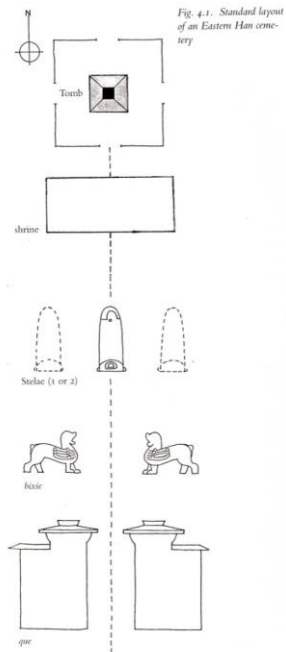


Fig.2. 11. Standard layout of an Eastern Han cemetery. After *Monumentality*, fig.4.1.

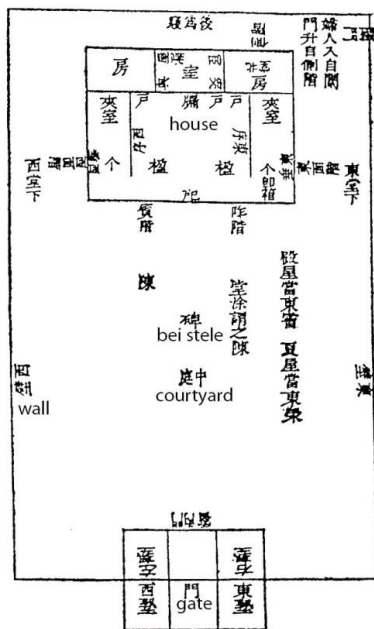


Fig.2. 12. Plan of an ancestral temple as recorded in ancient texts. After *Monumentality*, fig.2.6.



Fig.2. 13. The Song Shaozu stone coffin. 499, Northern Wei. From Datong, Shanxi.



Fig.2. 14. Stone Shrine at Xiaotangshan. Eastern Han Dynasty (8-220). Changqing, Shandong. After *Zhongguo jianzhu yishu quanji* 6, *Yuandai qian lingmu jianzhu* 中国建筑艺术全集 6:元代前陵墓建筑 (Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe,2000), fig.73.

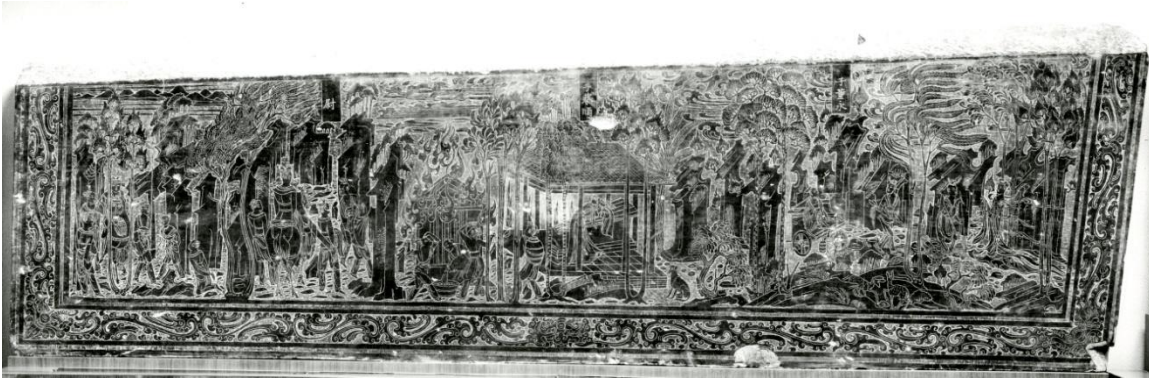


Fig.2. 15. The Filial-son sarcophagus. Late Northern Wei. From Luoyang, Henan. The Nelson & Atkins Museum, Kansas.



Fig.2. 16. Inscription on the Ning Mao sarcophagus.

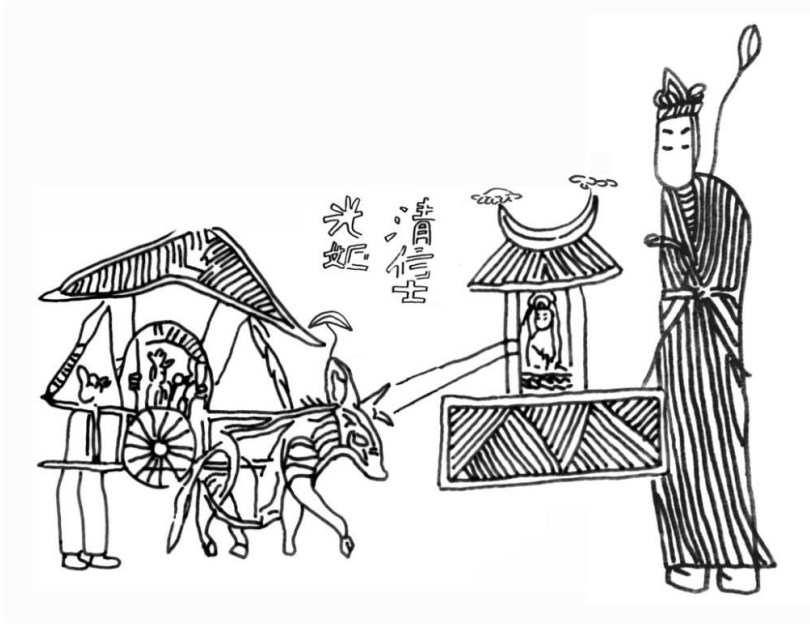


Fig.2.17. Drawing of an engraving on the Fumeng Wenqing stele. 520s, Northern Wei. Yaoxian, Shaanxi.



Fig.2.18. A Buddhist stele from the Wangfo Temple. Liang Dynasty (502-557). From Chengdu, Sichuan. After *Sichuan chutu nanchao fojiao zaoxiang* 四川出土南朝佛教造像, fig. 38-1.

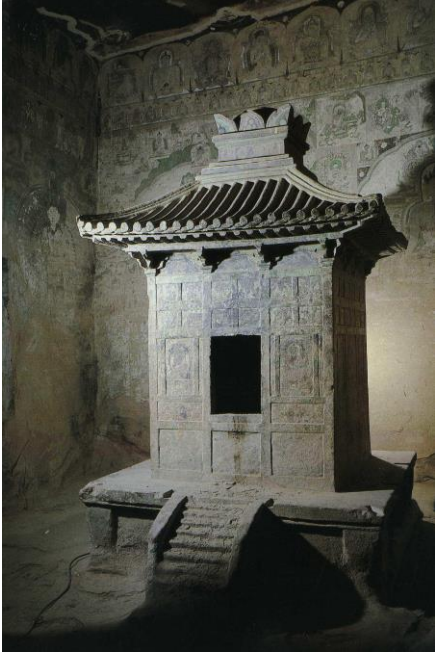


Fig.2. 19. Stone pagoda in Cave 3. Tang Dynasty (618-906). The Bingling Temple, Gansu Province. After Gansu sheng wenwu gongzuo dui, Bingling si shiku wenwu baoguan suo 甘肃省文物工作队 炳灵寺石窟文物保管所, *Zhongguo shiku: Yongjing Bingling si* 中国石窟: 永靖炳灵寺 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), Fig.168

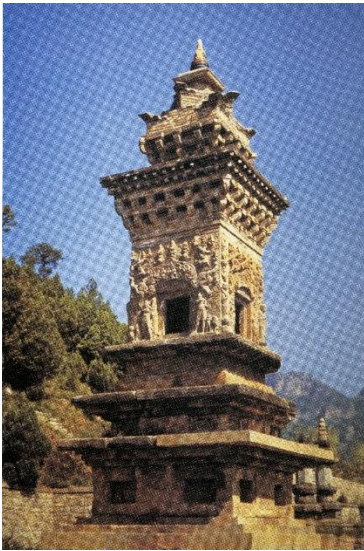


Fig.2.20. The Longhu Pagoda. Tang Dynasty (618-906). Ji'nan, Shangdong. After Luo Zhewen 罗哲文, *Zhongguo guta* 中国古塔 (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1985), fig. 217.



Fig.2. 21. Winged goddess on the pedestal of the Shi Jun sarcophagus. *Beizhou Shi Jun mu*, fig.176 -177.



Fig.2. 22. East wall of the Shi Jun sarcophagus. *Beizhou Shi Jun mu*, fig. 145.



Fig.2.23.Shi Jun sarcophagus, north side no.2 (N2). *Beizhou Shi Jun mu*, fig.27.

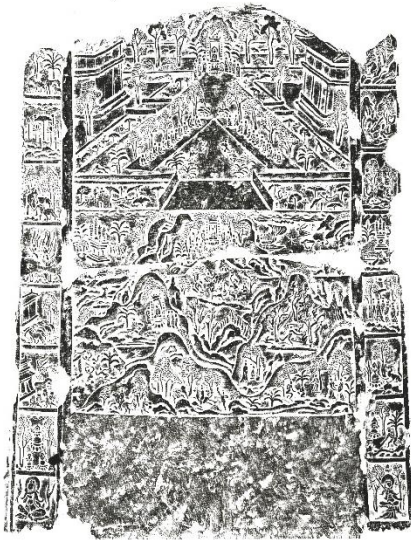


Fig.2.24. Engraving on a Buddhist Stele from the Wanfo Temple. Liang Dyansty (502-557). Chengdu, Sichuang Province. After *Sichuan chutu nanchao fojiao zaoxiang* 四川出土南朝佛教造, fig.36-2.

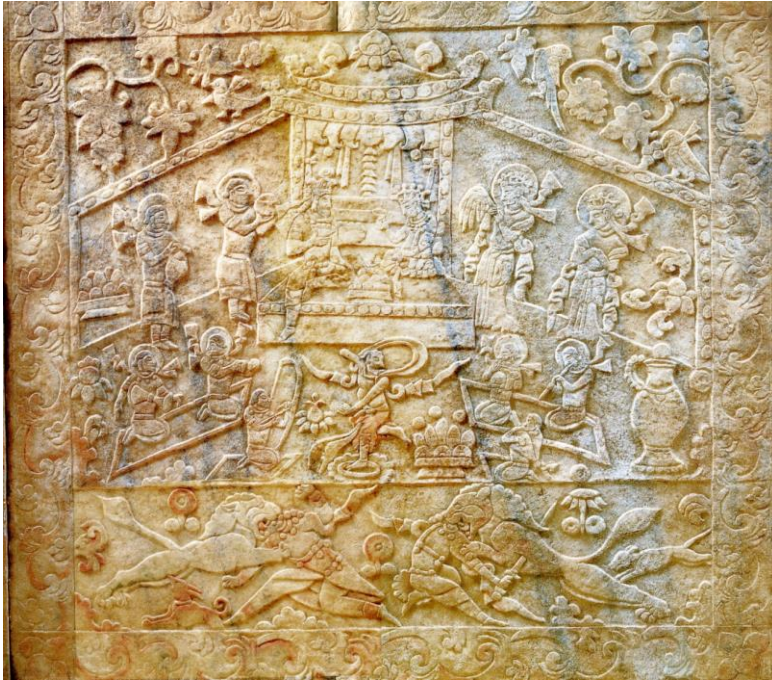


Fig.2.25. The Yu Hong sarcophagus. 592, Sui Dynasty (581-618). Taiyuan, Shanxi. After Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo, *Taiyuan Sui Yu Hong mu* 太原隋虞弘墓 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2005), pl. 36.



Fig.2. 26. Buddhist stela. Northern Qi (550-577). From Xunxian, Henan. Henan Museum.

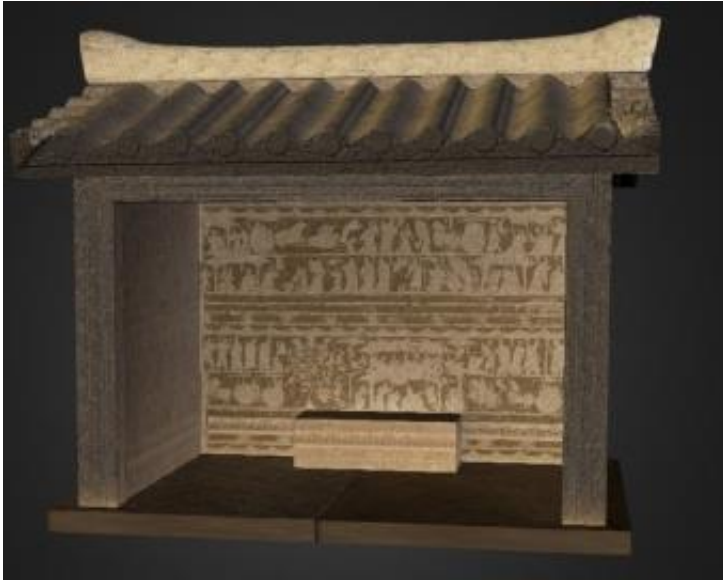


Fig.2. 27. Reconstruction of the Wu Liang shrine by Anthony J. Barbieri-Low.



Fig.2.28. The Yu Hong sarcophagus. *Taiyuan Sui Yu Hong mu*, pl.25.



Fig.2. 29. The Yu Hong sarcophagus. *Taiyuan Sui Yu Hong mu*, pl. 2.



Fig. 3.1a. Ink rubbing of the left side of the Yuan Mi Sarcophagus. Late Northern Wei period, 524 CE. From Luoyang, Henan Province. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Okumura Ikuro, "Tokin koshi-den sekkan no kokuga ni tsuite," in *Koku* 5 (1939).



Fig.3.1b. Ink rubbing of the right side of the Yuan Mi Sarcophagus.

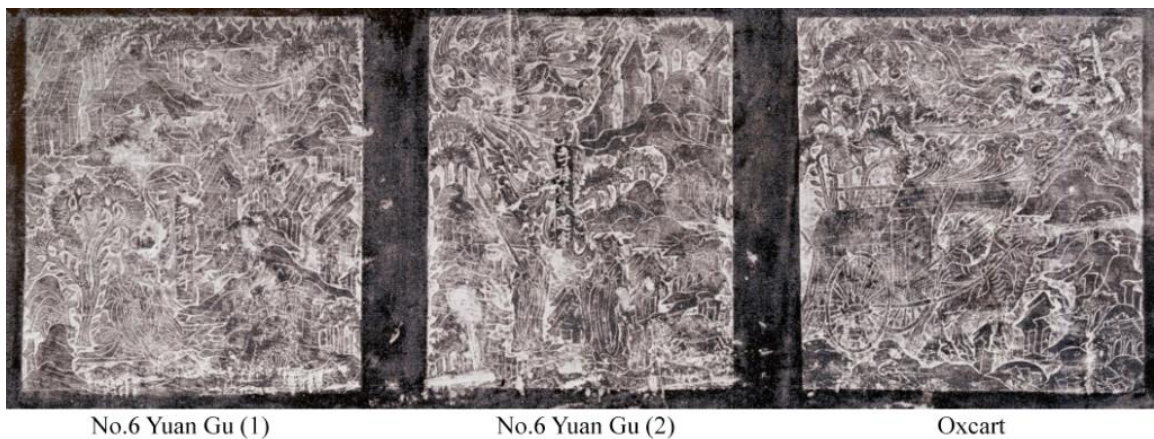


Fig. 3.2a. Slab 1 of the Boston Couch. Late Northern Wei period (495-534 CE). From Luoyang, Henan Province. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. C. T. Loo, *An Exhibition of Chinese Stone Sculptures* (New York, 1940), plate 29.

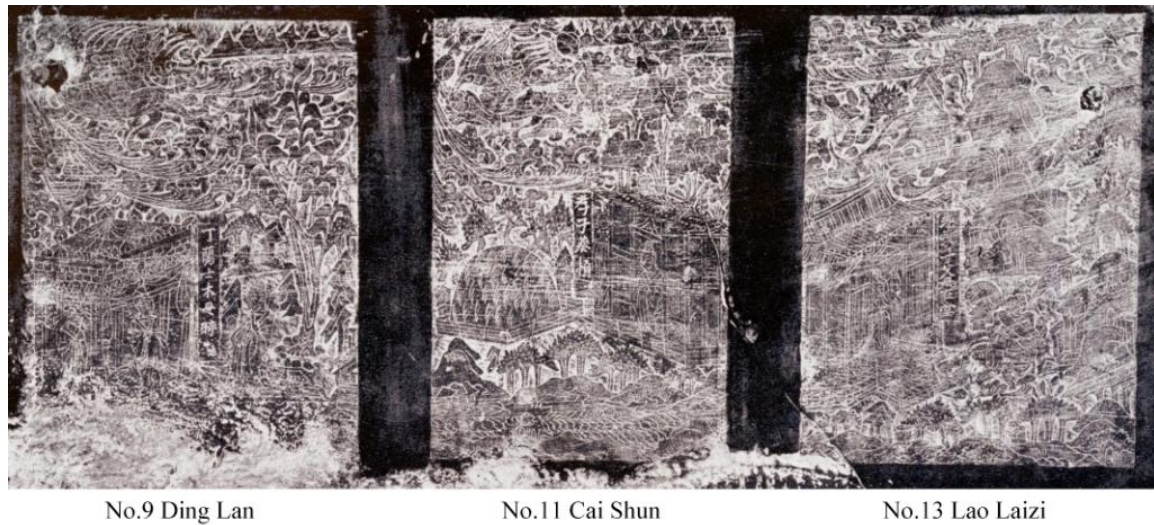


Fig. 3.2b. Slab 2 of the Boston Couch. Loo, *An Exhibition*, plate 30.

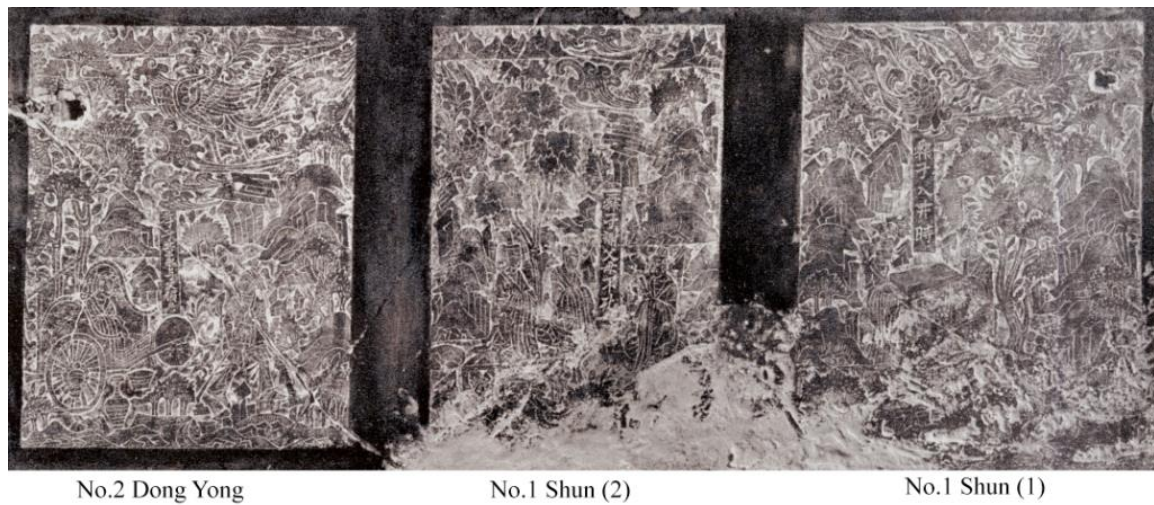


Fig. 3.2c. Slab 3 of the Boston Couch. Loo, *An Exhibition*, plate 31.

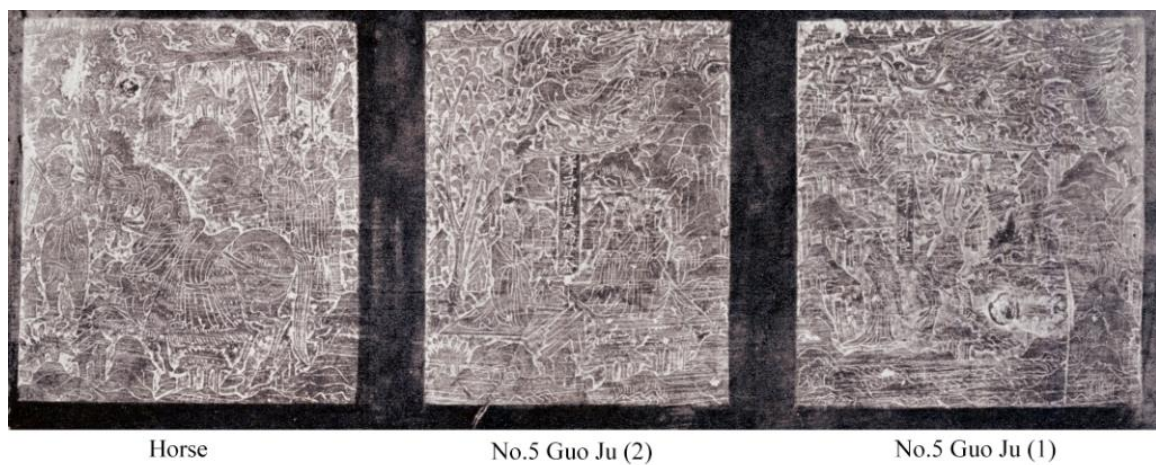


Fig. 3.2d. Slab 4 of the Boston Couch. Loo, *An Exhibition*, plate 32.



Fig. 3.3a. Left side of the Kansas Sarcophagus. Late Northern Wei period (495-534 CE). From Luoyang, Henan Province. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.



Fig. 3.3b. Right side of the Kansas sarcophagus.

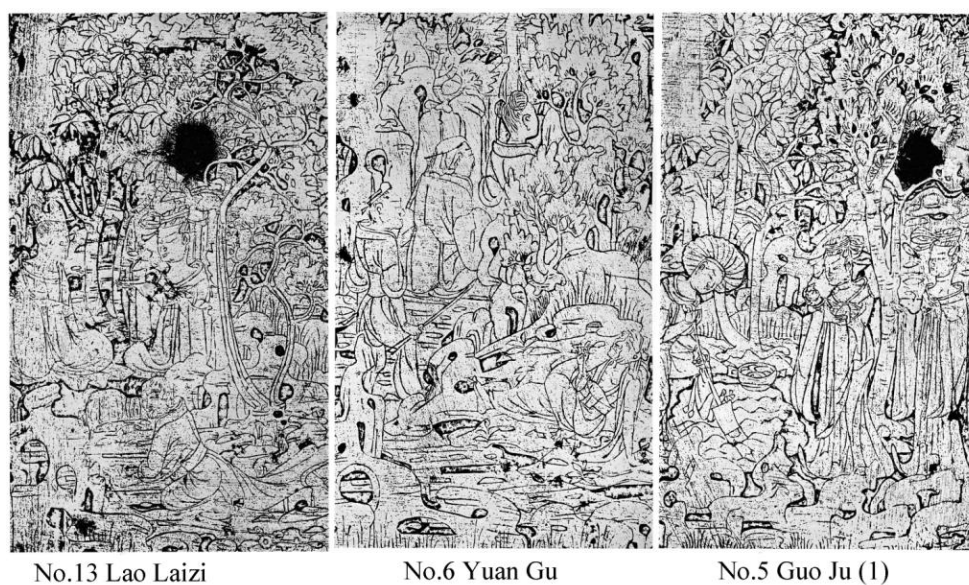


Fig. 3. 4a. Ink rubbing of Slab 1 of the Kansas Couch. Late Northern Wei period (495-534 CE). From Luoyang, Henan Province. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Nagahiro Toshio, *Rikucho jidai bijutsu no kenkyu* (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppansha, 1969), plates 45-47.



Fig. 3.4b. Slab 2 of the Kansas Couch. Nagahiro, *Rikucho jidai bijutsu*, plates 54-56.



Fig. 3.4c. Slab 3 of the Kansas Couch. Nagahiro, *Rikucho jidai bijutsu*, plates 48-50.



Fig. 3.4d. Slab 4 of the Kansas Couch. Nagahiro, *Rikucho jidai bijutsu*, plates 51-53.



Fig. 3.5. *Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies*. After Gu Kaizhi (344-405CE). Fifth to Eighth Centuries. British Museum.

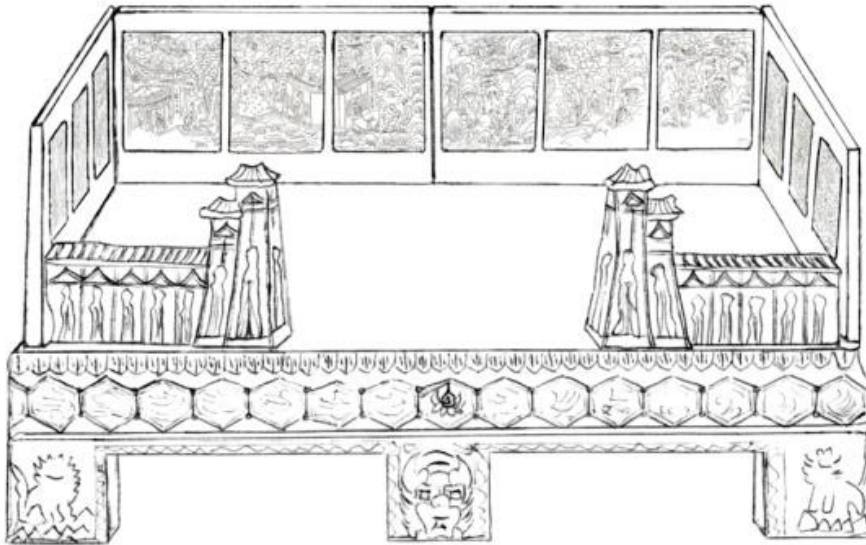


Fig. 3. 6. Reconstruction drawing of the Boston Couch. By author.

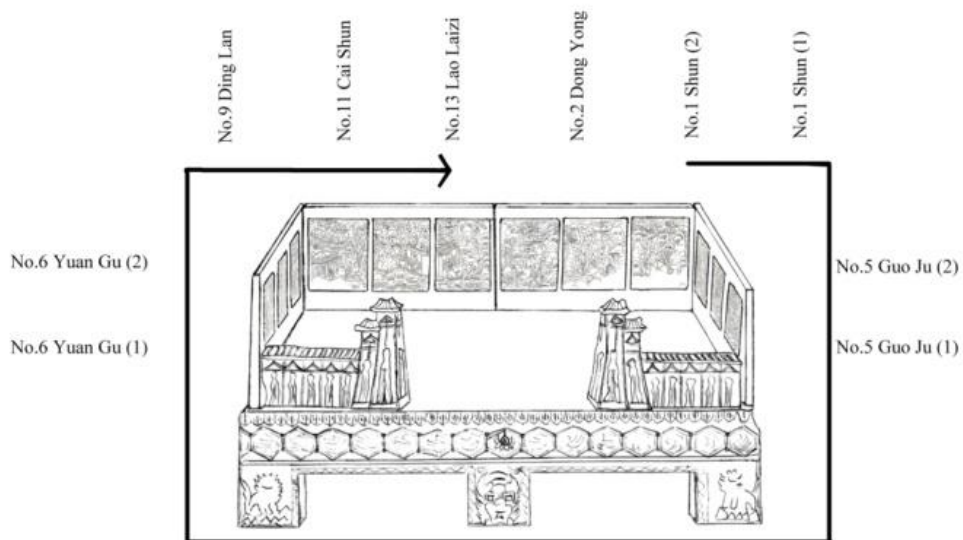


Fig. 3.7. The textual order on the Boston Couch. By author.

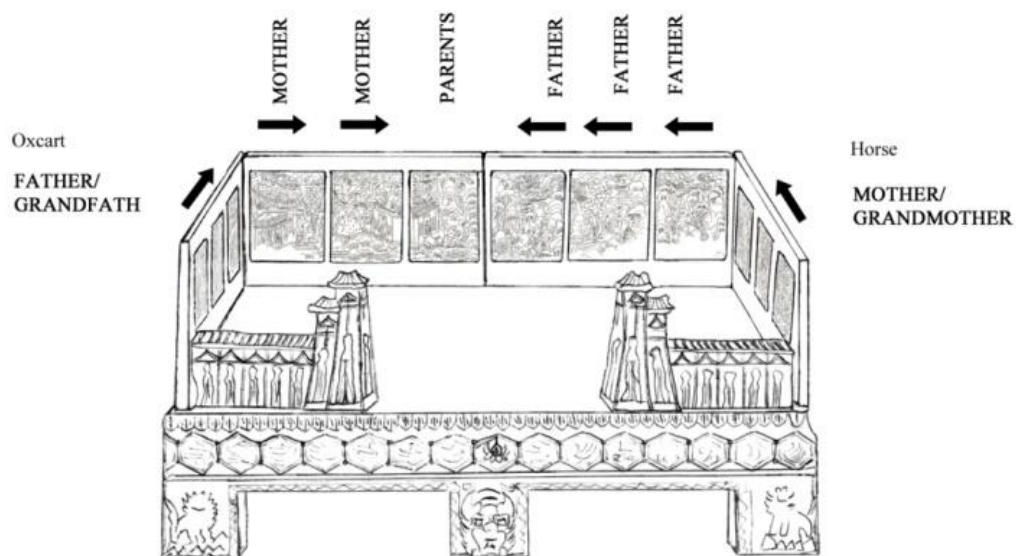


Fig. 3.17. The iconic structure of the Boston Couch. By author.

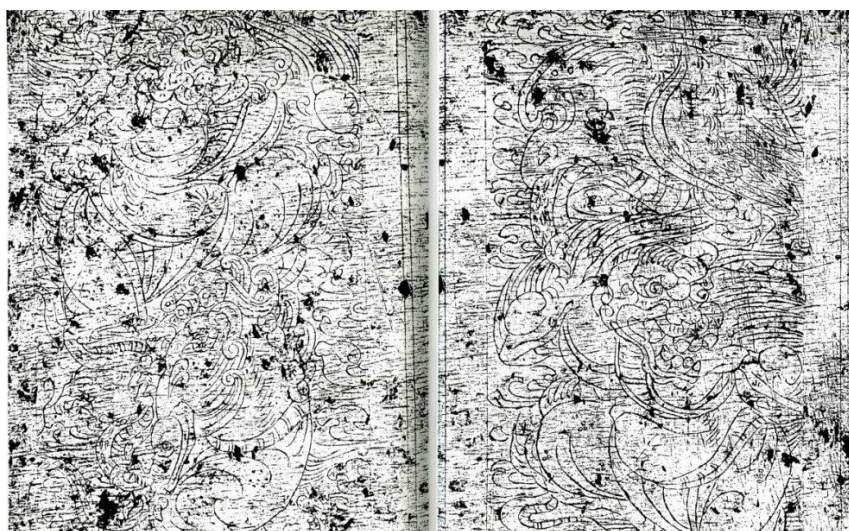


Fig. 3. 8. Ink rubbing of the back of the Kansas Couch. Nagahiro, *Rikuchō jidai bijutsu*, plates 24-25.



Fig. 3. 9. The second scene of Guo Ju on the Kansas Couch. Nagahiro, *Rikucho jidai bijutsu*, plate 56.



Fig. 3. 10. Two scenes of Dong An on the Kansas Couch. Nagahiro, *Rikucho jidai bijutsu*, plate 54-55.

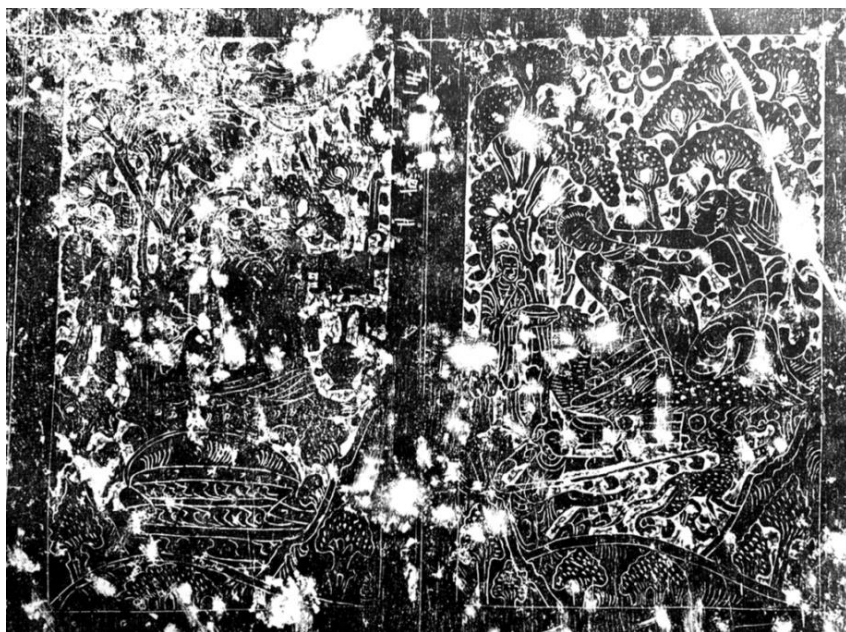


Fig. 3. 11. Ink rubbing of a slab from a mortuary couch. Late Northern Wei period (495-534 CE). From Luoyang, Henan Province. Private collection.



Fig. 3. 12a. Illustration of Wang Lin on the Kansas couch. Nagahiro, *Rikucho jidai bijutsu*, plate 49. Fig. 12b Illustration of Wang Lin on the Kansas sarcophagus. By author.

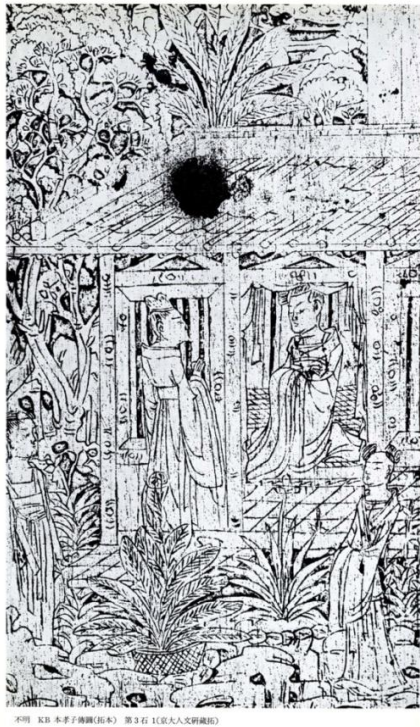


Fig. 3. 13a. Illustration of Ding Lan on the Kansas couch. Nagahiro, *Rikucho jidai bijutsu*, plate 51. Fig. 13b Illustration of Ding Lan on the Boston couch. By author.

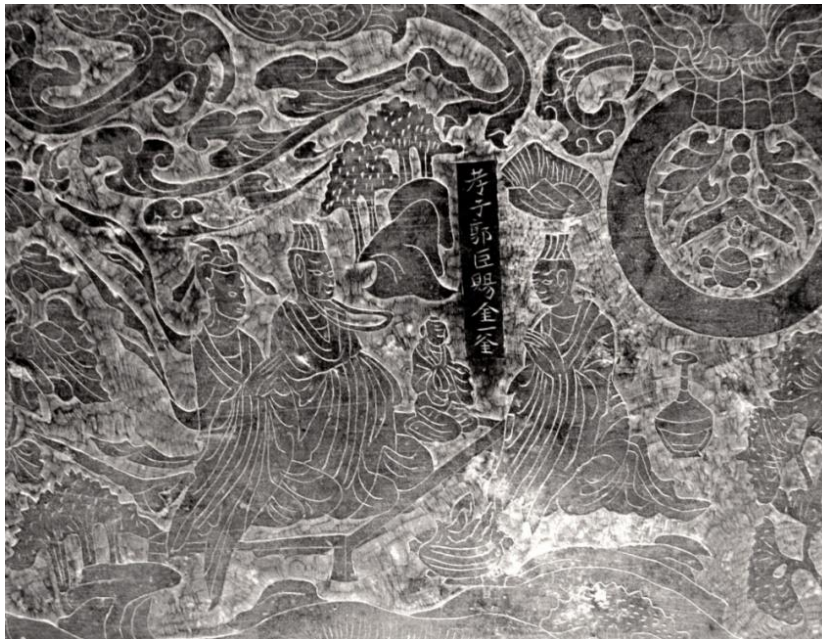


Fig. 3. 14. Illustration of Guo Ju on the Yuan Mi sarcophagus. By author.



Fig. 3. 15. Illustration of Lao Laizi on the Boston Couch. By author.



Fig. 3. 16. Illustration of Cai Shun on the Boston Couch. By author.



Fig. 3. 18. Right side of a sarcophagus with an immortal riding a dragon. Late Northern Wei (495-534 CE). From Luoyang, Henan. Luoyang Museum. *Sekai bijutsu daizenshu, toyo*, vol.3, plate 67.

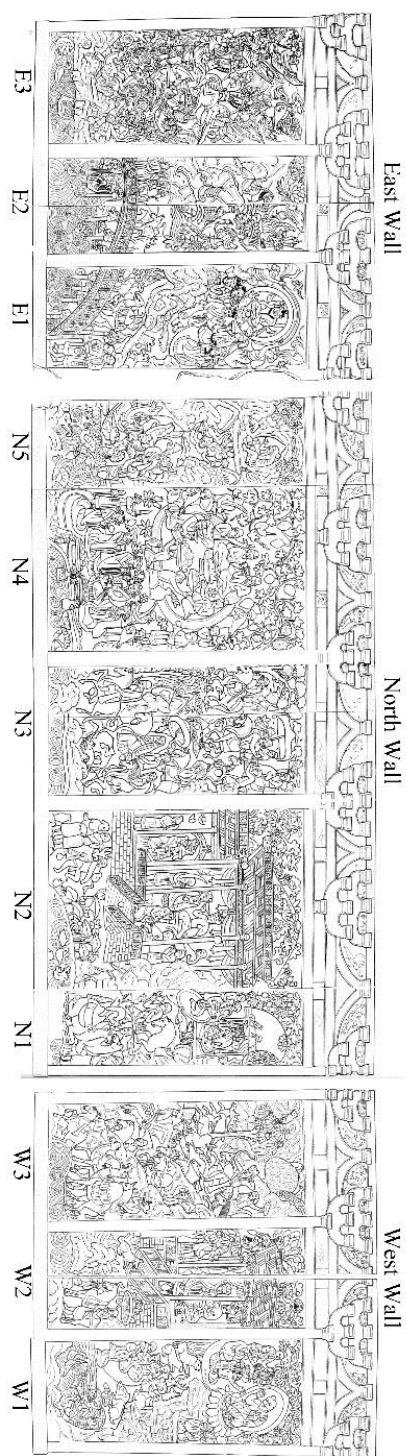


Fig.3.19. Illustrations on the Shi Jun sarcophagus. After Yang, *Beizhou Shi Jun mu*, fig. 80.



Fig.3.20. Jade seal of “Li Cang.” 286 BCE, Western Han Dynasty (202 BCE – 8 CE). From Mawangdui Tomb No.2. Side length 2-2.2cm, height: 1.4-1.7cm.

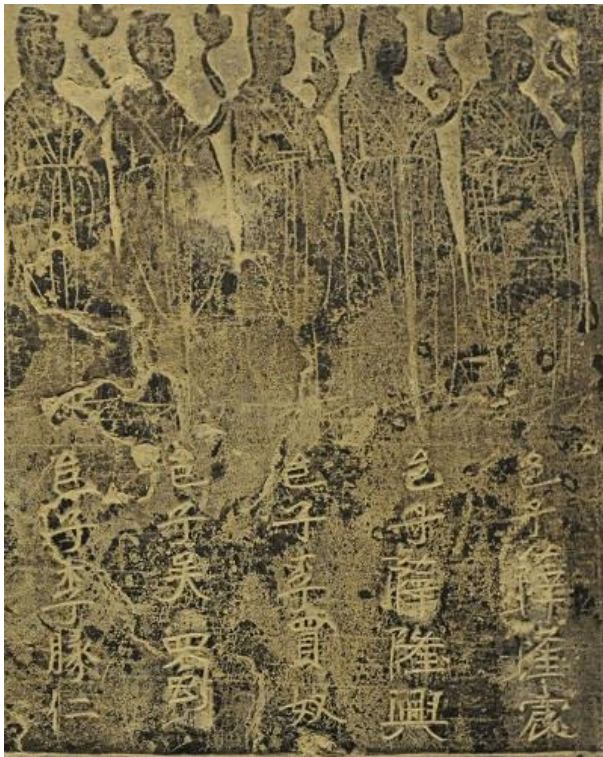
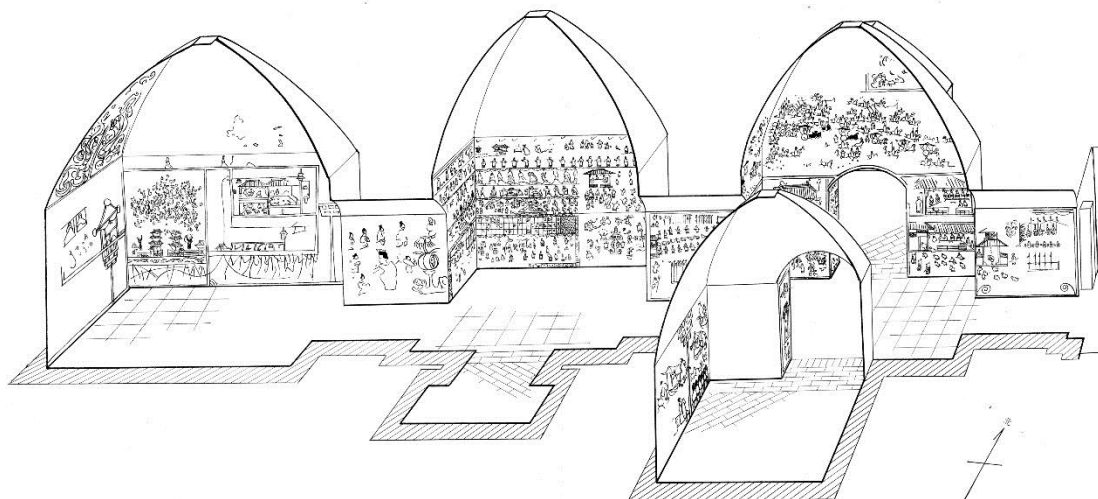


Fig.3.21. Donor images on a Buddhist stele. 554 CE, Western Wei Dynasty. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

壁面位置示意图一



F.3.22. Mural paintings in an Eastern Han tomb at Herlinger, Inner Mongolia. Eastern Han Dynasty. Drawing.



Fig.3.23. Biographic illustrations on the Wu Rong shrine. From *Zhongguo huaxiangshi quanji: Shandong han huaxiangshi*, fig.70. Eastern Han Dynasty.



Fig. 3.24. Kang Ye couch. 571 CE, Northern Zhou Dynasty. From Xi'an, Shaanxi Province.



F.3.25. W3 of the Shi Jun sarcophagus. After Yang, *Beizhou Shi Jun mu*, fig. 113.



Fig.3.26. E2 of the Shi Jun sarcophagus, fig., 139.



Fig.3.27. Apsara. Buddhist stele No. 11. From Cave 133, Maijishan, Gansu. From *Zhongguo shiku: Maijishan*, fig.98.



F.3.28. Section of *The Illustrated Sutra of Cause and Effect*. 26.4 cm x 1036.4 cm. 8th Century, Nara. Tokyo Nation Museum,



Fig.3.29. Life of the Buddha. Mogao Cave 290. Northern Zhou Dynasty. Dunhuang, Gansu.



Fig. 3.30 Buddhist stela No.10. From Cave 133, Maijishan, Gansu. From *Zhongguo shiku: Maijishan*, fig.96.



Fig.3.31. Jataka of the Rabbit King. From Cave 14, Kizil, Xinjiang. From *Zhongguo shiku: Kezi'er*, fig. 53.

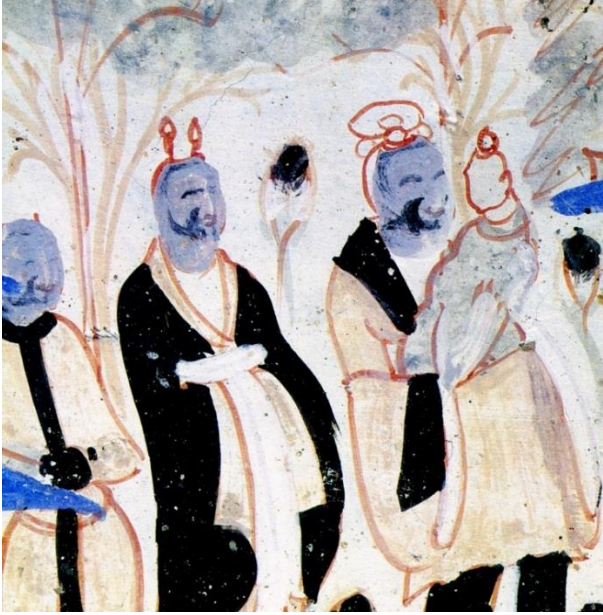


Fig.3.32. Prince Siddhartha and his parents. Mogao Cave 290. Northern Zhou. Dunhuang, Gansu.



Fig.3.33. Prince Siddhartha practicing asceticism. A Buddhist banner from the Dunhuang Cave Library.



3.34. N5 of the Shi Jun sarcophagus. After Yang, *Beizhou Shi Jun mu*, fig.140.



3.35. *Prince Siddhartha Escaping His Home*. Sui Dynasty. From Cave 322. Dunhuang, Gansu. After *Dunhuang shiku quanji: Fozhuan gushi huajuan* fig, fig.73.

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