

Forging bonds

GOLD AND SILVER IN HIGH-STATUS INTERACTION
OF EASTERN EURASIA, 6TH TO 9TH CENTURY

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To grandpa, my guardian angel

Table of Contents

<u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....</u>	<u>VIII</u>
<u>ABBREVIATIONS.....</u>	<u>XI</u>
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>0.1. 'CHINA AND GOLD: A DIFFICULT DIALOGUE'</u>	<u>4</u>
0.1.1. PRESTIGIOUS MATERIALS IN EARLY CHINA.....	6
0.1.1.1. JADE	6
0.1.1.2. BRONZE.....	7
0.1.1.3. FU HAO'S TOMB ASSEMBLAGE: AN EXAMPLE	9
0.1.1.4. LACQUER	10
0.1.2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHANGE	11
<u>0.2. THE INTRODUCTION OF GOLD AND SILVER.....</u>	<u>13</u>
0.2.1. GOLD AND SILVER: A WESTERN TASTE.....	14
0.2.2. THE ROLE OF THE NOMADIC PEOPLE.....	15
0.2.2.1. THE ARC	16
0.2.2.2. GOLD-USING IN THE ARC REGION.....	17
0.2.3. POLITICAL NETWORKING	20
<u>0.3. GOLD AND SILVER IN MEDIEVAL HIGH-STATUS INTERACTION</u>	<u>21</u>
0.3.1. THE EURASIAN ELITE NETWORK	22
0.3.2. SHARED USE OF GOLD AND SILVER	23
0.3.3. AGENTS OF INFLUENCES	25
0.3.3.1. OTHER EURASIAN POWERS	25
0.3.3.2. THE SOGDIANS.....	26

0.3.3.3. THE TANG RULING ELITES	28
<u>0.4. MATERIAL FOR STUDY</u>	<u>30</u>
0.4.1. ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL.....	30
0.4.1.1. CHINESE	30
0.4.1.2. TÜRK	32
0.4.1.3. TIBETAN	34
0.4.2. TEXTUAL MATERIAL	35
0.4.2.1. CHINESE	35
0.4.2.2. TIBETAN	36
0.4.2.3. TURKIC.....	36
<u>CHAPTER 1.....</u>	<u>38</u>
<u>1.1. STYLISTIC ANALYSIS.....</u>	<u>38</u>
1.1.1. DATE.....	39
1.1.2. PROVENANCE.....	42
1.1.3. INTERACTION WITH FOREIGN LANDS	45
1.1.4. DISCUSSION.....	48
<u>1.2. SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF GOLD AND SILVER.....</u>	<u>52</u>
<u>1.3. METHODOLOGY AND THEORIES.....</u>	<u>53</u>
1.3.1. SOCIAL FIELD	54
1.3.2. MATERIAL ENGAGEMENT.....	56
1.3.2.1. GIFT THEORIES	57
<u>CHAPTER 2.....</u>	<u>59</u>
<u>2.1. HISTORY OF THE MAJOR PLAYERS.....</u>	<u>61</u>

2.1.1.	THE CHINESE.....	61
2.1.2.	THE TÜRKES	62
2.1.3.	THE TIBETANS.....	65
2.2.	<u>THE EASTERN EURASIAN ELITE NETWORK.....</u>	67
2.1.1.	A HIERARCHICAL NETWORK.....	67
2.1.1.1.	PATRIMONIAL RELATIONSHIP	68
2.1.1.2.	HORIZONTAL ALLIANCE.....	70
2.1.1.3.	THE ‘MULTI-POLAR’ NETWORK	72
2.3.	<u>COMMUNITY OF INTEREST AND CONFLICTS.....</u>	73
2.1.2.	SUMMARY	77
CHAPTER 3.....	78	
3.1.	<u>CONSTRUCTION THE VALUE OF GOLD.....</u>	81
3.1.1.	THE EMERGENCE OF PRECIOUS MATERIAL AND COMPLEX SOCIETY.....	81
3.1.2.	MATERIALITY AND THE REPRESENTATION OF POWER	88
3.2.	<u>THE MATERIALITY OF GOLD AND THE VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF POWER</u>	89
3.2.1.	BODY ORNAMENTS	91
3.2.2.	WEAPONRY	92
3.2.3.	HORSE ORNAMENTS	95
3.3.	<u>‘THE STONE OF GENTLEMAN’: PRECIOUS MATERIAL IN EARLY CHINA.....</u>	96
3.3.1.	THE MATERIALITY OF JADE	98
3.3.2.	VALUE FROM MASS PRODUCTION	102
3.3.3.	THE IDEOLOGY OF JADE	107

SUMMARY	109
CHAPTER 4.....	111
4.1. THE FIRST PHASE: THE FIRST MILLENNIUM BC	112
4.1.1. CONTEXT	112
4.1.2. APPROPRIATION OF GOLD BY THE CHINESE ELITE	114
4.1.2.1. THE LIANGDAICUN CEMETERY	115
4.1.2.2. THE ROLE OF GOLD AND SILVER IN THE CHINESE ELITE CONTEXT.....	117
4.1.3. GOLD IN POLITICAL NETWORKING	120
SUMMARY.....	128
4.2. THE SECOND PHASE: THE POST-HAN ERA (3RD TO 6TH CENTURY AD).....	129
4.2.1. GOLD AND SILVER OF THE EARLY XIANBEI	129
4.2.2. GOLD AND SILVER OF NORTHERN WEI	134
4.2.2.1. GOLD AND THE BUDDHISM.....	136
4.2.3. GOLD AND SILVER VESSELS.....	139
4.2.3.1. THE SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF GOLD AND SILVER VESSELS.....	140
4.2.3.2. PICTORIAL MODELS OF DRINKING AND FEASTING	144
4.2.3.3. THE APPROPRIATION OF GOLD AND SILVER VESSELS UNDER THE XIANBEI RULE.....	149
SUMMARY	156
CHAPTER 5.....	158
INTRODUCTION	158
5.1. THE SPLENDID COURT: THE SETTING.....	161
5.2. INSIGNIA.....	174
5.3. CEREMONIAL BANQUETS	180

5.3.1. THE SHARED PRACTICE OF CEREMONIAL DRINKING AND BANQUET ACROSS EURASIA .	181
5.3.1.1. THE TURKS.....	181
5.3.1.2. THE TIBETANS	183
5.3.1.3. THE TANG	186
5.3.2. GOLD AND SILVER VESSELS	188
5.3.2.1. EWER.....	189
5.3.2.2. STEM CUP	190
5.3.2.3. RHYTON	193
5.3.2.4. HANDLED CUP	194
5.3.3. PICTORIAL REPRESENTATION	198
<u>SUMMARY</u>	<u>201</u>
<u>CHAPTER 6.....</u>	<u>203</u>
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	<u>203</u>
<u>6.1. GIFT GIVING</u>	<u>204</u>
6.1.1. TEXTUAL ACCOUNTS OF GIFTS.....	208
6.1.2. MATERIAL REMAINS OF GIFTS	211
<u>6.2. CONTEXT: GIFTS IN DIPLOMACY.....</u>	<u>216</u>
6.2.1. GIFT CEREMONIES IN DIPLOMACY.....	217
6.2.2. THE HIERARCHY OF GIFTS.....	220
6.2.3. THE HIERARCHY OF LETTERS	225
<u>6.3. GOLD AND SILVER AS DIPLOMATIC GIFT.....</u>	<u>227</u>
6.3.1. SILK	230
6.3.2. GOLD AND SILVER	233
6.3.3. CATEGORIES OF GOLD AND SILVER GIFTS	236

6.3.3.1. STATE GIFTS	236
6.3.3.2. PERSONAL GIFTS	238
6.3.4. GOLD AND SILVER VESSELS AS PERSONAL GIFTS.....	240
<u>6.4. COMPETITION THROUGH GIFT-GIVING.....</u>	<u>242</u>
6.4.1. NEGOTIATING HIERARCHY THROUGH DIPLOMATIC LETTERS	243
6.4.2. NEGOTIATING HIERARCHY WITH GIFTS	244
6.4.3. THE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF GIFTS	247
<u>CHAPTER 7.....</u>	<u>250</u>
<u>7.1. THE ROLE OF VISUAL HYBRIDITY.....</u>	<u>251</u>
<u>7.2. SHARED MOTIFS OF EASTERN EURASIAN GOLD AND SILVER.....</u>	<u>259</u>
7.2.1. ANIMALS	260
7.2.2. ORNAMENTAL BORDERS	265
7.2.2.1. VEGETAL SCROLLS.....	265
7.2.2.2. PEARL-ROUNDELS	267
7.2.3. HUMAN FIGURES.....	268
7.2.3.1. HUNTING SCENE.....	268
7.2.3.2. FOREIGNERS--‘THEY MAKE ONE’S ROOM LOOK SO PICTURESQUE...’	269
SUMMARY.....	272
<u>7.3. THE HYBRID EURASIAN ARISTOCRATIC CULTURE</u>	<u>273</u>
7.3.1. THE BYZANTINE-SASANIAN COMMON CULTURE	274
7.3.1.1. THE PALMETTE	274
7.3.1.2. PEARL-ROUNDELS	277
7.3.2. THE INTRODUCTION OF THE EURASIAN COMMON CULTURE.....	279
SUMMARY.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

SUMMARY	282
CONCLUSION	284
BIBLIOGRAPHY	288
FIGURES.....	320

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Jiemin Fang

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Abbreviations

<i>BS:</i>	<i>Bei Shi</i>
<i>HS:</i>	<i>Han Shu</i>
<i>JTS:</i>	<i>Jiu Tang Shu</i>
<i>KG:</i>	<i>Kaogu</i>
<i>KGWW:</i>	<i>Kaogu yu Wenwu</i>
<i>KGXB:</i>	<i>Kaogu Xuebao</i>
<i>MMAB:</i>	<i>The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin</i>
<i>QTW:</i>	<i>Quan Tang Wen</i>
<i>SGZ:</i>	<i>San Guo Zhi</i>
<i>THY:</i>	<i>Tang Hui Yao</i>
<i>TKYL:</i>	<i>Datang Kiyuan Li</i>
<i>TPGJ:</i>	<i>Taiping Guangjing</i>
<i>XTS:</i>	<i>Xin Tang Shu</i>
<i>WJ:</i>	<i>Qujiang Zhang Xiansheng Wenji</i>
<i>WS:</i>	<i>Wei Shu</i>
<i>WW:</i>	<i>Wenwu</i>
<i>ZZTJ:</i>	<i>Zi Zhi Tong Jian</i>

Introduction

The 6th to 9th centuries witnessed heightened use of gold and silver in China. There is a significantly larger number of gold and silver luxury items, elaborately adorned and finely crafted, preserved in the archaeological context of this period. Most of them are small, portable objects, such as utensils, personal ornaments and horse-fittings. This enthusiasm for gold and silver, especially in the elite sphere, came to an end with the decline of the Tang Dynasty (618-906). It was partly inherited by the Khitan, a Turko-Mongol people who ruled a large part of north China; whereas the next Chinese dynasty, the Song, had very different tastes, preferring more traditional prestigious material such as jade, and produced from imperial kilns, namely the famed *ru* 汝窯 and *guan* kilns 官窯, high-fired porcelains that have a jade-like quality.

One of the largest and finest corpus of such finds is a hoard unearthed at Hejiacun Village near Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. The hoard is located within Chang'an, the capital of the Tang Dynasty. In two densely packed ceramic urns, archaeologists found a rich assortment of luxuries made of gold, silver jade, crystal, agate, ruby, amber, coral, sapphire, and glass. Among them over one thousand items are made of gold and silver, including food and drinking vessels,

boxes, jewellery, belt ornaments, ingots and coins (fig. 0.1).¹ The dates of the objects vary, but on stylistic grounds, the latest is no later than the second half of the eighth century. The context of the hoard is unknown, but some of the silver ingots bear inscriptions that show connection with the Imperial Treasury;² also, the hoard yielded several gold and silver coins that were supposedly only circulated in the court.³ In all likelihood, the Hejiacun Hoard was associated with the highest-ranking elites of the Tang dynasty.

A similar range of luxury goods was found in the crypt of the pagoda in Famen Monastery in Xi'an.⁴ Objects of gold and silver, Syrian glass, high-fired porcelain, and polychrome silk textiles were deposited along with the Buddhist relics in 874 AD. Gold and silver objects in the assemblage include Buddhist

¹ Objects from the Hejiacun Hoard are well published. See Wenwu (1972:1), 30-32; Qi and Shen 2003, Hansen 2003, Li and Hansen 2003, Qi 1999a, 10f., Watt 2004, cat. nos. 210-14. For the ceramic and silver jars that once contain the objects, see Qi and Shen 2003, cat. nos. 73, 74. However, crucial information about the hoard's archaeological context, such as how items were arranged and packed, was lost. In a recent study, Shen Ruiwen has reconstructed the context according to excavators' memory. Shen 2015.

² For example, four silver cakes are marked as 'tax silver' (*yong diao yin* 庸調銀), and 56 silver ingots are marked with the character *chao* 朝, indicating their location in the Imperial Treasury. See Qi and Shen 2003, cat. nos. 47, 48, Qi 1999a, 273f.

³ Qi and Shen 2003, cat. no. 58.

⁴ Shaanxi 2007.

ritual instruments, Buddhist statues, food and drinking vessels, incense burners, a tea ceremony set, and jewellery. Moreover, the reliquaries—the centre of the collection—are made of gold and silver. A part of the relics were enshrined in eight layers of caskets made of silver, gilt silver, gold, or marble inlaid with pearls and coloured gemstones;⁵ the rest of the relics were placed on a tray held by a tiny gilt silver sculpture of Bodhisattva adorned with pearls. Unlike the Hejiacun Hoard, the Famensi collection is well documented in an inscription found on the same spot.⁶ According to the inscription, the Tang imperial family, among them

⁵ The reliquary is described in great detail in the inventory that accompanied the collection: ‘A set of precious caskets with eight layers, together held in a red silk bag. The first layer – a small real gold pagoda consisted of three parts including the base, with a small silver column in side; the second layer—a stone casket framed with gold and decorated with precious stones and pearls; the third layer—a gold casket framed with gold and decorated with precious stones and pearls; the fourth layer—a decorated gold casket. All above amount gold 47 *liang* 2 *fen*, silver 10 *fen* and half. The fifth layer – a gilt silver casket weighing 40 *liang* 2 *fen*; the sixth layer – a plain silver casket weighing 47 *liang* 3 *qian*; the seventh layer – a gilt silver casket weighing 65 *liang* 2 *fen*; the eighth layer – a sandalwood casket framed with gold in addition to 7 silver and gilt silver padlocks and keys with chains. All above amount silver 16 *liang* 4 *qian*.’ Shaanxi 2007, vol.1, 227-30; vol.2, colour pls. 202-3. *Liang*, *qian*, and *fen* are weight units. A *liang* approximates 40 grams, 10 *qian* equal 1 *liang*, and 10 *fen* equals 1 *qian*.

⁶ The inventory gives detailed description of each article as well as the name, title, and position of its donor. A number of gold and silver items from the Famensi deposition also bear inscriptions that not only give names of the craftsman but also the names and ranks of their supervisors. For a discussion of the gold and silver from Famensi, see Lu, 1988; for discussion of the organization of the imperial workshop, see *ibid*, Qi, 1999: 278-83; for full excavation report, see Shaanxi, 2007.

two emperors, Yizong (r. 859–873) and Xizong (r.873–888), and their close retinues not only commissioned and donated the body of the offerings, but were involved in the rites of deposition (fig. 0.2-3).

0.1. ‘China and gold: a difficult dialogue’⁷

The Hejiacun and Famensi collections are striking not only because of their sheer size, but because, more importantly, gold and silver played a central part in the assemblage, indicating their supreme position in the Chinese material hierarchy as never before. Also, as both collections were associated with the Tang ruling class, they suggest a new taste in the elite sphere. In both collections, gold and silver predominate; other materials include glass, rock crystal, coloured gemstones, and polychrome silk textiles. Together they create a visual effect that is glittering and colourful with an iridescent quality. Such a taste does not exist in earlier Chinese tradition. The Chinese were aware of the precious metals: fragments of gold, worked into thin foils, were found at the late Shang site in Anyang (1500—1200 BC, fig. 0.11).⁸ Gold and silver inlays were popular adornment for bronze vessels, belt hooks and weapons in the last few centuries of the first millennium BC; the jade suits of the Han princes were sewn together

⁷ Title quoted from a lecture by Jessica Rawson.

⁸ For excavation reports of the Yinxu site, see Li 1929-33.

with gold threads; and the Shizishan and Dayunshan tombs were furnished with gold belt plaques in the steppe fashion and silverware imported from as far as Iran.⁹ As we shall see in chapter 4, the ancient Chinese did find gold attractive and valuable and exploited the material to some extent.¹⁰ But gold and silver did not rise to the top level of material hierarchy until the period under discussion. Neither had precious metals become full-fledged currency until the sixteenth century, when Mexican silver flowed into China through trade with the Europeans.

It is curious that gold and silver never assumed the social and symbolic significance as they had in Western Eurasia. A possible explanation this thesis proposes is that China had a long-established material hierarchy, jade, bronze, silk, and lacquer being on the top level. As I am going to show, the production

⁹ See chapter 4.

¹⁰ This, however, may have been the result of poor preservation of precious metals in early tombs. The belief of that the Han imperial tombs were systematically looted by post-Han warlords is widespread in contemporary sources. For example, the famous warlord Cao Cao (155-220 AD) is blamed for leading his armies into the tomb of the Han Prince of Liang in Henan, where he seized a treasure of ‘several thousand catty of gold’. See, for example, *Tao Cao Xi Wen* 討曹檄文 (A Denunciation Against Cao) by Chen Ling (?—217 AD). Although the credibility of these accounts is highly doubtful, but it seems uncommon at the time for armies to be involved tomb robbery. Also, recent discoveries of staggering amounts of gold in some of the Han princely tombs raise the possibility that precious metals may have been more used than we had assumed. See notes 40 and 41.

and use of prestigious goods are so deeply embedded in every aspect of the society that, unless there is drastic social or political change, it is hard for a new material to penetrate in.

0.1.1. Prestigious materials in early China

0.1.1.1. Jade

The prestige of jade goes back to the Neolithic period. In the Neolithic Hongshan Culture (4700-2900 BC) in northeast China, stretching from Inner Mongolia to Liaoning, and then to the Liangzhu Culture in the Lower Yangtze region, jade played a central role in ritual practices. In Liangzhu Culture, some of the forms of jade became standardised: jade discs (*bi* 璧), half discs (*huang* 璜), and vertical blocks (*cong* 琮) are regular components found in elite tombs in close proximity to the dead (fig. 1-6).¹¹ Also, the standard motif of a face with feathered headdress found on many *cong* jade blocks (fig. 0.6) suggests the objects' cultic role.

The prestige of jade in comparison to other materials is indicated by their close proximity to the body in tombs. The ancient Chinese seem to have believed that jade had a special power: this durable stone could protect the body from

¹¹ Such objects are known as 'ritual objects' (*li qi* 禮器) in Chinese literature. But it is important to note that the designation of name categories (*bi*, *huang*, *cong*) and 'ritual' functions of this group is based on Confucius classics compiled in the fifth century BC, much later than Shang.

decay after death and thus ensure the possibility of a life after death. The magic encasement par excellence is the jade suit of the Western Han (206 BC—9 AD). According to the Han sumptuary law, jade burial suits were reserved exclusively for the Emperor and princes, whereas officials of lower levels could only have suits made of ordinary stones.¹² The finest example is a jade suit unearthed from a Western Han princely tomb at Shizi Mountain, Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province, which is made up of over 4000 pieces of oblong plates of jade sewn together with gold threads (fig. 0.10).

0.1.1.2. Bronze

In the western context, copper and bronze are ‘base’ metals, as opposed to ‘precious’ metals, such as gold and silver. But in China, bronze seemed precious more for its social role than for its rarity in nature. Bronze was introduced to China much later than Western Asia and the Eurasian Steppes.¹³ Bronze metallurgy was introduced to China in the second millennium BC. The Shang

¹² This jade suit was exhibited at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Lin 2012. It was a standard practice among the Han elites to bury the dead with small jade articles: a jade cicada on the tongue, jade blocks in hand, and small jade pieces plugged into the orifices of the body. For a comprehensive discussion on the Han burial jade, see James Lin’s Ph.D. thesis. Lin 2002.

¹³ The earliest remains of copper and bronze objects in what is now China were found in the northwest borderland, including Gansu, Qinghai and eastern Xinjiang, some of the sites dated to the fourth to the third millennium BC. Notable early metal-using communities are found in Qijia/Siba sites in Gansu. See Linduff 1997, Linduff, Han, and Sun 2000, 1-28, Mei 2000.

(1600—1046 BC) and the Zhou (1046—256 BC) cast magnificent ritual vessels in bronze (fig. 0.12). The elaborate bronze vessels used in these ritual performances—typically inherited, bequeathed, or commissioned for special occasions—stood for the lineage, prestige and wealth of the family.¹⁴ These vessels played a central part in the rites of the ancestral cult, a key political apparatus of the Shang and Zhou regimes in the Central Plains.¹⁵ The rites involved cooking and offering food and drinks to the ancestors, who would, in return, protect the family and look after its fortune and prosperity. Bronze ritual vessels were also buried in tombs so that the dead could continue to conduct

¹⁴ Jessica Rawson argues that from the late Western Zhou, the number and type of bronze ritual vessels in a set appear to have been standardised in accord with the user's rank. So the size of the vessel *set* deposited in the burial seems directly related to the status of the deceased. She terms the change 'ritual reform', which is indicative of major social and political changes. Rawson 1985-87.

¹⁵ The importance of bronze ritual vessels is evident from their prominent role in Shang and Zhou elite tombs; and the number and quality of the vessels to a great extent reflect the tomb occupant's status, as we shall soon see in the example of Fu Hao's tomb. Bronze is also frequently mentioned in transmitted texts. *Zuo Zhuan* (左傳 *Zuo Tradition*, or *Commentary of Zuo*), China's oldest narrative history claims, '(there are) two significant state affairs—the sacrifice and the warfare'—both are closely related to the bronze industry. We must note, though, *Zuo Zhuan* was composed in the late fourth century BC and covers events happening between 722 to 468 BC, which were significantly later than Fu Hao's tomb. For versions of translation of *Zuo Zhuan*, see Cheng 1993.

ancestral ritual, or share banquets with the ancestors, in their afterlives. The vessels might have also been used for offerings and display at the funeral.

0.1.1.3. Fu Hao's tomb assemblage: an example

The prestige of jade and bronze is best exemplified by the undisturbed tomb of Fu Hao. Fu Hao was a consort of the Shang king Wu Ding; according to bronze inscriptions, she was also a military leader and had conducted ancestral rites in her own right. Her tomb assemblage, therefore, illustrates the highest-ranking materials about 1200 BC, and they illustrate the various uses of these material in a high-status context.¹⁶

Bronze and jade dominated the assemblage. A set of 196 bronze ritual vessels, weighing about 1600 kilogrammes, were found in her outer coffin.¹⁷ Wine vessels, such as *jue* 爵 and *gu* 觚, predominated; next in number are cooking vessels, such as *ding* 鼎, and *you* 鬲; food containers, such as food basins, *gui* 簋, have the least presence. The assemblage also included a staggering number of 755 jade objects. 'Ritual' jades, such as *cong*, *gui* tablets, *bi*, and *huang*, were placed within Fu Hao's inner coffin (fig. 0.7). Jade weapons, such as, axes, adzes, spears, and *ge* dagger, were found in the tomb chamber (fig. 0.8). As most of the

¹⁶ Zhongguo 1980. For the inscriptions, see Cao 1993.

¹⁷ Zhongguo 1980, 15ff.

jade weapons do not have traces of use, the excavators assign them a ‘ceremonial’ role. The last category is the two- or three-dimensional figurine, featuring a wide range of animals, fantastical beings and human figures. Some of these figurines could have been body ornaments, as they have small holes, with which they can be attached to belts or other background materials, or amulets (fig. 0.9).

0.1.1.4. Lacquer

From the first millennium BC, with the decline of centralised bronze production, lacquer assumed growing importance as a prestigious material. Lacquer is a natural varnish that can be coloured with cinnabar, lampblack, and other pigments. It is used to decorate and conserve articles with wooden or textile body.¹⁸ The Warring States aristocrats often had lacquer coffins embellished with ‘rich combinations of pictorial and decorative images’.¹⁹ Lacquer, with its light weight and non-corrosive surface, was also a highly prized material for utensils. The growing importance of lacquer is evident in the tomb of Marquis Yi of the Zeng State 曾侯乙, dated fifth century BC. Marquis Yi was buried in double coffins with elaborate lacquer decoration. His tomb was furnished with 220 lacquerwares, including furniture, utensils, musical instruments, and containers

¹⁸ See Shaughnessy and Loewe 1999, 178, note 82 for the early usage of lacquer in China.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 741.

(fig. 0.13).²⁰ Also, from this period, lacquer appears to have been gradually taking the place of bronze in ancestral rituals. Wu Hung argues that an area in the north chamber of Mawangdui Tomb 1 (*ca.* 193 BC) was designated as a ‘sacrificial area’, with an empty seat and a set of lacquer utensils (fig. 0.14) intended for offering to the ancestors or the tomb owner.²¹ A similar scene is reproduced on the silk banner excavated from the same tomb (fig. 0.15), depicting the tomb owner offering food and drink to the ancestors with a set of lacquerware in her afterlife.

0.1.2. Significance of the change

The choice of prestigious material concerns not only the material itself, but also a complex social enterprise, including the availability of raw material, technology, production processes, and the power structure and belief system. Taking the bronze industry as an example, the procuring of metal alone would require exchanges with remote mountainous areas—through commerce or wielding of power of some form—and complex logistics to transport the smelted

²⁰ Hubeisheng and Zhongguo 1989.

²¹ Wu 2010, 64ff. See Hunansheng and Zhongguo 1973. Wu Hung also suggests that the cult of ancestors continued in the Han period, but its social role in society seems to have changed. The rites appeared to become smaller and more private in nature, with lacquerware instead of heavy bronze vessels. Also, the centre of ancestral worship shifted from lineage temples to tombs of individuals. Wu 2010, 31ff.

ores in massive quantity to the core areas of the regime, where ritual vessels were cast.²² What is more, the sophisticated piece-mould technique for the casting elaborate bronze vessels is based on minute labour division:²³ craftsmen were divided into bands, each responsible of preparing ceramic models and moulds, decorating them, casting, and final polishing—the process was so complicated that it still puzzles archaeologists.²⁴ According to the theory of Costin and Peregrine,²⁵ craft specialisation, especially for the production of prestigious goods, often correlates with greater political centralisation; meanwhile, such a

²² Lead isotope analyses show that metal used in Anyang might have come from south China, perhaps the west of Sichuan Basin. Jin 1999. Archaeologists have also found large ancient mining and smelting sites along the Yangtze River, including present-day Anhui (Huangshishi 1999) and Hubei provinces (Qiu and Ke 2014).

²³ Authors of transmitted texts believe that craftsmen with the same expertise lived together and inherited their skills and occupations from their fathers. See Yuan 2009. For discussion on the labour division in ancient China based on material evidence, see Ledderose 2000 and Jessica Rawson's Slade Lectures in Cambridge University, 2013-2014.

²⁴ The piece-mould technique, based on the long-established, sophisticated ceramic tradition, is unique to and the greatest achievement of the Chinese bronze metallurgy. The model is the clay version of the final product. The mould, also made of clay, is taken off the model and then cut in sections (thus the so-called 'piece-mould') to release the model. After firing, all mould pieces were reassembled for casting. A clay 'core' was placed inside the mould and was separated from the mould by spacers. Then melt bronze was poured into the space between the core and the mould. This is the basic idea, but how exactly the intricate patterns on the bronze vessels were executed on the mould is still a subject of debated. See Nickel 2006, Bagley 2009.

²⁵ Costin 1991, Peregrine 1991, Costin 2001.

multifaceted manufacture system would in return facilitate the construction of a complex socio-political hierarchy.²⁶ It is, therefore, not unreasonable of many scholars to believe that the bronze manufacture was monopolised by the central government, while the ancestral rites were the ultimate visual expression of the enormous social power that made the production of magnificent bronze ritual vessels possible.

Therefore, the emergence of new prestigious materials implies significant social and political changes—new forms of social control, distribution of resources, manifestation of power, and identity. It, first of all, points to access to these new materials and the art of gold- and silversmithing. It may also be related to the emergence of new identities, that is, how the elites chose to present themselves—bodily, with gold and silver ornaments, or with new practices, such as drinking with gold and silver vessels.

0.2. The introduction of gold and silver

Because the appropriation of gold and silver, as well as the prestige associated with it, was innate to the western and steppe societies, it can be inferred that interactions with these areas was central to the power and identity of elites, who ruled China in the period under discussion.

²⁶ Liu 2003.

0.2.1. Gold and silver: a western taste

The taste for glittering, colourful material seems more in keeping with western cultures. The positive value judgement associated with bright colours and polychrome, was long established in the ancient Near East.²⁷ Such a taste already took shape in the city of Ur III (2600 BC). Gold and silver were appreciated for their beauty and therefore widely used as ornaments. They were also recognised as a symbol of excellence very early on. Gold and silver were found exclusively in elite contexts, such as royal treasuries, temples and elite burials, where gold and silver were used for personal ornaments, weapons, cylinder seals, food and drinking vessels, and religious sculpture.²⁸ Colourful gemstones, such as lapis lazuli and carnelian, travelling a long way from Afghanistan and Indus Valley, respectively, were also greatly valued.

Such a combination is illustrated by an elaborate headdress from the tomb of Queen Puabi (PG 800) at the royal cemetery of Ur. It consists of gold bands,

²⁷ Winter 1995b, a. **page number needed**

²⁸ Most of the gold and silver objects came from the royal cemetery, most notably PG 580 and PG 800. PG/800 of a female is assigned to Queen Puabi because the name and title are known from the cuneiform inscription on three cylinder seals found on the female body, although there is dispute on how to interpret her title *eresh*, which can also mean ‘priestess’. For the excavation report of PG/800, see Woolley 1934. For finds from the Royal Cemetery of Ur, see Zettler and Horne 1998. For an online database of the Ur excavations and finds, see <http://www.ur-online.org>.

gold leaves and rosettes set with lapis lazuli (fig. 0.4). The upper body of Queen Puabi ‘was covered with beads of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, carnelian, and agates—the remain of a beaded cape; a broad belt of gold, carnelian, and lapis lazuli tubular beads, from which were suspended gold rings, lay at her waist.’²⁹

The prestige of gold is also attested by the fact the body of the deceased was signified with gold. Instead of jade, the ‘magical encasement’ in the west was made of gold. For example, Tutankhamun's (1341–1323 BC) inner coffin is made of solid gold, and his mummy is covered with a fabulous death mask consisting of two layers of gold (fig. 0.5). The mask is further embellished with inlays of coloured glass and gemstones for facial features: eye contours and eyebrows of lapis lazuli, eyes of quartz, the pupils of obsidian, and a broad collar made from fine pieces of carnelian, feldspar, turquoise, amazonite, faience and other stones.³⁰ Here, gold is the material chosen by the ancient Egyptians to represent the Pharaoh’s effigy in his eternal afterlife.

0.2.2. The role of the nomadic people

It is, therefore, not surprising to see that, throughout Chinese history, heightened interest in gold and silver had always had to do with heightened

²⁹ Zettler and Horne 1998, 35.

³⁰ Edwards 1976.

interaction with the West. But more exactly, it is through the steppe and the border regions between the steppe and the sown that the Chinese came into close contact with the practices of using these materials. These border regions played a particularly crucial role in the introduction of not only gold and silver, but also other new technologies, such as bronze and iron metallurgy, chariot, horse riding. In fact, it had mediated China's interaction with the rest of Eurasia in general.

0.2.2.1. The Arc

In this thesis, I will, following Tong Enzheng and Jessica Rawson, refer to this important region as 'the Arc'.³¹ Tong describes the Arc as 'a crescent-shaped region' between the Central Plains and the Eurasian steppe, running horizontally from present-day northeast China, through the Ordos region, to the Hexi Corridor; meeting geographical barriers, it turns south, traversing the eastern slope of Tibetan Plateau in Sichuan and Yunnan. The Arc area consists of ecologically diverse zones, including desert, semi-desert, grassland, and some northern forests. The ecological diversity allows the Arc to support a variety of subsistence strategies, but mainly animal-husbandry with limited agriculture. The diversity also gave rise to people of varied identities, subsistence strategies, and social practices. But in general, these people share more with the steppe people in terms

³¹ Tong 1987, Hein 2014, Rawson 2016.

of lifestyle (i.e., animal husbandry with limited agriculture), certain pottery and bronze types, weaponry, and burial practices.

Jonathan Skaff argues that people from what he called the ‘frontier’ or ‘borderland’, which is essentially a part of the Arc, tended to have a fluid identity: surrounded by a multi-cultural environment, they are often multi-lingual and have multiple cultural identities; their political affiliations are based more on pragmatic interests than on ethnical or cultural identity; when circumstances require, they can freely shift between these identities.³² Throughout history, the Arc peoples played an intermediary role between the steppe and sown, including the introduction of gold and silver.

In this thesis, the term ‘the Arc’, frontier, and borderland are largely interchangeable, with the ‘Arc’ emphasising a closely defined geographical region, and frontier and borderland being more general terms for areas where people from different cultures met and intermixed.

0.2.2.2. Gold-using in the Arc region

As we shall see in chapter 3, the nomadic peoples of the Eurasian Steppes were also a part of the gold- and silver-using culture of Western Eurasia. So was the Arc. In the past decades, a growing body of gold and silver in the Arc region

³² Skaff 2004.

have been brought to light, illuminating the introduction of gold and silver in early China. There was a growing presence of rich steppe burials in the Arc during the first millennium BC, particularly the northeast, the Ordos and the Hexi Corridor.³³ Many of these tombs, exemplified by the Majiayuan Cemetery in Gansu³⁴ and Aluchaideng in the Ordos³⁵, yielded numerous gold objects. Apart from steppe knives, daggers, and ‘animal style’ plaques, these burials often contained gold and silver ornaments, especially belt plaques, and weapons adorned with gold and silver. Some scholars, such as Di Cosmo and Honeychurch, believe that the emergence of rich steppe-style tombs was the result of major changes within the steppe societies: increased mobile pastoralism, the advent of mounted warfare and iron metallurgy, as well as the formation of the first nomadic states, such as the Xiongnu.³⁶

The first millennium also witnessed a growing interest in precious metals among the Chinese elites, especially in regions bordering the Arc, such as the Qin, Zhongshan and Rui States, during the Warring States period. Elite burials of these

³³ See Bunker 1993, Rawson 2017, Di Cosmo 2002 84ff. for a review of burials of the pastoral peoples living in the steppe and areas bordering China.

³⁴ For excavation reports of the Majiayuan cemetery, see *WW* (2008:9), 4-28; (2009:10), 25-51; (2010:10), 4-26; (2012:8), 4-26; Gansu sheng 2014. See also note 214.

³⁵ For the excavation report of Aluchaideng in Inner Mongolia, see *KG* (1980.4), 333-68.

³⁶ Di Cosmo 2002 74ff., Honeychurch 2015, 109ff. See also page - 117 -

areas sometimes exhibit a fascinating combination of Chinese and steppe materials, with gold standing for the latter. For example, M26 of the Liangdaicun Cemetery in Shaanxi Province (Late Western Zhou),³⁷ the tomb of the Lord of Rui State contained standard metropolitan bronze vessels and a large number of gold objects of the steppe-style, including body ornaments, copies of hammered armour in small gold plaques and a jade dagger with gold sheath.³⁸ Imperial China (Qian and Han dynasties, 221BC—220 AD) used even more precious metals. To acquire horses to fight the Xiongnu, Emperor Wudi ordered expeditions, led by General Zhang Qian to as far as Ferghana in Central Asia. To fund the mission, Zhang Qian took with him ‘gold and silk to the value of several tens of thousand’.³⁹ The growing importance of gold during Imperial China is also evidenced by the tomb of the Han prince Liu He (*ca.* 59 BC) in Jiangxi Province, which yielded a staggering amount of gold artefacts and bullion, weighing in total 78 kilogrammes (fig. 0.17)⁴⁰, as well as the large number of steppe-style, animal

³⁷ For excavation reports of the Liangdaicun cemetery, see *KGWW* (2007:2), 3-14; (2007:6), 3-22; (2010:1), 14-21; *WW* (2008:1), 4-21; (2010:6), 4-20; *KG* (2009:4), 3-15. Important finds from the Liangdaicun cemetery are published in the exhibition catalogue at the Shanghai Museum. Shaanxisheng and Shanghai . The majority of the gold objects were found in M26.

³⁸ See page - 120 -

³⁹ See Peng 1994, 134, note 6.

⁴⁰ Jiangxi and Capital Musuem 2016.

plaques found in the tombs of Han princes in Dayunshan (fig. 0.16) and Shizishan, both near Nanjing, Jiangsu Province.⁴¹

0.2.3. Political networking

Without a doubt, interactions with people from the Arc and the steppes familiarised the Chinese with precious metals. However, I am more inclined to call it ‘interaction under pressure’. With mutual expansion, both the nomadic empires and imperial China pressed against each other and were forced into encounters with different cultures. These encounters were not always peaceful; sometimes they were antagonistic or even violent, thus the building of the Great Wall. Yet they could also be constructive and fruitful, with the movement of people, ideas, technologies, and different ways of doing things—not surprisingly, this is the period when iron metallurgy and horseback riding were introduced into China—and with trade, military collaborations, marriage alliances, and various forms of political networking.⁴²

In short, I argue that major changes, such as that of the taste in prestigious materials, was only possible when interactions with culture of others become a

⁴¹ One of them is the tomb of the Prince Chu (*ca.* 127 BC) at Shizishan Mountain, Xuzhou; the other is the tomb of the Prince of Jiangdu (*ca.* 154 BC) at Dayunshan Mountain. See Lin 2012, Ge 2011, Nanjing Museum 2013.

⁴² See page - 126 -.

significant part of one's own existence, an absolute necessity. It usually happens when a polity reaches a certain size, such as the Qin-Han empire and the Sui-Tang empire, as it is relatively easier for small communities to remain self-sufficient. For the Qin and the Han, for instance, the Xiongnu had posed a threat throughout their history and required constant attention. The continuous antagonistic engagement with cultural others, especially the Xiongnu, must have also made them acutely conscious of different material cultures, which 'they clearly recognised, appreciated and may have coveted'⁴³ This must have included gold and silver, the materials which the Han's powerful enemies valued as the symbol of prestige and wealth, and which they had to produce and present as gifts in high-status networking.⁴⁴

0.3. Gold and silver in medieval high-status interaction

Given the fact that gold and silver assumed an ever-so-conspicuous position in high-status material culture during the early Middle Ages, we cannot help but wonder which roles Western Eurasia and the steppes had played—why at this particular point of time, in these particular forms, and how the change took place.

⁴³ Rawson 2017.

⁴⁴ For the Chinese manufacturing gold objects for nomadic clients, see p. - 129 -.

0.3.1. The Eurasian elite network

I argue that the Chinese enthusiasm for gold and silver is indicative, and the result of, an elite network closely connected with other major Eastern Eurasian powers, especially the Türks and the Tibetans, and the numerous city-states of Central Asia. Like the Han, the Sui-Tang empire's relationship with these powerful neighbours was characterised by frequent wars and raiding alternated with exchanges of embassies and hostages, investitures, inter-dynastic marriages, military alliances and trade. With the ever-growing size and power of these great empires, these exchanges became grander in scale, with the participants becoming ever more interdependent. On the one hand, these exchanges over four centuries allowed elites from varied geo-cultural backgrounds to become familiarised with each other's material culture and social practices; on the other hand, the interaction made a common aristocratic culture necessary, with which the elites could address, compliment, challenge and insult their counterparts in a language that had meaning for both. At the same time, this intimacy with each other's culture inevitably gave rise to similar tastes, which became shared marks of distinction.

I argue that the use of gold and silver was a part of this shared aristocratic culture. As I have argued earlier, it is not a part of the early Chinese tradition but had more to do with Western Eurasia and the steppes. But in order to be a part of the Eurasian elite network, in which gold and silver, rather than jade or bronze,

were the universally recognised symbol of excellence, the Tang were motivated to appropriate gold and silver in a fashion similar to the rest of their Eurasian counterparts. I am deeply indebted to Matthew Canepa, whose work on the Roman-Sasanian aristocratic culture inspires me to reflect on the motivation for an elite to think of themselves globally and integrate ‘another structured system of symbolic capital’. As Canepa argues, ‘at the highest level of exchange, the cultural material that moved between courts was itself potentially significant and carried a message or meaning that persistently challenged the recipients, tempting them to integrate it or demanding that they defuse and counter it.’

0.3.2. Shared use of gold and silver

A corpus of visually similar gold and silver objects were widely distributed across the geo-culturally diverse regions of Eastern Eurasia. One example of the shared type of gold and silver objects is the handled cup: it has a cylindrical body with a small loop-handle and a flat thumb-piece on top of the handle. There are also many examples of such cups of alleged Tibetan provenance.⁴⁵ A parcel-gilt cup, now in the Metropolitan Museum, shares these basic features, though its body is larger and squatter than most Tang handled cups, and it is cast rather than hammered out of a silver sheet like most Tang silver. Another gold cup of

⁴⁵ For a review of handled cups of presumable Tibetan provenance in public and private collections, see Heller 2003b.

presumable Türk provenance, excavated from the burial mounds at Kopeni chataas, Khakassia, Russia, also shares the basic feature, but its body has a bulging belly and a thick neck. This shape is typical of vessels made by the nomadic cultures of Eurasian steppes from at least the fourth century BC. But during the period under discussion, it was also widely reproduced in other areas of Eastern Eurasia.⁴⁶

The thumb-piece of these cups is often adorned with an animal or grotesque anthropoid figures, and their rim and foot are often bordered with a string of beads. All three cups are covered with intertwined vegetal scrolls, consisting of palmette and half-palmette leaves and floral motifs grown out of wavy, undulating scrolls.⁴⁷ Although there is considerable variation in details and execution, this is a type of popular motif across Eastern Eurasia, found not only on gold and silver objects but also other prestigious materials, such as silk textiles, state-funded Buddhist architecture, and stone epitaph covers of the elites.⁴⁸

This is why the geographic range of this thesis is Eastern Eurasia, not China. Gold and silver of the period demand to be studied in a wider, interconnected context, because elites from culturally and ethnically diverse regions of Eastern

⁴⁶ For more discussion on the steppe-style, bag-shaped handled cups, see p. 205.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of the vegetal scrolls, see p. - 277 -.

⁴⁸ Rawson 1984a.

Eurasia not only shared the use of gold and silver objects in high-status interaction, they also appear to have shared a repertoire of ornaments and forms for the gold and silver objects.

0.3.3. Agents of influences

0.3.3.1. Other Eurasian powers

I will argue in later chapters that the display, use, and exchange of gold and silver were a part of the Roman-Sasanian common aristocratic culture. So are many visual elements of these gold and silver objects.⁴⁹ Through the power and influence of the Romans and the Persians (and later the Arabs), their shared aristocratic culture became, from the sixth century, the shared Eurasian aristocratic culture. Compared with the Tang, the Türks and the Tibetans were in closer and more direct contact with these western powers. For example, the Western Türks had frequent exchanges of embassy with the Byzantines,⁵⁰ and they tried to engage in trade with Sasanian court;⁵¹ later, they found their way into the Arab annals as a major threat.⁵² The Tibetans, on the other hand, had been

⁴⁹ See chapters 5, 6, 7.

⁵⁰ Blockley 1985, 16, 115ff. See p. 171, - 228 -.

⁵¹ Gabain 1983.

⁵² Beckwith 1987, 55ff.

close allies with the Arabs against the Türks throughout their mutual history.⁵³ I argue that it was through these people that the shared aristocratic culture of Eastern Eurasia became more or less an off-shoot of the Roman-Sasanian common culture, which was, at the same time, infused with local innovations.

0.3.3.2. The Sogdians

The Sogdians were an Iranian-speaking people originally from the fertile valley between the Oxus (Amu Darya) and Jaxartes (Syr Darya) in Central Asia. Sogdiana was located at the key junction of ancient trading routes between the East and the West. Towards the sixth century, the Sogdian played an increasingly significant role in the Silk Road trade. Their massive commercial network extends to the Roman Empire, Iran, the Eurasian Steppes, and China. The presence of thriving Sogdian communities from at least the fourth century is well attested by transmitted texts and material culture.⁵⁴ Besides, the Sogdians also served as political agents, diplomats, and civil officials at the courts of great empires in Eastern Eurasia. For example, the Western Türk delegation to the court

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ For a general history of the Sogdians, see De la Vaissière and Ward 2005. For the ‘Sogdian Ancient Letters’ found by Sir Aurel Stein in a Chinese tower near Dunhuang, which attest the presence of Sogdian merchants in China in the fourth century (*c.a.*313), see Grenet and Sims-Williams 1987, Sim-Williams 1996, 2001, 2005. For material culture, especially their unique funerary couches and sarcophagi, see Linduff and Wu 2006, Rong 2001 and discussion in later chapters.

of Justinian in 568 was led by a Sogdian called Zemarchus, and the dominant roles played by the Sogdians in the political life of the Türk Empire were noticed by many contemporary writers from various cultural backgrounds.⁵⁵ In China, the Sogdian presence in the military was prominent, at least until the ninth century. General An Lushan, who led the famous 755 rebellion that almost overthrew the Tang Dynasty, was of mixed Turko-Sogdian descent. The role of the Sogdians in the Tibetan court is less recorded in textual sources, yet the substantial number of Sogdian textiles and metalwork excavated in Tibetan burials from this period in recent years demand further study on the influence of the Sogdians in the Tibetan court.⁵⁶

As traders and diplomats, the Sogdians were multi-lingual as much as multi-cultural. Moving between the courts of the Byzantines, the Persians, the Türks, and Tibetans, as well as the Chinese, they would have been familiar with these different court rituals, etiquettes and material cultures and conducted themselves in the manner that could be understood by all. Bringing the intimate knowledge and experience from one court to another, they must have served as agents in creating a common aristocratic culture. Also, the Sogdians are known to be excellent silversmiths. Their silverwork was inspired by the Roman-

⁵⁵ De la Vaissière and Ward 2005, 200-202.

⁵⁶ Compareti 2009, 2003, Xu 1994, Heller 2003a.

Sasanian royal silver but has its own distinct characteristics.⁵⁷ In the case of gold and silver, as I will discuss later in greater detail, Sogdian metalwork and Sogdian craftsman had a direct and immediate influence on the luxury gold and silver of Eastern Eurasia.⁵⁸

0.3.3.3. The Tang ruling elites

Finally, I would like to mention the ethnic and cultural background of the Tang ruling elite as a factor in their enthusiasm in participating the Eastern Eurasian network, including the use of gold and silver. Interaction with the steppe was highly valued by the Tang, because the Li, the ruling clan of the Tang Dynasty, was not purely Han Chinese. Rather, they were of mixed Xianbei-Chinese descent, originally from the borderland area where interaction with the steppe and Central Asia was a norm. To understand the background of the Li clan, we must look back four hundred years prior to the Sui-Tang Empire. Upon the decline of the Han Dynasty in the beginning of the third century, groups of peoples from the steppes and the Arc moved into north China. Among them, the most notable were the Xiongnu, Jie, Di, Qiang and Xianbei. These outsiders directly led to the downfall of the Western Jin Dynasty (265-316 AD). For the subsequent four hundred years, China was divided into competitive southern and

⁵⁷ Marshak 1971, Marshak 1999, Marshak 1986.

⁵⁸ Marshak 2004, Xu 1994. See also p.202.

northern parts: in the north, these outsiders established a series of regimes in north China, whilst the south was ruled by Han Chinese. The most important among these outsiders were the Xianbei, a semi-nomadic people originally from the northeast. They established the Northern Wei (386—534 AD), a successful dynasty that integrated Chinese and steppe elements. Though the Northern Wei dissolved in the first half of the sixth century, the Xianbei aristocrats continued to rule north China.

Ethnically, the founders of both Sui and Tang dynasties, Yang Jian 楊堅 (541—604 AD) and Li Yuan 李淵(566—635 AD), were both of mixed Han-Xianbei descent, and they both intermarried with Xianbei aristocrats.⁵⁹ Culturally, they both came from what were originally the Northern Wei garrison towns in the Hexi Corridor, bordering China and the steppe, where the Chinese, the Xianbei, and other peoples from the steppe and further west intermixed. The Li were typical frontier people. According to Chen Sanping, they spoke a mixed Turk-

⁵⁹ Although the Chinese official histories claimed that Yang Jian's ancestors were Han Chinese, they had served the Xianbei during the Northern Wei and the succeeding Northern Zhou in the frontier regions. Yang Jian married a Xianbei aristocrat himself, and his daughter was married to the Northern Zhou emperor Yuwen Yun (559—580 AD). Li Yuan's ancestor also served at the Northern Zhou court. He himself descended from the Xianbei on the maternal line. He also married a Xianbei. His son, the famous Emperor Taizong, was, therefore, of mixed Xianbei-Chinese descent and later married the Xianbei Empress Dugu.

Xianbei language at home,⁶⁰ but they were equally proficient in classical Chinese; for political expediency, Li Yuan once acknowledged himself as a vassal of the Turks before he established the Tang Dynasty; they were also equally familiar with both steppe and Chinese political apparatus—acting as orthodox Confucian literati at one time, charismatic nomadic leaders at another.

Throughout the Tang Dynasty, the ruling Li clan more or less retained their frontier behaviour. Such a heritage might have made them more confident in networking with their steppe and other neighbours and presenting their own identities in a manner that is not typically Chinese.

0.4. Material for study

0.4.1. Archaeological material

0.4.1.1. Chinese

This thesis is based on a corpus of gold and silver objects, mostly dated to the sixth to the ninth centuries on stylistic grounds. In China, the majority of finds were unearthed in Xi'an, the capital of Sui-Tang Empire. The foremost finds are in the form of caches, such as the Hejiacun Hoard and Famensi collection mentioned above—Hejiacun alone yielded more than one thousand gold and silver objects. Another important context of gold and silver caches is Buddhist,

⁶⁰ Chen 2012, 9.

exemplified by the Famensi collection. Because these caches are often carefully documented, they provide invaluable information about the items, such as date of the deposition, description of the items, and identity of the donors.

Apart from the Famensi collection, there are also a number of Buddhist caches outside China. Nara, the capital of Japan from 710 until the end of the eighth century, has been a particularly important place for its marvellously preserved collections of Tang material.⁶¹ For example, gold and silver utensils, along with other treasures, were found in basements of the pagodas in Hōryū-ji and Kōfuku-ji, both in Nara, Japan, as a part of the foundation deposition. These groups of material provide us with accurate dates, because we know the year of the consecration of the buildings (607 and 750, respectively). But the most remarkable of these are in the Imperial Treasure in the Shōsōin. Founded in 767 A. D., the Shōsō-in Repository is an immense wooden storehouse in the Tōdai-ji

⁶¹ There is debate, though, on whether these material, for example a pair of silver jars in the Shōsō-in, were imported from China or made in Japan in imitation of Tang objects. See Kunaichō Shōsōin Jimusho 1976.

(Eastern Great Temple).⁶² The Shōsō-in collection includes gold and silver,⁶³ glass, and polychrome silk textiles—rather similar to the Famensi material, and most of the items are said to have come from China. The nucleus of the Shōsō-in collection is formed by personal objects of Emperor Shōmu (701 – 756 A.D.), which were dedicated to the temple by Empress Dowager Kōmyō (701 – 760 A.D.) in 756 after the Emperor's death. Another group of eighth-century items, also donated by members of the imperial family, were brought to the Shōsō-in in the tenth century from the damaged Twin Repositories of the Tōdai-ji. All contents of the Shōsō-in are scrupulously recorded in *Kokka Chimpō-cho* (Record of Rare Treasures of the Nations 國家珍寶帳).

0.4.1.2. Türk

Gold and silver from the medieval Türk period are scarce. We attribute these materials to the Türks, because they were found in the vast territory that was once a part of the Türkic Empire, but this neither guarantees Türk provenance nor workmanship. The famous hoard found in 1912 near the village of Malaya

⁶² Tōdai-ji Temple, founded in 728 by Emperor Shōmu, was the head of all kokubun-ji (provincial temples) built in each province throughout the country at the imperial order. It is most known for a huge gilt bronze statue of Vairocana, which was cast at the order of Emperor Shōmu.

⁶³ For metal works in the Shōsōin collection, see Shōsōin, 1976. The material in the Shōsōin is fully illustrated in (Harada et al., 1929) and (Shōsōin, 1960-64). The English catalogue of the material is available in Shōsō-in, Nara-shi et al., 1932.

Pereshchepina, Ukraine, for example, is attributed to Kubrat (d. *ca.* 650/665), the Qaghan of the Bulgars, a Türkic people descended from the Dulo clan, because of a ring inscribed with the Qaghan's name. Nevertheless, the diverse gold and silver objects from the hoard, weighing more than fifty kilogrammes in total, are of mixed dates and provenance, including Byzantine and Sasanian artists. Burial mounds of Altai nobility at Tuyahta and Kopensky also yielded gold and silver objects. They were attributed to the Türks, because, for instance, a group of silver jars from Tuyahta bear inscriptions in Orkhon characters on the bottom.⁶⁴

The most significant finds were discovered by the Mongol-Turkish joint expedition in Khusho-Tsaidam basin west of the Orkhon River, Mongolia, in 2001 and 2003.⁶⁵ The site is alleged to be the burial of Bilga Qaghan (r.717 – 734

⁶⁴ One of the inscriptions read, 'Man... courageous companion of the *Shad*'; another reads, 'Turk-Shas silver tax'. Mongait 1959. *Shad* is a Turkic military title below *Yabghu* and above *Beg*. There is a gold jar from Kopeni (attributed to the Kirghiz, another Turkic tribe) with Orkhon inscriptions that read, 'We have given the silver to the *Beg*.' Mongait 1959, 305f. The Orkhon inscriptions are the oldest known form of Turkic script named after the inscriptions found in the Orkhon Valley. Content of the inscriptions attribute them to the Second Türk Qaghanate established by Bilge Qaghan (683–734) and his brother Kul Tegin (684—731), contemporary with the Tang dynasty. The inscriptions, therefore, also point to a date no earlier than the second half of the seventh century.

⁶⁵ Turkish 2002, Bahar 2009, Chen 2013, 31-4. The site was first discovered during the Orkhon Expedition in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, under the supervision of V. V. Radloff. Radloff 1892-99.

A.D.), the founder of the Second Türk Qaghanate, according to the Runic-Chinese bilingual inscriptions on a stele found on the same site. During the 2001 excavation, a hoard was uncovered, consisting of 1878 silver items, 78 gold items and 26 items with precious stone. Most notable among them are a hammered gold crown with decoration of birds with extended wings (fig. 7.19), sets of miniature gold and silver vessels (fig. 5.17), and two silver deer (fig. 7.9).

0.4.1.3. Tibetan

A major corpus of Tibetan material comes from the excavation of a cemetery at Dulan, Reshui County, Qinghai Province.⁶⁶ Although the cemetery was heavily looted, archaeologists still found quite a few gold and silver items, including belt plaques, weapons and other ornamental plaques. As in the case of the Türks, we cannot be sure of the Tibetan provenance or workmanship of these materials, except that they came from the Tibetan-controlled area of Qinghai. There are still debates on the identity of the owners of the Dulan cemetery—either Tibetan or local Tuyuhun elites under the Tibetan rule.⁶⁷ Other Tibetan materials

⁶⁶ Xu 1994, Beijing and Qinghai 2005. For an English summary of the Dulan excavation, see Heller 2006.

⁶⁷ Zhou 2013.

are scattered around public and private collections, the foremost of which are the Pritzker collection in Chicago⁶⁸ and the Mendiexuan collection in Hong Kong.⁶⁹

0.4.2. Textual material

0.4.2.1. Chinese

The Chinese textual material includes official dynastic histories, such as the *Old and New Tang History*, *Ce Fu Yuan Gui* (Prime Tortoise of the Record Bureau), and *Zi Zhi Tong Jian* (Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government). They were all composed during the Song dynasty but based on Tang material. There is also miscellaneous writing during the Tang, poetry, fiction, anecdotes, letters, and inscriptions. These texts contain accounts of how gold and silver were produced, circulated, and used. But importantly, these texts are illuminating on how gold and silver were *described*, thus giving us an idea on the materiality of gold and silver in the eyes of contemporaries. However, there is a major problem with the textual evidence, that is, the discrepancy between material remains of gold and silver and descriptions of gold and silver. So we must bear in mind that texts only provide *potential* functions that the gold and silver could have served.

⁶⁸ The Pritzker collection has not yet been fully published, but some items are mentioned in Heller 2003b, Huo 2009.

⁶⁹ Su 2013.

Mentions of gold and silver are limited in the Tibetan and Turkic texts, but I will also use these sources in this thesis as a source of their respective political history and a first-person discourse on how they perceived each other in the high-status networking.

0.4.2.2. Tibetan

Our knowledge of early Tibetan history mostly comes from the excavated Tibetan documents written during the imperial period (8th to 9th century), whose accounts of the origin of the Spurgyal family are more mythological than historical. They include *The Old Tibetan Annals*, MS Pelliot tibétain 1288 and India Office 750; *The Old Tibetan Annals, Continuation*, MS British Museum Or. 8212 (187); *The Old Tibetan Chronicle* (MS Pelliot tibétain 1287).⁷⁰

0.4.2.3. Turkic

The only preserved corpus written in Old Turkic alphabet (Runic) are the Orkhon inscriptions, so named because they were found on the memorial stele erected by the Türks in the early eighth century in Orkhon Valley in Mongolia.⁷¹

⁷⁰ All published in Bacot, Thomas, and Toussaint 1949. For a summary of these documents, see Haahr 1969, Beckwith 1987, 3-10, MacDonald (Spanien) 1971. For translation of *Old Tibetan Annals*, see Hill 2006, Dotson and Hazod 2009, Zeisler 2011.

⁷¹ Tekin 1983, 1968, Marlov 1951, Thomsen and trans. by H. Schaeder 1896, Sinor 1987, Golden 1992, 151.

Chapter 1

Literature Review and Methodology

This chapter shows how gold and silver of medieval Eastern Eurasia has been studied and why, in my thesis, it is necessary to provide new perspectives on three primary aspects of scholarship: the materiality of gold and silver (chapter 3), the social practices of appropriating these materials (chapters 4 to 6), and the shared visual elements of gold and silver objects (chapter 7). By bridging the two groups of evidence—archaeological and textual — I hope to explore how the physicality and visual aspects, such as form and motif, of the gold and silver objects could have had been related to their intended context (cross-cultural, high-status interaction) and function.

1.1. Stylistic analysis

The study of Tang gold and silver started from the first half of the twentieth century, when they started to appear on the market. Tang gold and silver caught immediate attention of collectors and scholars alike, not only because of their splendour and beauty but also because they are reminiscent of the gold and silver of the Romans and Persians. The initial excitement caused by Tang gold and silver is probably not unlike that arising from the discovery of Hellenistic cities in Central Asia, upon seeing Western civilisation flowering in the ancient Far East.

A substantial body of scholarly literature on Tang gold and silver has been generated since then, most notably by Bo Gyllensvärd, Margaret Medley, Tepe Chakaraku, Jessica Rawson and Qi Dongfang.⁷² Most of the existing literature on Tang gold and silver is based on an art historical approach, that is, stylistic analysis, especially in the early stage of the study. This is because in that early stage, most of the objects were excavated without scientific methods.⁷³ Without reliable archaeological contexts, scholars could only rely on internal evidence, that is, the visual and technical features intrinsic to the object. Also, because of the lack of archaeological contexts, the early studies had to deal with the two most fundamental issues: date and provenance.

1.1.1. Date

The first comprehensive study on the subject, *T'ang Gold and silver*, by the Swedish sinologist Bo Gyllensvärd was published in the *Bulletin of the*

⁷² Gyllensvärd 1957, Medley 1971, Chakaraku 1979, Chakaraku 1977, Rawson 1982, Matsumoto 1999.

⁷³ These objects are now scattered around the public and private collections in the United States, Europe, and Japan. Gyllensvärd, who worked around this period and therefore had better access to the source of the material, claims that most of these objects emanate from tombs. A group of 15 late Tang gold and silver in the British Museum, for example, are said to have come from a tomb at Beihuangshan, near Xi'an (British Museum. 1936, 0319. 1-15) Gyllensvärd 1957, 25f. Qi Dongfang also mentioned tombs at Beimangshan, near Luoyang, and those near Xi'an as the main sources of Tang gold and silver unearthed in the early half of the twentieth century. Qi 1999a, 12.

Museum of Far Eastern Antiquity in 1957. One of the primary task of Gyllensvärd's work was to establish a chronology of Tang gold and silver. His chronology is based on a limited group of securely dated objects in a few well documented Japanese collections: the material from the foundation depository of the pagoda in Hōryūji, in Nara, Japan, dated 607 A.D.; those from Kōfukuji, also in Nara, dated around 710, and, most importantly, the Shōsō-in mentioned earlier.⁷⁴ Ornaments were the key points of reference for Gyllensvard, as some of the reoccurring ornaments, such as vine and palmette scrolls, were used throughout the Tang and earlier periods. These ornaments can also be found on dated materials, such as bronze mirrors, tiles, stelae, and Buddhist caves. By comparing these dated material, Gyllensvärd was able to trace the development of these ornaments. For example, he speaks of the lion motif, typically a part of the popular 'lion and grape' motif, developing from the violent naturalism of earlier periods into the playful cubs humorously depicted in later examples. He also speaks of the relatively simple palmette scrolls developing into more lush, luxuriant vegetal and floral scrolls in later periods.⁷⁵ Gyllensvärd divides the development of ornaments into four periods: Sui and Early Tang (589-650), High

⁷⁴ Gyllensvärd 1957, 26f.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 161 ff.

Tang (650-755), Middle Tang (755-820), and Late Tang (820-906).⁷⁶ Against this chronology other undated material can be compared. Later scholars, such as Chakaraku, Rawson, and Qi, employed a similar approach, only with a growing body of scientifically excavated material at their command.⁷⁷ With these material, they were able to establish a more accurate chronology of Tang gold and silver based on not only ornaments, but also on vessel shapes and other visual elements.⁷⁸

However, archaeological contexts are not always reliable in dating materials like gold and silver. This is because gold and silver objects tend to have been in use for a long time before their final deposition in the context where they were later found. A large part of the Shōsō-in and Famensi collections mentioned earlier, for example, had been in the possession of their donators before their documented dates. In fact, there are several cases in which Tang gold and silver were found in tombs of much later periods. For example, a set of silver vessels found in a tenth-century tomb in Aohan Banner, Inner Mongolia, are dated to the

⁷⁶ Gyllensvärd 1957, 161-95.

⁷⁷ See Qi 1999a, 11, table 1 and Matsumoto 1999 for a summary of Tang gold and silver excavated up till 1999.

⁷⁸ Medley 1971, Chakaraku 1977, Qi 1999a, 167-77, Han 1989, Duan 1980, Lu 1986.

7th century on stylistic grounds.⁷⁹ It is also common that the objects from the same group, such as the Hejiacun Hoard mentioned earlier, have mixed dates. Since neither archaeological nor stylistic analysis is adequate on its own, the combination of the two methods can give us more confidence in the dates. The date of most objects given in this thesis, therefore, is usually an approximate range, unless otherwise stated.

1.1.2. Provenance

When it comes to provenance, there are two main concerns: 1) where the material was from, and 2) where the object was made. Both prove to be difficult issues.

For the source of gold and silver ores, we know from ancient texts that some was mined in China. There were government- and private-run silver mines. In some prefectures, where gold and silver were mined, the central government allowed tax money being reckoned in gold and silver bullion, which was an important source of gold and silver for the Imperial Treasury.⁸⁰ Gold and silver

⁷⁹ See Aohan Qi 1978, Watt 2004, cat. nos. 208, 209. Gyllensvärd also mentions a group of Middle Tang material, once in the Karl Kempe collection, came from three tombs in Eastern Mongolia, which contained a tablet with a dating from the Song (or Liao) Dynasty. Gyllensvärd 1957, 26.

⁸⁰ Inscriptions on some of the silver ingots from the Hejiacun Hoard suggest that they came into the Imperial Treasury as tax money. For a review of silver ingots with similar inscriptions,

also flowed in from abroad along both the land and the sea routes. The Silk Road was also an important source, with many gold and silver objects found in the northwest frontier, such as Xinjiang, Gansu, Ningxia, and Shaanxi.⁸¹ There were even Arab and Roman silver coins circulating in those regions during the early Tang.⁸² In the South Seas, the Arabs had been carrying on a lively trade, bringing gold mined probably in Arabia, India, and various other places in Southeast Asia, such as Sumatra.⁸³

Nevertheless, it is rather difficult to determine the source of the material of gold and silver objects by scientific methods, as we can do with bronze. One of the main reasons is that gold and silver objects tend to have a long, complex history of recycling, during which ingots from different sources may be mixed. It is also because the trace element composition of the object has to be compared with that of the metalliferous ores from which the metal was derived. However, few ancient gold mines have been excavated in Eastern Eurasia. Moreover, as the gold used in ancient times was mostly alluvial gold, the location where it was

see Qi 1999a, 261. For a review of textual accounts on the production of gold and silver during the Tang, see Peng 1994, 277ff., Qi 1999a, 268ff., Katō 1925.

⁸¹ Watt 2004, cat. nos. 90-95, 100, 157, 207-209.

⁸² Skaff 1998. For reviews of the Sasanian and Roman coins found in China, see Xia 1974, Jiang 1994.

⁸³ Peng 1994, 277f., Qi 1999a, 296ff.

actually mined may have been very far from the gold-containing veins, where chemical composition of ores can be collected. One plausible method is to group the objects according their elemental composition, as done by the Metropolitan Museum, New York, with their collection of Sasanian silver. That does not show the geographical source of the ore, but tells a lot about its concentration and distribution.⁸⁴ This is a method that can hopefully be applied to Tang gold and silver in the future.

To determine where an object was made, on the other hand, is based primarily on stylistic analysis. Stylistic analysis disentangles visual elements, such as shape, motif, and iconography, and traces them to a single cultural or regional origin. This is based on the premise that there are such things as relatively pure, static cultural or regional traditions, and that there are craftsmen who were trained in these traditions as well as ethnically or culturally bound to the region in question. In this way, art historians can determine the cultural or ethnic identity of the craftsmen, if not the exact place of production.

However, as these visual elements can be easily transmitted and reproduced, they cannot be used as the only evidence. Another important clue is details of technical execution, or the artist's 'manner'/workshop. Special attention

⁸⁴ Meyers 1981, Pollard and Heron 2008, 302-45.

is paid to the unconscious traits that reveal a special way of making, instead of conspicuous features that determine the first impression of the item, such as the vessel shape or the motif. This is because, as Boris Marshak suggests, the ‘unobtrusive elements of execution’ were transferred from the craftsman to the apprentice, and permit the items to be classified as ‘works of craftsmen with a common tradition’.⁸⁵ In this way, even though we cannot determine the provenance of an object, we can at least attribute them to different traditions of craftsmanship, which imply various regional centres of production.

1.1.3. Interaction with foreign lands

As mentioned earlier, on first impression, Tang gold and silver are more related to western prototypes than traditional Chinese ones. For example, popular types of Tang gold and silver vessels, such as stem cups, handled cups, and ewers, do not have parallels among ancient Chinese bronze or lacquer; instead, these forms are common among Roman and Sasanian silver. Many decorative motifs, such as the palmette scroll and the pearl-roundel, are also western loans with a long tradition in Greek, Roman and Persian visual culture. Lastly, the major technical methods, namely hammering and chasing, were part of a western metalworking tradition rather than the bronze casting tradition of China.

⁸⁵ Marshak 1971, 114-15.

To better understand this phenomenon, another focus of stylistic analysis is to disentangle visual elements, such as shape, ornaments, iconography, and technical execution in Tang gold and silver, and assign them to distinctive cultural strands, such as Persian or Roman. Such information can potentially help with provenance, and it also serves as testimony to China's interaction with the foreign lands, where the artistic influences were originally from. For example, the Persian elements are attributed to the exiled Sasanian court in Chang'an, as well as the presence of Persian craftsmen in China.⁸⁶

The foreign elements can also suggest potential routes of the interaction and people who might have been involved. Jessica Rawson, for example, draws attention to the key role of the non-Chinese people from the steppe and the borderland, who ruled north China from the fourth to the sixth century. The most important among them were the Xianbei. As great patrons of Buddhism, they introduced foreign ornaments, such as palmette and acanthus leaves, into China

⁸⁶ Qi 1999a, 310. Evidence of contact with the Sasanian court was mainly textual. According to *XTS*, a Sasanian embassy was sent to Chang'an asking for help against the Arabs, which the emperor Taizong refused. In 670-3, Peroz, the son of Yazdgard III (the last Sasanian ruler of the Persian Empire), came to Chang'an himself. He was pointed 'the Governor of Persia' by the Tang emperor, a hollow title bestowed again on Peroz's son in 707, and on other members of the Persian royal house in 722 and 728. However, the Chinese seemed more interested in nominally, rather than practically, incorporating Persia into their empire. There are disputing accounts on whether a Chinese force was sent with the object to restore the Sasanian throne with what outcome. See Watson 1983, 547, Beckwith 1987, 45ff.

as a part of decoration for Buddhist architecture. The Buddhist caves in Yungang, built during the Northern Wei as a part of imperial propaganda, are an example. The Xianbei aristocrats were also responsible for appropriating these ornaments to other materials, as we can see from their coffin painting and column bases.⁸⁷

Qi Dongfang points out Sogdian influence as a major influence on Tang gold and silver. Qi's observation is based on the Russian scholar, Boris Marshak's, study of Sogdian silver. Before Marshak's influential work was published in 1971, Sogdian silver was confused with Sasanian silver. But Marshak argues that Sogdian silver, though imitating the Sasanian court silver, has its own character in terms of size, choice of material, technique, and imagery.⁸⁸ One example is the type of handled cup mentioned earlier, which, according to Marshak, is characteristic of Sogdian silver. As such cups are numerous among the Tang gold and silver, Qi suggests the possibility of the Sogdians not only bringing actual

⁸⁷ Rawson 1982, 8ff., figs. 34-35, 1984b, 63ff. See p. - 158 -.

⁸⁸ For instance, the Sogdian silversmith used thinner silver sheet, and the decoration was rendered mostly in repoussé, whereas most of the Sasanian court silver are decorated with silver relief sculpture attached to the body. He also speaks of the 'grand, static' manner of Sasanian court silver, in contrast to the crisp, living, and sometime economical style of Sogdian silver, which met the taste of the burgeoning their merchant-warrior clients. For a detailed discussion on the difference between Sasanian and Sogdian silver, see Marshak 1999.

objects of gold and silver, but also being involved in the making gold and silver objects for Chinese clients.

The foreign elements, when contextualised in the political history can be used as a dating reference. For instance, Gyllensvärd and Qi both argues that the mid-eighth century, that is, the period of Tang's internal unrest, was a dividing point for the Tang political history as well as for the stylistic development of Tang gold and silver. Before this point, the non-Chinese vessel types, such as stem cups, handled cups, oval and lobed cups, and ewers predominated, as we can see from the Hejiacun Hoard. After that point, these distinctive foreign forms became less common; whereas new forms—shapes unknown in either Chinese or foreign tradition but combining characteristics of the two—took over. This period also witnessed the increasing stylisation of vegetal patterns, which took over earlier subject matter, such as animals and human figures, and became the dominant ornaments.⁸⁹

1.1.4. Discussion

Stylistic analysis also dominates the study of the Tibetan and Türk gold and silver, with special focuses on foreign influences. In the case of Tibetan material, for example, the Sogdian and Chinese influences caught a lot of

⁸⁹ Qi 1999a, 169ff., Gyllensvärd 1957, 161ff.

attention.⁹⁰ These previous studies on dates, provenance and visual features form the foundation of this study. They allow us to recognise the general pattern of visually similar gold and silver objects distributed across Eastern Eurasian, and their stylistic connection to the Roman-Sasanian gold and silver. However, as the nature of this approach determines, it deals mainly with the visual aspects of the objects; whereas questions raised in the Introduction—related to the change in the preference or taste for prestigious material and the physicality of gold and silver objects—is not sufficiently addressed. Objects tend to be treated merely as carriers of motifs, techniques, or human identities. In other words, the visual features of Tang gold and silver were studied in isolation to the usage and circulation of the actual objects; whereas such social contexts, I argue, are crucial aspects for understanding their foreign character—what motivated the Tang elites to appropriate gold and silver as a new prestigious material and create objects with foreign characteristics.

Also, I think that all the scholarly efforts that went into disentangling stylistic influences have raised far more interesting questions, other than being merely clues for the provenance. For one thing, visual elements that can be attributed to disparate sources are often found on one object, thus obscuring the

⁹⁰ For the Chinese influences, see a gold stem cup in the Metropolitan Museum, described in *MMAB* (2002 60), 57.

threads leading back to one particular tradition. Gyllensvärd thus describes typical Tang gold and silver:

A stem cup of Sasanian origin might then be adorned with Indian ornaments and a vessel similar in shape to an Indian reliquary might have Sasanian ornaments. On the same gold and silver object we can find both Indian and Iranian elements, but also features deriving from old Chinese art and in certain cases also details we must regard as Chinese innovations.⁹¹

The same can be said about gold and silver from other places in Eastern Eurasia. The juxtaposition of various regional elements challenges the traditional belief of ‘style’ as a static, closed category.⁹² Since what I will later in the thesis term ‘visual hybridity’ appears to be a common feature of aristocratic visual

⁹¹ Gyllensvärd 1957, 38.

⁹² I must clarify that I do not believe that these traditional approaches are by any means inferior or outdated. On the contrary, without them, later theories would be groundless. For example, later I will use the hybridity theory to negate the presumption that pure, static regional styles exist. But at the same time, the concept of hybridity itself is based on the premise that relatively ‘pure’ breeds exist. Otherwise from where comes the ‘hybrid’? Likewise, without the knowledge of a relatively ‘pure’ style related to a certain culture or region, how would we ever have known that interaction or hybridity ever took place?

culture of this period, we may assume that, instead of the result of agentless transmission of motifs, it may have been a conscious construction. Those who produced these objects might have even made a conscious effort to obscure the provenance of the object by imitating each other and incorporating foreign visual and technical elements. Instead of seeing such ‘visual hybridity’ as an obstacle to provenance, or a corruption of the pure regional style, it invites us to reflect on what might have motivated the medieval elites to dedicate significant resources—expensive material and fine craftsmanship—into creating objects that seem exotic but, at the same time, do not point to a specific regional tradition.

Contact with distant lands, as previous studies have all convincingly argued, certainly provide the necessary precondition for the transmission of motifs and forms. However, I do not believe it is a sufficient condition for elites from various geo-cultural backgrounds to adopt a similar style as marks of aristocratic distinction. It is certainly not the case in our age of globalisation. Modern metropolises, such as London and New York, draw immigrants from all over the world. Although they are heavily populated with immigrant communities, one can hardly say these foreign cultures are patronised by the elites. On the contrary, these cultural ‘others’, especially those who refuse to lose their identity, are often seen as a potential threat to the mainstream society. This stands in stark contrast to conspicuous enthusiasm for exotic materials among the ruling class,

whose taste for gold and silver as well as exotic food, clothing, art, music, and sports (e.g., hunting, polo, and chess) was evident in their tombs.⁹³

1.2. Social functions of gold and silver

Another direction in the study of Tang gold and silver focuses on the social functions of gold and silver. These studies are based primarily on the Chinese transmitted texts. It was Chinese and Japanese scholars, such as Peng Xinwei, Katō Shigeshi, and Qi Dongfang, who have training in both classical Chinese texts and economics that first made these attempts.⁹⁴ These studies explore the socio-economical role, especially the monetary role, of gold and silver in the Tang society—a preoccupation that reflects the presumption of precious metals as a form of natural currency in western societies. Although gold and silver were not used as full-fledged currency during the Tang, after scrupulous screening of ancient texts, scholars found many other uses of gold and silver: gold and silver

⁹³ See Xiang 1957 and Schafer 1963 for thorough accounts on Tang exotics. I have to note here, though, that the enthusiasm for exotic things was very much limited to the Tang ruling elite. As have been discussed by Marc Abramson and Jonathan Skaiff, the Tang literati, who were ethnically Han and composed the available written sources, tended to downplay role of outsiders in Tang culture and politics in favour of emphasising the dynasty's continuities with earlier imperial tradition.⁹³ This tendency became even more pronounced after the An Lushan Rebellion, and foreigners are more often cast in a negative light.

⁹⁴ Katō 1925, Peng 1994, Qi 1999b, 261ff.

were widely used for large payments, for example, the purchase of luxury goods such as horses and paintings; large transactions by the government, such as military expenses and tax, are often reckoned in silver; other miscellaneous uses can be generally categorised as gifts—depending on the giver, the recipients, and the context, they can also be described as tribute, bribery, monastic donation, and so forth.

1.3. Methodology and theories

Although ancient texts are by nature biased and can by no means be relied upon as ready answers to our enquiry, they do not conflict with my previous assumption on the role of gold and silver in high-status interaction. Also they point to more specific contexts, in which gold and silver were produced, displayed, used and circulated. Most relevant contexts that involved gold and silver objects are diplomatic ceremonies (chapter 5) and diplomatic gift exchanges (chapter 6). However, there is a major gap between the archaeological remains and textual accounts of gold and silver. It is impossible to establish a one-to-one correlation between the preserved gold and silver objects and those described in ancient texts. All I can say is that these preserved objects have the *potential* to have served the functions described in texts. Also, I am going to use a few theories to extrapolate the possible social roles of the objects in relevant contexts. Of course, theories, as they are, remain theories. But combining all these

different lines of reasoning, hopefully this study will inspire more perspectives when dealing with such well-studied material as Tang gold and silver.

Here are the theories I am going to use.

1.3.1. Social field

The social field theory is the basic theoretical stance of this study, though it will not be brought up explicitly later in the thesis. On the social field theory, I am able to reconstruct such a gold-and-silver using network of Eastern Eurasia that transcends political, cultural and ethnical boundaries.

The term ‘social field’ is first used by sociologists to describe spheres of actions, within which power relations play out, each with a set of rules and specific power structure related to the specific field. A society is split into ‘fields’, whether scientific, religious, academic, political, medical or judicial; at the same time, ‘fields’ can cut through arbitrary social boundaries, with its forces and structure functioning in multiple societies, states or ethnic groups.⁹⁵ The concept is adopted by archaeologists, such as Alexander Lesser and Philip Kohl, to describe transverse elements in ancient societies.⁹⁶ Kohl gives the so-called

⁹⁵ For Bourdieu’s definition of social field, see Bourdieu 1984, 170, Reed-Danahay 2004, 32.

⁹⁶ Kohl 2008, Lesser 1961.

‘metallurgical province’ as an example. The Russian archaeologist E. N. Chernykh uses this term to call areas defined by typological and technological uniform metal tools and weapons found within them. It is the spread and sharing of metalworking technologies, visible in the archaeological record, that draws the otherwise distinct (archaeologically defined) cultural-historical communities, such as the Timber Grave (Srubnaya) and Andronovo ‘Cultures’, into an interconnected system.

Such an interconnected system poses stark contrast to the linear model of interaction implied by most previous studies of gold and silver. In the case of Tang gold and silver, China is seen as the receiving end of foreign influences—either Roman, Persian, Indian, or Central Asian, and these influences were the result of direct contact with the source of influences. The social field theory, nonetheless, proposed an alternative, de-centralised model, which I believe better explains the phenomenon of shared use of gold and silver across Eastern Eurasia.

Also, the loose, dynamic nature of social field make it a particularly suitable framework to locate archaeological remains, which are by nature scanty and hard to define within a clear-cut, closed aggregate such as culture, ethnicity, or state. But the term ‘social field’ can articulate social relations regardless of these boundaries that may or may not have existed. Archaeologists can thus reconstruct social fields on an empirical basis, that is, patterned relations in the

archaeological record. Through the force of shared social fields, these separate groups of people can be inextricably involved with each other in web-like connections.

In the same manner, we can reconstruct a network, based on the distribution of visually similar gold and silver objects, across the disparate geo-cultural regions of Eastern Eurasia in the early Middle Ages—a network not defined by the boundary of political entities, but by shared taste and social practices, which included the production and use of gold and silver. Only against this framework will we be able to explore how people from culturally and politically diverse regions of Eastern Eurasia came into contact with and transform one another, creating a shared ‘social field’, a part of whose material expression was gold and silver. As Andrew Sheratt and others have argued, the universality of human contact is a fundamental feature of the socio-historical process.⁹⁷

1.3.2. Material engagement

The theory of material engagement by Lambros Malafouris explores how the physical properties of a material shaped how we perceive various aspects of objective reality. Engagement with precious materials influences what we

⁹⁷ Sherratt 1995, 2006.

consider to be beautiful and excellent, which is inextricable from the values and beliefs of a given society.⁹⁸ I use this theory with an attempt to explain why the value of gold and that of jade are so deeply embedded in their respective culture that we are reluctant to incorporate new elements into the established material hierarchy, and thus why the use of precious metals was relatively late in the Chinese history.

1.3.2.1. Gift theories

Finally, I also aim to apply theoretical lenses to the potential functions of gold and silver. One of the most important is the gift theory. Gift exchange is an important way in which gold and silver constituted human relations. The anthropological theories of gift, starting with Marcel Mauss's influential work, *The Gift*, in 1920 describe societies in which gift-giving is constitutive of social order. In these societies there are three imperatives: to give, to receive, and to give in return. The act of gift-giving creates ritual bonds between the giver and the recipient. Exchange of gifts was an important and obligatory component of every diplomatic mission and was built into diplomatic protocol. Gift exchange at the state level was not only a gesture of friendship and alliance—which they were, in part—but also an essential element of aggression. Often involved with more naked expression of power, such as the application of physical force or

⁹⁸ See p. 91.

payment of subsidies, gift giving strategies were developed to control the other's identity and thus gain an advantage.

According to transmitted texts, one of the major functions gold and silver served in high-status interaction was as diplomatic gifts. These texts give extensive description of gifts and the contexts in which gifts were exchanged. The attention the texts pay to ensure the proper reception and interpretation of gifts makes it clear that gift-exchanging strategies were of utmost importance for the state. Also, the way in which gifts, especially gold and silver, were described in texts illuminates on how gold and silver were perceived by contemporaries.

Chapter 2

The Geo-historical Background

This chapter draws a picture of the geo-historical background of the period and area under discussion, with a focus on high-status interaction between the major political powers. I argue that an elite network, created and sustained by such interactions, was crucial to the identities of the elite and very much to the survival of their states. The relationships were so close, almost symbiotic, that, in the tenth century, the fall of one empire was closely followed by another.

The sixth century witnessed the weakening and collapse of the powerful Sasanian and the Gupta empires and the emergence of a new world order, with the rise of mighty new empires: the Sui and Tang, the Tibetan, the Arab Caliphate, to name a few. It also saw the successive movement of nomadic people (the Huns, Avars, Alan tribes, Chionites, Hephthalites, and Kidarites). But throughout the period, it was the Turkic tribal confederations, namely the kök Türks, the Türgish, the Karluk, the Uighurs, and the Bulgars, who held political hegemony over the vast Eurasian steppes. In recent years, there is a new trend to see historical development from a global, or at least Eurasian, perspective. In these studies, social and political history, technology, and culture are not viewed as isolated, arbitrarily demarcated geographical entities, such as China or Rome; instead, they

are examined as a part of an interconnected system and the results of interaction with other parts of this system.⁹⁹

The Eastern Eurasian polities, while connected to the rest of Eurasia, are treated altogether as a micro-system (compared to the global perspective) in this thesis, mainly because of their relative isolation, geographically, from the rest of Eurasia. Eastern Eurasia was separated from the rest of Eurasia by the Tarim Basin, characterised by the Taklimakan, the second largest desert in the world. To make things even more difficult, Tarim Basin is surrounded by the snow-covered Great Ranges—Himalayas, Karakoram, Hindu Kush, Pamir Mountain, Kunlun Mountain—and the Tibetan Plateau, with an elevation of 4500 km on average above the sea level. These natural obstacles very much marked the western frontier of China. On the one hand, throughout history, the Chinese influence rarely went beyond these natural boundaries; on the other, China did develop a unique material culture and practices based on jade and bronze. Even

⁹⁹ Such a ‘grand narrative’ was proposed by Andrew Sherratt Sherratt 1995, and it is well illustrated in Barry Cunliffe’s recent work on the collective Eurasian history (Cunliffe 2016). For studies on the area and period under discussion with this approach, see Skaff 2012, Wang 2013, Chen 2012, Iwami 1998, 2009, Beckwith 2009, Kaneko 2001, Hori 2002., There are also a number of work, though not necessarily self-aware of their approach, focus on the political history of Eastern Eurasian polities from interactive perspective. See Cunliffe 2016, Litvinskiy and Zhang 1996, Bosworth 1998, Sinor 1989, Beckwith 2009, 112-62, Iwami 1998, Kaneko 2001, Hori 2002, Wang 2013, Skaff 2012, Pan 1997, Qi 1999a.

for the Tibetans, it required tremendous effort to send large bodies of troops across the Pamirs to Central Asia, as in the case of the Battle of Talas. Hence, during the period under discussion, they formed a close-knit network. The only exception are the Türks, as the Eurasian steppes link Eastern and Western Eurasia without physical obstacle. But as the example of the Western Türks' delegation to the Byzantine court suggests, it was the Western Türks, whose territory comprised most of the Central Asian steppes, that had closer and more active contact with Western Eurasia; whereas the Eastern Türks, who were based on the Mongolia, were more engaged in Eastern Eurasian affairs.

2.1. History of the major players

Before we go into the discussion of the network, it is necessary to provide brief accounts of the history of the major players up till the point of the period under discussion as a background.

2.1.1. The Chinese

In China, the four hundred years' internal turbulence ended in the sixth century. China was reunited under the powerful, yet short-lived, Sui dynasty (581—618 A.D.). The Sui was succeeded by the Tang dynasty (618—906 A.D.). In the early phase (7th to the first half of the 8th century), the Tang Empire flourished in culture, economy, and political influence. These descendants of frontier generals sought to expand the Chinese domain at an unprecedented rate. Through a series of military campaigns during the reigns of Emperor Taizong

(598—649 A.D.) and Gaozong (628—683 AD), the Tang Empires conquered large parts of the Eurasian steppe, which were traditionally under nomadic or Persian rule. The Chinese influence, though transient, extended as far as Lake Baikal in the north, and the heartland of Central Asia—Transoxiana, Tokharistan and the Aral Sea—in the west. The Tang expansion came to an abrupt end in 755, when An Lushan, a general of mixed Turkic-Sogdian descent, led a rebellion that almost overthrew the Tang Dynasty. Struggling to recover from the internal unrest, the Tang became less interested in maintaining their influence in the northern and Central Asian steppes.¹⁰⁰

2.1.2. The Türks

As in the case of all other nomadic peoples, the ethnical, linguistic and political boundaries of the Türk are hard to pin down. The term ‘Türk’, in a narrow sense, refers to the royal Ashina clan who established the first and second Türk Qaghanate. They are identified with the *kök Türks*,¹⁰¹ or the ‘Türks of the East’, who modern scholars believe to be the *tujue* in Chinese sources. The

¹⁰⁰ For the general history of the Tang dynasty, see Twitchett and Fairbank 1979, Lewis 2009, Tanigawa 1971, Chen 1954, Miyazaki 1989, 1977.

¹⁰¹ The term ‘*kök Türks*’ come from Kul Tegin’s inscription found in the Orkhon region, in which the royal Ashina clan self-identified as the ‘*kök Türks*’ (‘the *kök Türks* who were masterless and without clan organisation’). *Kök* in Turkic means blue, the colour identified with the East. So the name *Gök Türk* means the ‘Türks of the East’. Golden 1992, 117.

Chinese sources report that the kök Türks descended from the Xiongnu. In the fifth century, five hundred Türk families, all bearing the surname Ashina, were settled by the Ruru in the Altai, where they worked on the manufacture of iron implements.¹⁰² The ‘Türks’ can also refer to the Turkic people belonging to the Turk tribal confederations, such as the On Oq (*ten arrows*) tribes of the Western Turks, or the Tiele/Uihgur Toquz Oguz (‘nine tribal groupings’, transcribed as *jiu xing*, or ‘nine surnames’ in Chinese sources). After the Türk Qaghanate became a multi-ethnic, multilingual milieu, the name would be applied to various peoples who joined the confederation but did not stem from the actual Turkic tribes, which included nomadic, sedentary, and forest peoples.¹⁰³

The rise of the Türks coincided with the reunification of China. After driving out the Ruru,¹⁰⁴ the Türks became the master of the Eurasia steppes in

¹⁰² Sinor identifies iron mines with the ‘ancestral cavern’, which the Türk qaghan ‘leads his nobles to... offer a sacrifice.’ Sinor 1987, 206. The Türks attached great spiritual importance to ironworking, ranking the smith second to Shamen. For the origin of the Türks, the Chinese the dynastic Annals (mainly the *Zhou shu*, *Sui shu*, *Jiu Tang shu*, *Xin Tang shu*, *Liang shu*) provide the most ample information. They have been translated by Chavannes 1903, Liu 1958. For a review on the theories concerning the origin of the Türks, see Golden 1992, 117ff, Findley 2005.

¹⁰³ Golden 1992, 141ff.

¹⁰⁴ Ruru, Ruanruan, or Rouran, are Chinese the transcription of the Chinese characters used to transcribe the name of a tribe that as the major power in the Eastern and Central Asian steppes from the late fourth century to the sixth century. As they were forced to migrate westward with

552 A.D. The Türk political organisation is from the very beginning bilateral: the eastern part, comprising mainly the Mongolian Plateau, was led by Muhan Qaghan (r. 554—572 A.D.); whereas the western part, extending from the steppes north of Tian Shan to Central Asia, was led by Ishtemi Qaghan (557—573 A.D.) and his descendants.

As mentioned earlier, many frontier Chinese generals, including the Li Yuan, the founder of the Tang Dynasty, had sworn allegiance to the Turks. However, in 630, Emperor Taizong personally led the Tang army and conquered the Eastern Türks led by Xieli Qaghan (r. 619 – 634 A.D.). Taizong's son, Emperor Gaozu, taking the advantage of the Sir-Yantuo (one of the Turkic tribes) uprising, launched a campaign against the Western Turks between 657 and 659 A.D. and conquered them as well. From the Western Türks, the Tang took over the vast areas of the Central Asian steppes, extending as far as Ferghana.

However, the Türks soon rose up again, upon the death of Emperor Gaozong. Under the leadership of Elterish Qaghan (r. 682 – 692 A.D.), the Ashina clan established the Second Türk Qaghanate (682 – 745 A.D.). The second Türk

the rise of the Turkic power, some scholars identify them with the Avars and the Alan tribes, though their name, language and ethnic appurtenance are unknown. Szádeczky-Kardoss 1987, 207, Golden 1992, 76ff. The Ruru had been locked in unceasing conflicts with the Northern Wei dynasty of China, along with diplomacy and marriage alliances. Sinor 1987, 291ff. For a 6th-century tomb of a Ruru princess found in Hebei Province, see Zhu and Tang 1984.

Qaghanate fell apart in the mid-eighth century. Upon its ruins, the Uighurs, another Turkic people took over the eastern Eurasian Steppes. Meanwhile, the Turgish, one of the ten On Oq tribes, rose on the ruin of the Western Türk Empire from the late seventh century, confronting three great powers—the Tang to the southeast, the Umayyad Caliphate to the southwest, and the Second Türk Empire to the northeast. The Turgesh was undone by Asad, the the Umayyad governor of Central Asia, at the Battle of Kharistan in 737. But the Uighur rule in the Eastern steppes lasted well until the mid-ninth century.

2.1.3. The Tibetans

Another major power that confronted the Tang expansion was the Tibetan Empire, particularly from 726. Taking advantage of the chaos caused by the An Lushan Rebellion, the Tibetans sacked the Tang capital Chang'an twice: once in 763, in which they occupied the capital for fifteen days before retreating; and again in 765 again, with the Uighur allied armies. The power of the Tibetans is best illustrated in the Sino-Tibetan treaty of 821 and 823, in which tremendous effort was put into ensuring the equal status of the two states in rituals, protocols and the content of the treaty.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ For translation and discussion of the 821/823 Sino-Tibetan treaty, see Richardson 1985, Li 1956, Demiéville 1952.

The Tibetans came onto the stage relatively late: we only heard about them after they came into contact with the Sui in the early seventh century. Yet we know little about their earlier history. The family that established the Tibetan Empire called themselves *Spurgyal* in Tibetan texts. They were farmers from the valley of Yarlung River on the southern slope of the Tibetan Plateau.¹⁰⁶ After conquering Central Tibet and the Kokonor region,¹⁰⁷ the Tibetans proved themselves a formidable, rising great power causing direct threat on the Chinese border. The Tibetan *btsanpo* Songtsan Gampo (r. 620 – 649 A.D.) sought

¹⁰⁶ See note 70.

¹⁰⁷ The rich pasture-land around Lake Kokonor (Qinghai) was then ruled by the semi-nomadic Mongolic-speaking people known as Aža in Tibetan, and Tuyunhun, or Azha in Chinese. In the fifth century the Aža had once been overlords of some of the oasis cities in the Tarim Basin, but they had long passed the peak of their power though still remained a military force to be reckoned with. Upon Emperor Taizong ascending the Tang throne in 626, the Aža king sent an embassy to Chang'an no sooner than made a serious raid on the Tang border prefecture of Shanzhou. A marriage alliance was proposed but was subsequently cancelled because the Aža prince refused to come to the Tang court to receive his bride. In 634 and 635 Taizong sent large armies against the Aža and destroyed them as a major power. Following the defeat, the Tibetan took advantage of the situation and attacked the Aža from the south, weakening them still further. After conquering western Tibet, the Tibetans attacked the Aža in 660 and again in 663, which finally destroyed the once-powerful Tuyuhun kingdom. The Tibetans now moved into the Kokonor region, from which they had direct access to the Tang borders. For a complicated history of power struggle between the Aža and the Chinese, the Tibetans and the Türks, see Beckwith 1987, 17ff., Twitchett 2000, 115, 120. Like the Tibetans, the Aža also produced their dynastic chronicles. See Uray 1978, Molè 1970.

marriage alliances with the Chinese, to which Emperor Taizong consented.¹⁰⁸ The Chinese princess Wencheng left for Tibet in 640 to marry Songtsan Gampo, arriving the next year.¹⁰⁹ Another marriage alliance between China and Tibet was arranged in 710 during the reign of Emperor Zhongzong (r.705 – 710 A.D.).

2.2. The Eastern Eurasian elite network

2.1.1. A hierarchical network

Unlike modern diplomacy, which assumes all states are equal (nominally at least), medieval diplomacy was based on a hierarchical network of rulers. At the apex of the hierarchy were the Great Empires, or *da guo* 大國 in ancient Chinese texts. The Sui-Tang empire, the Tibetan Empire, and the Türk Qaghanate were self-aware and generally recognised by their contemporaries as such.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ When the marriage was first proposed in 634, the request was rejected. But Emperor Taizong shortly consented to it after Songtsan Gampo demonstrated his military competence by effectively raiding the Chinese border prefecture of Songzhou (in north-western Sichuan).

¹⁰⁹ *Ce Fu Yuan Gui* 978: 20 (*CFYG* after). It is worth pointing out that Princess Wencheng was a member of a minor branch of the Tang royal family, and was probably not related to Emperor Taizong. *CFYG* mentioned another marriage alliance between China and Tibet taking place during the reign of Taizong. *CFYG* 979: 1. However, it did not appear in any other Chinese or Tibetan sources. Beckwith suspects that it might refer to the princess who married the Aza king.

¹¹⁰ XTS 220 (Korea); CCYG 170 (Ruru); 978 (Tibet).

Next in rank of the hierarchy are lesser states, such as Japan, Korea, Bohai, Nanzhao, as well as the numerous oasis kingdoms around the Tarim basin.

2.1.1.1. Patrimonial relationship

The network was knitted together by vertical patrimonial relationships (between patron and client) and horizontal alliances (between equals). Jonathan Skaff advocates Max Web's (1864-1920) concept of patrimonialism to understand the medieval socio-political relations.¹¹¹ In a patrimonial relationship, a) subjects render *personal* allegiance to the ruler; b) symbolically, the patrimonial domain is treated as the possession of the ruler, and subordinates accordingly are regarded as members of the ruler's *household* with the right to be *fed* at the lord's table; c) in return for some form of regular income, subjects render military or administrative service to the master; d) rulers typically give *ad hoc* rewards to adherents, who have provided outstanding service.

It is generally accepted that Turko-Mongol societies, including those of the medieval Türks and the Mongols, were organised along patrimonial lines.¹¹² In medieval Eurasia, however, patrimonial bonds did not have to be confined by ethnical or cultural boundaries. The elites used the same strategies in court politics as well as in interstate relationships. Just like frontier generals such as Li

¹¹¹ Skaff 2012, 12ff.

¹¹² Allsen 1986, Hsiao 1978.

Yuan, who had sworn allegiance to Türk lords, the Türk tribes also swore allegiance to the Tang emperor Taizong in the seventh century. The Tang Empire had a concentric model for patrimonial alliances. With the Tang court being the centre, its influences extends towards ‘Outer Client’ (*wai chen* 外臣) and ‘Remote Countries’ (*jue yu* 絕域). The rulers of “outer subjects” were invested with Chinese court titles and integrated into the court hierarchy. The ruler of a “remote country” was unable to maintain regular contact with China or was considered unimportant. Foreigners inhabited an outer zone of ‘loose rein’, or ‘bridle’, (*ji mi* 羈縻) prefecture, in which indigenous leaders (referred to in this thesis as ‘bridle officials’) handled internal affairs. They generally did not forward tribute, taxes, and census records to the Ministry of Revenue, but compared to the outer subjects, the ‘loose rein’ tribes were perceived a part of the Tang administration and their indigenous leaders (bridle officials) as Tang government official. As scholars, such as Di Cosmo, have convincingly argued, it is the entering into these hierarchical relations, rather than ethnicity or culture, that defines whether one is a part of ‘us’ or ‘them’. As a rule, patrimonial bonds were sealed by investiture ceremonies, with the patron bestowing on the client symbolic gifts—in the medieval case, they were usually ceremonial robes and belts—and honorary titles.

2.1.1.2. Horizontal alliance

All medieval Great Powers in the multi-polar model strived to portray themselves as the sole great power (at least in front of the internal audience. These public records, which were loaded with Confucian ideology, tried to make the impression that China—the ‘Middle Kingdom’ (*zhong guo*)—was the centre of the world and the Chinese Emperor (*tian zi*, the Son of Heaven) the sole ruler mediating between the Heaven and the Earth. Any other states that entered into contact with the imperial court thus entered into the vertical patrimonial system described earlier, submitting themselves as vassals and paying tributes. Like the Chinese Son of Heaven, the Türk qaghan ruled by heavenly mandate (*kut*), embodying and demonstrating heaven’s favour through the successful performance of his functions as ruler.¹¹³ The Tibetans’ imperial title *btsanpo*, as an equivalent to the Chinese August Emperor (*huang di*) and the Turkic

¹¹³ Skaff argues that the Chinese and Turkic rulers shared the worship of Heaven in different names (i.e., *tian* and *tengri*) and ancestral veneration. He also points out that *tian*, a concept invented by the Zhou, might have come from the western frontier, which is where the Zhou came from. Skaff 2012, 109ff. However, it is hard to not imagine it was also a strong claim in response to the Heaven-mandated rule of the Tang emperor and Turkic qaghan.

Qaghan,¹¹⁴ with *Phrul-gyi lha* (God Incarnate) and *lha-‘phrul* (Divine Incarnate) being regular epithets to the title.¹¹⁵

In all these ideologies of kingship, there is no such thing as an ‘equal’ or peer state. The closest to an ‘equal’, in the Chinese ideology, was ‘adversary state’ (*di guo* 敵國)¹¹⁶—theoretically, anyone who is not a subordinate has to be an enemy. But in reality, the Great Powers were bound to observe shared customary laws, recognise other players as equals, and negotiate with them on equal terms. In those more ambiguous circumstances (as I am going to show in chapter 6), familial terms, based on sworn-brotherhood or matrimonial alliances, were used. ‘Country of Brothers’ 兄弟之國, an ancient term with its origin in the Han-Xiongnu relationship, came into use again during the period under discussion;

¹¹⁴ The equivalence of *btsanpo* to the imperial titles of other Eurasian powers is generally accepted in the ancient times as by scholars today. See Beckwith 1987, 14-15, note 10, Pelliot 1961, 143, MacDonald (Spanien) 1971.

¹¹⁵ ‘Gnam-gyi lha-las myi’i rgyal-por gshegs-te’, eighth line on the east face of the Sino-Tibetan inscription in Lhasa. Li 1956, 82-82, note 2. These epithets, as Li Fang Kuei and Arienne MacDonald have argued, certainly had their unique roots in the political myth of the Tibetan royal religion, indicating that the *btsanpo* ‘came from among the gods to become the ruler of man’.

¹¹⁶ According to Skaff, the status of ‘equal adversary’ was only applied formally to the First Türk Qaghante from 618 to 625 (XTS 215a:6032; ZZTJ 191:5996) and probably to Tibet from 781 to at least 841, both posing strong military threat to the Tang.

this time between the Tang and the Turks. The Tang and the Tibetans, on the other hand, became ‘countries of in-laws’ through matrimonial alliances. In my diplomatic letter sent by the Tibetan *bstanpo* to the Tang emperor Suzong, the *bstanpo* points out that Tang and Tibet are ‘Countries of Uncle and Nephew’ 甥舅之国, forcing the Chinese to change from the patrimonial protocol to a more hierarchically neutral language in diplomatic correspondence.¹¹⁷

2.1.1.3. The ‘multi-polar’ network

However, we must note that the hierarchy within the Eastern Eurasian network was by no means static and clear cut. It was subject to change, sometimes through naked expression of power—the Tang turned from a vassal to the lord of the Türks after a series of military campaigns against the Türks, with the latter being utterly defeated; sometimes it was through subtle manipulation in the symbolic realm, such as protocols of diplomatic correspondence mentioned earlier, gift exchange (chapter 6), and visual culture (chapter 7). Also, the hierarchy can be ambiguous with different aspects of negotiation expressing conflicting messages. For example, while the Türks were, on the one hand, nominal vassals of the Tang in the eighth century, with diplomatic correspondence addressed to the Türk qaghan identified as ‘memorials’, the

¹¹⁷ Another letter from the Tibetan *bstsanpo* to the Tang emperor in 733 points out that ‘Tang and Tibet are both Great Powers’. *CCYG* 978. For the same letter, see also note 434.

letters preserved in Chinese sources, on the other hand, employ the protocol reserved for an equal.¹¹⁸

In any case, in the ever-changing political scenes of medieval Eastern Eurasia, none of the great powers were able to remain the sole centre of the network throughout their history. This observation challenges the Sino-centric view that the Chinese official historiography tries to convey, which has subsequently been accepted by many modern scholars. In reality, the Sui-Tang Empire, like the Tibetans and the Türks, was but *one of* the Eurasian powers. As we shall see in later chapters, neither had the Chinese dominated in the symbolic sphere. Negotiations with other Eurasian powers, especially diplomatic rituals, incorporated as many Eurasian/Inner Asian elements as Chinese/Confucian ones.

119

2.3. Community of interest and conflicts

As all these great empires were brought into close contact with each other through expansion at an unprecedented rate. After clashing into each other's territory, they expanded westwards into Central Asia. In the beginning of the

¹¹⁸ For a discussion on the hierarchical elements of diplomatic correspondence, see p.225.

¹¹⁹ For comparison between the Chinese and Turkic diplomatic rituals, see Skaff 2012, chapter 5, Barfield 1989. For Inner Asia diplomatic rituals, see Sinor 1989.

eighth century, a ‘fairly stable balance of power on a continental scale was established’. Beckwith argues that, from this point onwards, none of the great powers were able to further expand in territory or political influence.¹²⁰ But I would rather argue that when an empire reached a certain size, expansion became a necessity, because it could no longer be sustained by its internal resources alone and its survival became dependent on its opponents. I believe this was an important motivation for the great powers to invest tremendous resources, including producing and using luxury gold and silver objects, in maintaining the close-knit network.

One example is the struggle to control Central Asia and the Arc by all the Great Powers. The Chinese took over the Central Asian steppes after their defeat of the Western Türks. However, Central Asia did not remain in Chinese hands. Allied with the Arabs, and later with the Tibetans, the Türgish, who inherited the Western Türk Qaghanate, were powerful competitors for Tang’s interest in Central Asia. The Tibetan Empire was also deeply involved in Central Asian affairs, which was a natural consequence of Tibet’s geographic proximity to the Hexi Corridor, Eastern Central Asia (Xinjiang) and the strategic mountain passes

¹²⁰ Beckwith 1987, 84.

to Western Central Asia.¹²¹ In 670, the Tibetans took over domination of the Tarim Basin and forced the Chinese to abandon the Four Garrisons of the Pacified West. Only in 692 did the Tang army recover Tarim Basin, taking advantage of internal turmoil of the Tibetan Empire. Yet Tibetan influence in the Tarim Basin did not disappear altogether. Rather, the garrisons in the Pacified West changed hands frequently between the Tibetans and the Chinese in the first half of the eighth century. However, shortly before the An Lushan Rebellion, the Tang army suffered a heavy defeat from the allied force of the Arabs and the Tibetans at the Battle of Talas in 751, which halted the Chinese from further expansion into West Central Asia. When the An Lushan Rebellion broke out, the Chinese had to pull out the garrison troops to suppress the rebellion. Thereafter, the Tibetans gained full dominion over the Tarim Basin as well as the disputed Kokonor region and Hexi Corridor (the Tang prefecture of Longyou in southern Gansu).

While the expansion of military campaigns to areas as far as Central Asia seemed pointless to the contemporary Confucian literati, I would rather agree

¹²¹ In an audience with the Chinese general-diplomat Guo Yunzhen in 696, the Tibetan Prime Minister Mgar Khri 'brin' thus justified the Tibetan military interest in Eastern Central Asia: 'the western five tribes (of the Türks) and the Nu-shih-pi were only separated from Tibet by a desert, and so their raiders could reach Tibet very quickly.' He also accused the Chinese interest in the same region, which, he argue, was very far from core of Chinese proper. *Zi Zhi Tong Jian* 205:6508 (after *ZZTJ*); cf. *CFYG* 655: 15v-17r, quoted by Beckwith 1987, 59-9.

with Denis Twitchett in the strategic importance of Central Asia as horse breeding grounds: ‘a regular supply of horses was essential to provide mobility, not only for the nation's cavalry, which formed the backbone of the forces of all the peoples of Inner Asia and the Chinese frontier, but for the internal communications networks without which a great empire could not function effectively.’¹²² On the other hand, for the Türks and Tibetans, due to the patrimonial nature of their societies, the elite had to have regular supplies of luxury goods, such as gold and silver, to distribute to their followers as gifts, if they wanted the latter to remain loyal. As the patrimonial network extended to the scale of a massive empire, the needs for luxury goods became tremendous. Under these circumstances, the controlling of trade routes, in this case the Silk Road, and trades with sedentary states, such as China, through political networking became a necessity to maintain the empire as it was.

Therefore, side by side with military collisions, the great empires developed a deep, close relationship through investiture, inter-marriage, trade, and joint military campaigns. This is illustrated by the almost symbiotic relationship between the Tang and the Türks. From the mid-eighth century, the

¹²² Twitchett 2000, 134. Skaiff also discussed the strategic importance of controlling the horse-breeding grounds of the Arc area. He argues that was indeed the key of maintaining an effective cavalry throughout the Chinese history, and the Tang was one of the rare cases, in which the Chinese managed it.

Tang offered dynastic marriage with the emperor's own daughter in exchange for vital military support from the Uighurs to fight internal uprisings and provide security on the northern borders, whereas the Uighurs took the opportunity to strengthen their hegemony in the steppe and to open up a vastly profitable trade exchanging horses for silk. The Chinese also secured sources of horses—vital for the Tang military campaigns—from the Turks through trading. It was among the Türks that the Tang found the horses for building a large cavalry, which their predecessors lacked. According to Skaff's calculation, from 5000 at the accession of the Tang dynasty in 618, the number of horses grew to more than 700,000 in the middle of the 7th century.¹²³

2.1.2. Summary

These contacts fundamentally shaped the political apparatus of the great empires—not only in terms of how they interacted with each other, but also very much in internal affairs, in how they saw themselves as a polity and a people. We may find a common aristocratic culture understandable in the context of this close-knitted network.

¹²³ Skaff 2012, 241ff.

Chapter 3

Contesting Values: the Materiality of Gold and Jade

In the Introduction, I stressed that change in the taste for prestigious materials matters. This is because the choice of prestigious material concerns not only the material itself, but also the entire social system—the procurement of raw material, technology of production, distribution, usage and circulation; all of these rely on power structures, ideology, and beliefs. In this chapter, I will, therefore, focus on the appropriation of gold and silver as new prestigious materials in Eastern Eurasia.

It may seem strange that gold and silver can be seen as *not* precious. Gold is one of the oldest metals exploited by humans. As it occurs in nature, it does not need to be won from the ore.¹²⁴ This bright, incorruptible yellow ‘stone’ surely had caught the attention of early humans. In Western Eurasia, as I will soon demonstrate, gold and silver have been held in high esteem from the very

¹²⁴ There are two types of gold deposits: reef gold, which is buried in the veins deep underground; and placer (or alluvial) gold, which is basically weathered reef gold being transported by moving water and settling out among the river gravels and sands, occurring in the form of dust, flakes, nuggets, and crystals. The latter appears to have been the major ancient source of gold. According to Forbes, by late nineteenth century 90% of the gold was collected from placers’ (Forbes 1971). For gold and silver metallurgy antiquity, see Needham and Wagner 1974-, 109ff, Forbes 1971, 155ff., Rapp 2002, 142ff.

beginning of history. They are not only symbols of excellence but also standards of value. Western thinkers from Aristotle to John Stuart Mill all agreed that gold and silver are ‘natural currency’, for ‘they were imperishable, portable while containing large value in small bulk, easy to hide, eminently divisible, and when pure, always of the same quality.’¹²⁵

However, other scholars, such as Grahame Clark and Colin Renfrew, have noted that the supremacy of gold and silver are not universal in all time and all over the world.¹²⁶ In fact, this ‘metal-obsessed’ value system, as Renfrew puts it, is unique to West Asia and Europe.¹²⁷ To illustrate relative values of gold and jade, Clark relates an encounter between the Spanish conqueror Diaz del Castillo and the Aztec leader Moctezuma in the sixteenth century: one may guess at the Spaniard’s dismay when Moctezuma passed him some lumps of greenstone, enjoining him to hand them to none other than his prince. The situation was only saved when the Aztec tactfully pointed out that each piece was worth two cart-loads of gold.¹²⁸ Apparently for the Aztecs, the ‘greenstones’ (i.e., jade) were more highly valued than gold. This too was the case in ancient China. As I

¹²⁵ Mill 1909 (1848), quoted by von Reden 2010.

¹²⁶ Clark 1986, 50, Renfrew 2012.

¹²⁷ Renfrew 2012.

¹²⁸ Clark 1986, 10.

mentioned in the Introduction, objects of high status were made of bronze, jade, lacquer and silk.

The Aztecs and the ancient Chinese were certainly aware of the existence of gold and silver and found them attractive, but they did not place these materials on the top level of material hierarchy as people did in Western Eurasia. Instead, these societies had their own value systems, which I will discuss later in this chapter. This observation challenges our assumption of the ‘intrinsic’ value of gold and silver. Gold and silver are not ‘naturally’ precious; but, rather, they owed their unique status to the fact that ‘the people who developed modern science and in many other ways created the modern community happen to have acknowledged their supremacy’.¹²⁹

After all, all values are constructed. But how was the value of gold and silver constructed? What made gold and silver ‘precious’, not just in terms of scarcity, but also in terms of social significance? How have the physical properties of gold and silver related to the way these materials were used, especially as prestigious materials? How did the appropriation of these prestigious materials function as a part of the larger social system? Answering these questions may help us understand why the ancient Chinese were reluctant

¹²⁹ Clark 1986, 50.

to appropriate gold and silver as prestigious to a greater extent until the period discussion.

3.1. Construction the value of gold

3.1.1. The emergence of precious material and complex society

As we shall see in the cases of gold and jade, the first appearance of precious materials coincides with the emergence of pronounced social inequality. The creation of precious things seems a universal character of human society: some materials are assigned a value above all else; and there are striking general similarities in the way high status and prestige are expressed by the highly-prized materials in rich burials across the world. However, the choice of precious material varies from culture to culture. In Western Eurasia, a value system, in which metals—copper, gold, and silver, in particular—were rated as possessed of high value, is the result of specific historical development. It initiated in Eastern Europe from the fifth millennium BC.

The earliest known examples of gold and silver being used to denote high status are the treasures of Varna and Maikop. The treasure from the necropolis of Varna, on the western coast of the Black Sea, is dated to the fifth millennium

BC.¹³⁰ 3100 gold objects were found in the Varna cemetery, weighing about six kilograms. Grave 43, the burial of a forty- to fifty-year-old male, alone yielded gold artefacts weighing more than 1.5 kilograms (fig. 3.1-2). They included ritual attire ornamented with gold appliqués; gold and carnelian beads; a hat decorated with gold lamellae; earrings, necklace, bracelets made from gold rings; a bow and a quiver lined with gold; a number of copper and stone axes, among them was a ‘sceptre’—a stone axe whose shaft was lined with gold—held in the hand of the deceased; and what has been interpreted as a penis sheath of gold.

Another important concentration of worked gold and silver, dated to the fourth millennium BC, is from a burial mound (kurgan) in Maikop in northern Caucasus.¹³¹ About 7000 objects of gold and 1000 of silver were recovered from the Maikop kurgan (fig. 3.3). The way in which the grave goods were laid is reminiscent of Varna: the clothing of the deceased was adorned with gold appliqués in the form of lions and bulls; one strip of sheet gold with rosettes was probably part of an ornamental headdress; and across the main chamber laid

¹³⁰ For the latest radiocarbon dating of Varna cemetery, see Higham et al. 2007. The extraordinary wealth of gold from Varna has caused great interest since its discovery in 1972. For general discussion of the Varna cemetery and its relation with other Chalcolithic (Eneolithic) cultures in the Black Sea region, see Chapman et al. 2006, Higham et al. 2007, Slavchev 2010.

¹³¹ For archaeological finds from the Maikop kurgan, see Piotrovski 1998, 2013, Hansen 2013. For the site in context, see Kohl 2007 72-86^{and} Anthony 2007, 290ff.

several thousand beads of turquoise, carnelian, silver and gold lay across. Among the gold and silver artefacts, particularly noteworthy are gold and silver vessels, two of them decorated with hammered animal friezes. Along with vessels of the Uruk period, they are the very earliest vessels made of metal. Also remarkable are two golden and two silver bovine figurines, both sensitively modelled and skilfully cast (fig. 3.4).¹³²

The Varna and Maikop burials show clear signs of social stratification.¹³³ Among the 65 graves at the Varna cemetery, five rich burials yielded about 80% of the entire gold assemblage.¹³⁴ So was the body of gold artefacts found in the main chamber of the Maikop kurgan, which was most lavishly furnished. Such

¹³² Though, admittedly, it has been frequently pointed out that the extraordinary wealth of Varna and Maikop burials stand out as unparalleled phenomena within their chronological and cultural contexts and beyond. Someone has estimated that the weight and the number of gold finds in the Varna cemetery exceeds by several times the combined weight and number of all the gold artifacts found in all excavated sites of the same millennium from all over the world, including Mesopotamia and Egypt Slavchev 2010, 201. However, gold and silver were not totally unheard of in their respective cultural context, see for example Leusch et al. 2015 and Hansen 2013.

¹³³ For discussions on the emergence of prestige goods in relation to that of complex society in the mentioned area, see Chapman et al. 2006, Slavchev 2010, 203ff.

¹³⁴ Burials nos. 1, 4, 36, 41 and 43. Yet only grave no.43 mentioned above contains skeletal remains. The other depositions are often interpreted as ‘symbolic graves’, representing communal effort rather than individual wealth and prestige, see Leusch et al. 2015, Slavchev 2010, 200.

stratification is generally associated with technological and economic development as well as growing social complexity in the Balkans and Caucasus around the fifth and fourth millennium BC. A new form of power found its expression in the accumulation and display of the new ‘noble metal’, i.e., gold and silver, as well as a large array of exotic goods, such as cowries, *spondylus* shells, turquoise, and carnelian. Gold played a key role in the expression of power and prestige. As Renfrew notices, in Grave 43 of Varna, gold was placed in proximity to the body in two key positions: the face and the genital; gold is prominent in objects that from their position were of symbolic value (for example, the stone shaft-hole axe held in the hand); and gold is added to less prestigious materials—for example, some objects, such as the stone axe, are plated with gold leaves to make them look as if it is made of gold.¹³⁵

The physical and symbolic relationship between new forms of power and ‘noble metals’ became characteristic of a major tract of Western Eurasia, including West Asia, Egypt, Anatolia, and the steppe lands of Central Asia and the Iranian Plateau, from the fourth and third millennium BC.¹³⁶ After 3000 BC,

¹³⁵ Renfrew 1986, 2012.

¹³⁶ There are disputes on the direction of the influence. Most archaeologists are convinced that Maikop Culture was the result of so-called ‘Uruk Expansion’ in the fourth millennium BC. However, other scholars argue that there are few noticeable material parallels, such as ceramic types, between the two cultures. Some even suggest that the Caucasus took the centre stage of

graves richly furnished with precious metals increasingly appeared in Mesopotamia and Anatolia, exemplified by the Royal Cemetery of Ur. We have already mentioned the tomb of ‘Queen Puabi’ from the early Dynastic period (*ca.* 2600 BC) and the tomb of Tutankhamun (1341—1323 BC).¹³⁷ Like Varna Grave 43 and Maikop, these tomb occupants were covered with gold and silver ornaments as well as a large array of exotic goods—most notably lapis lazuli, carnelian, and agate. As at Varna, they were also buried with ceremonial weapons made of gold: a shaft-hole axe with gold band and a gold dagger with gold blade at Queen Puabi’s tomb, and even more fantastically adorned gold daggers at Tutankhamun’s tomb (fig. 3.5). As these daggers have gold blade, they could have only served symbolic roles.

The metal-based value system was not sanctioned in the Eurasian Steppes until the first millennium BC. This period also coincides with drastic social changes on the steppes, most notably iron metallurgy and horse riding, which gave rise to the possibility of long-distance migration, as well as long-distance

intense cultural production, which expanded its repertoires of material practices to the ancient Near East (Smith 2012, 675ff.). These discussions are beyond the scope of this thesis, but in the case with gold and silver, I would rather take the latter stand. Mesopotamia as a land is indeed poor in resources. So when it comes to metallurgy, they would have to look to mineral-rich areas such as the Caucasus.

¹³⁷ See p. 16.

raiding and mounted warfare. Honeychurch sees these trends as preludes to the emergence of large-scale nomadic states, such as Xiongnu, with complex political institutions and social stratification. These new trends are illustrated by the appearance of monumental burial mounds by 800/900 BC, with their huge size, complex structure, and greater assemblages of exotic and costly items. The most remarkable collections of worked gold and silver of the steppe were recovered from these kurgans (fig. 3.6-7). The steppe people developed their unique technical and visual style. The so-called ‘animal style’ art, depicting subjects such as animal combat and griffin, spread across the steppe (fig. 3.8). The art of gold- and silversmith, so adaptable to the mobile lifestyle, became the primary form of art on the steppe—‘the barbarian art par excellence’, as Deleuze and Guattari put it.¹³⁸

The best example of these rich steppe burials would be the burial mounds near the modern village of Arzhan, Tuva Republic, Siberia.¹³⁹ A kurgan, investigated by the Russian archaeologist Mikhail Gyzanov in the 1970s (so-called Arzhan I, dated late ninth and early eighth century BC), measures more than 100 metres in diameter and has a complex subterranean wooden structure that

¹³⁸ Deleuze, Guattari, and Massumi 2013.

¹³⁹ For a detailed account of the excavation and findings of the Arzhan tombs, see Čugunov, Parzinger, and Nagler 2006, Rudenko and Thompson 1970, Gyzanov 1969.

houses the graves. From a nearby kurgan (Arzhan II), archaeologists discovered the rich burial No. 5, which yielded more than 5700 gold items (fig. 3.9). The steppe people seem to have inherited from the Bronze Age cultures of Western Eurasia the general practice in using these materials but pushed it to an even grander scale. As in previous examples, the male tomb occupant was buried with gold ornaments, such as torques, necklaces, earrings, pendants and pins. His headdress, garments and boots were covered with gold appliqués—his upper garment (clearly a cape) alone was adorned with 2,632 feline gold appliqués (fig. 3.11-12). The deceased was also buried with weaponry, consisting of a gold-embellished iron dagger (fig. 3.10) and a gold quiver with fish-scale decoration (containing iron arrow heads with remains of gold encrustation), both connected to a belt.¹⁴⁰ There are numerous such examples from Iron Age kurgans across the Eurasian steppes.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Čugunov, Parzinger, and Nagler 2006, cat. no. 6, pls. 15-17; c.f. Čugunov, Parzinger, and Nagler 2010. Grave 5 is a double burial. The female tomb occupant was buried in a similar manner. The decoration of her dress corresponds to the man's caftan, including thousands of gold panther appliqués. But instead of an iron sword, she was buried with an iron knife, also adorned with gold, near her right hip.

¹⁴¹ The so-called 'Golden Man of Issyk' in Kazakhstan is another impressive example. Samašev 2007a, 166f., fig. 9. See these catalogues Parzinger 2007, Aruz, Farkas, and Fino 2006, Aruz 2000, Francfort 2012, Schiltz 1995, Stark and Robinson 2012 for gold artefacts from other parts of the Eurasian steppes.

3.1.2. Materiality and the representation of power

There is striking consistency in the way, in which gold and silver were appropriated to represent power and prestige, from the very beginning and across Western Eurasia. From the above example, we can see that there are two major foci of representation: a) the material body of the person, and b) objects that symbolised power, such as sceptre and weaponry. With gold and silver adorning the body and the symbols of power, it is the *visual* aspect of power that is particularly stressed.

I argue that materiality is the key to understanding the manner in which metaphysical ideas, such as power and status, are represented. In the case of gold and silver, the emphasis on the *visual* aspect of power is closely associated with the physical properties of these materials. The value of gold and silver as symbols of excellence is constructed (not *ascribed*) through continuous experience with the materials—when they are being apprehended and dwelled upon.¹⁴² This relationship between material things and abstract ideas is best put by Lambros Malafouris in his *How Things Shape the Mind: A Theory of Material Engagement*. Malafouris argues that thinking *through*, *with*, and *about* things is categorically prior to ‘thinking about thinking’.¹⁴³ Engagement with the material—working,

¹⁴² Malafouris and Renfrew 2013, 77ff., Porter 2012.

¹⁴³ Malafouris and Renfrew 2013, 77, 237.

using and reflecting on it—shapes our mind, including what we envisage as exalted values, such as beauty and good. What we consider beautiful about a material—visual or tactile, bright or muted tones, monochrome or polychrome, transparent or opaque—is inseparable from what is good in a person or in a society. This is what Malafouris calls ‘constitutive intertwining’ of mind and things, which is evident in such expressions as ‘a heart of gold’ or ‘a jade-like gentleman’, respectively, in two distinctive systems of values.

If Malafouris is correct, it is unlikely that people of the fourth and third millennium first had an abstract idea of power and prestige and then sought to express it through external media, namely gold and silver, in which case these materials were arbitrarily ‘designated’ with certain value. Rather, minds and material culture are ‘co-constitutive’. That is, such a concept as ‘prestige’ emerged from continual (mental and physical) engagement with materials like gold, silver, lapis lazuli and carnelian; in the course of such interaction, the materials also become ‘articulated metaphorical links’, or ‘indexes’ to the ideas. The physical property of the material played a crucial part in the process, as it provides potentials and limitations of how things might be engaged, which subsequently shapes how the mind might be construed.

3.2. The materiality of gold and the visual representation of power

As the one of the oldest metals exploited by humans, gold stands out for its easy workability: native gold can be worked by direct hammering. It is malleable;

that is, it can be beaten into extremely thin sheets without breaking or cracking.¹⁴⁴

Gold is also among the most ductile metals. An ounce of gold can be drawn into a fine wire some fifty miles long, suitable for making delicate chains and filigree as well as threads for lace or tissue. Silver attracts interest for similar physical property, though it tarnishes more easily than gold.¹⁴⁵

Gold and silver, after all, are meant to be *seen*. It is their colour and above all the brilliant lustre that people find most attractive. The superb malleability and ductility of gold and silver makes them the perfect media for *superficial embellishment*. With these qualities, the glory of gold can be displayed with maximum economy. Gold foil can be pasted to other materials, such as wood, stone, or ceramic. Varna provides ample evidence for this technique. Apart from the stone axe mentioned earlier, gold sheet was also used to cover bows, a shell

¹⁴⁴ A single Troy ounce can be beaten into a sheet a hundred feet square and only 1/282,000 of an inch thick.

¹⁴⁵ In addition, the smelting process of silver is more complicated. Silver rarely occurs in easy-to-work placer deposits as gold does, but must be won from underground veins. To extract silver in an adequate scale, silver must be recovered from natural alloys (such as electrum, the naturally occurring alloy of gold and silver) or ores. Silver mines are often associated with lead sulphide ores, most notably galena. The process of extracting silver involved smelting the ore, purifying the crude lead and recovering silver from the base metal, notably by means of the cupellation. This is why the use of silver came about much later in history. The earliest known concentration of worked silver from the Maikop kurgan, see below.

bracelet (interpreted as a ‘repair’), ceramics, and tube-shaped copper beads.¹⁴⁶ Other luxury materials highly treasured in the ancient Near East, such as lapis lazuli and carnelian, with their bright, saturate colours, share the visual quality of precious metals. Glass, a later development, was also valued because they transmit, reflect and refract light. Polychrome, achieved by combining these precious materials, seems even more preferable, exemplified by objects from the royal tombs of Ur and Tutankhamun’s tomb described earlier.¹⁴⁷

3.2.1. Body ornaments

The association between power and visual splendour is so strong in the *Western* tradition that David Graeber assumes, when he talks about valuable things, that they are always ‘an object of display, and always in some sense adornment to the person’. He relates Foucault’s observation that, until the beginning of the eighteenth century, in Europe ‘power was what was seen’—splendid public buildings, such as cathedrals and palaces, and especially in the ‘material body of the king’, which are displayed in paintings, sculptures and coins. The exercise of power was, in essence, ‘a persuasive power’. By making a show of magnificence, ‘a king is able to define himself in such as way’ that ‘inspires in

¹⁴⁶ Slavchev 2010, 350, figs. 8,9.

¹⁴⁷ See note 27.

others acts of compliance, homage or recognition’ and that consequently ‘others are moved to transfer some of their wealth to him’.¹⁴⁸

The material body of the important person is constantly on display in royal pageant and spectacles. As I argued earlier, the physical properties of gold and silver make them the perfect media for surface embellishment. Covering the surface of human body seems only a natural result of such practice. As we can see from the Arzhan example earlier, the body of the deceased was lavishly adorned with gold and silver ornaments, including headdress, earrings, necklace, bracelet, beads, as well as other numerous appliqués sewn to the garment. With the glitter of precious metals, the material body of the important person would stand out from the dull mass.

3.2.2. Weaponry

Another point of focus in the mortuary space is weaponry, such as shaft-hole axes, maces, swords and daggers.¹⁴⁹ Such weapons were found across Western Eurasia, including Greece, Egypt, Anatolia, western Asia, and Iran, as

¹⁴⁸ Graeber 2001, 92ff.

¹⁴⁹ They are often found along with so-called ‘tools’, such as chisels and adzes, in burials. The latter seems to have had a symbolic role as important as the weapon, indicated by the gold chisels found in Queen Puabi’s tomb in Ur (Zettler and Horne, Zettler and Horne 1998@cat. nos. 153,154). The same phenomenon can be found in Fu Hao’s tomb. But as two categories are often found in proximity, the distinction between weapon and tool is probably modern.

well as the Eurasian steppes. Jessica Rawson stresses the role of military activity as the key of power, personal glory, and legitimacy to rule in Western Eurasia and the Eurasian Steppes. The elites often engaged in hand-to-hand fighting as a major form of battle.¹⁵⁰ As a result, weapons suitable for hand-to-hand combat, such as short, double-edged daggers and maces (a weapon with a large head and a short staff for ‘battering an enemy at close reach on the head’¹⁵¹) were of great importance and were often buried close to the body. These weapons are often elaborately adorned with gold and silver. The marriage between ‘noble metal’ and an object, symbolically significant in its own right, undoubtedly reinforced the dignity of each other. Together with the gold-adorned outfit (for example, Alexander the Great’s gold armour), these glamorous weapons would certainly make their owners’ person and status conspicuous in the battlefield.

¹⁵⁰ Rawson 2015.

¹⁵¹ Description by Rawson, Rawson 2015, 44. Depiction of such scenes are seen in ancient Egyptian wall-paintings, in which the pharaohs are often depicted battering an enemy’s head with a mace. The famous Narmer Palette of the First Dynasty (*ca.* 3100—3050 BC). However, it is unclear whether this is a symbolic act or it did take place in actual battles, and whether mace was indeed an effective weapon in hand-to-hand combat. However, the symbolic significance of the mace is unequivocal from its often conspicuous position in mortuary context. See *ibid.*: 44ff., fig. 8 for the advent and spread of maces as weapons as well as symbols of power across Eurasia.

Weaponry played a central position in the steppe. The advent of nomadic states is often associated with growing ‘militarism’—raiding and warfare being an important means for negotiating local relationships of loyalty and leadership, with booty being a source of material profit. If warfare was indeed so important to the steppe society, it is not surprising that weaponry occupied so conspicuous a place in mortuary space.¹⁵² Most noticeable are the elaborate iron swords (iron was still relatively rare at the time and was apparently highly valued) adorned with gold and silver.¹⁵³ As the Arzhan II example shows, the sword was often fastened on a belt elaborately decorated with gold and silver plaques. The enormous attention given to the belt seems to specific to the steppe people of this period. As Rawson has argued, the significance of the belt is closely related to

¹⁵² However, to what extent the ‘military’ element is symbolic or actual, we do not know. Honeychurch casts some doubts on the traditional ‘militarism’ view of the steppe by pointing out that violence and warfare may have varied regionally. Besides, recent skeletal analyses show that artefacts commonly viewed as weaponry in tombs are not always correlated with evidence of conflict-related trauma on body remains. Honeychurch thus suggests that these ‘weapons’ were ‘probably related to belief system and trans-regional identities rather than to warfare’ (Honeychurch 2013, 294f.)

¹⁵³ Earlier we mentioned such a sword found at Arzhan II. Another impressive example is a long sword with gold plated scabbard and handle plated with alternating gold and silver strips from a kurgan in southern Tajikstan Demidenko and Firsov 2007, figs. 2,3. For a distribution of such daggers from the Black Sea to China, see Rawson 2015, fig. 21.

the mounted or mobile lifestyle, as people needed to hang weapons and other essential things from the belt as they rode.¹⁵⁴

3.2.3. Horse ornaments

The emphasis on horses is more specific to the steppe. With the growing importance of horses and mounted warfare, horses became an important part of the identity of steppe elites, with horse sacrifice being a major component in steppe rituals. The importance of horses for the horse-dependent cultures of the steppe is clearly shown by the representation of the image of the horse¹⁵⁵ as well as horse sacrifices found in graves. Around the central chamber of the Arzhan I were positioned 160 riding horses sacrificed along with splendid gear such as harnesses and saddles. Gold and silver were used to enhance the glamour of these animals. Some examples of well-preserved gold and silver horse trappings have come from the kurgan of Berel' in the Kazakh part of the Altai Mountains. The horses were found wearing masks with ibex horns plated with gold (fig. 3.13). They also wore bridles with gold-plated wooden pendants representing various animals, such as fox, mouflon, elk, griffin and sphinx.¹⁵⁶ Apart from gold and

¹⁵⁴ Rawson 2013, 22f.

¹⁵⁵ Moreover, the image of horse is often represented in gold plaques, such as those that were parts of the headgear of the man's body found in Grave 5 of Arzhan II.

¹⁵⁶ Samašev 2007b, Stark and Robinson 2012.

silver, exotics materials were used to emphasise the importance of horses. For example, Pazyryk grave 5 yielded an exquisitely embroidered piece of undyed raw silk that was incorporated into a locally made felt saddlecloth.¹⁵⁷ Such a growing interest in far-reaching exchange and alliance network also seems to be a feature of the Iron Age steppe elites.¹⁵⁸ The acquisition and accumulation of precious metals, along with other exotic goods, were certainly important parts of networking.

3.3. ‘The stone of gentlemen’: precious material in early China

In ancient China, however, one cannot find such emphasis on the visual aspect of power. On the contrary, the Chinese emperor is *invisible*: no image of the emperor—either in the form of coins or sculpture or painting—was circulated; he was not seen in public, either making a speech or joining the people in royal pageants or spectacles; and though he was the symbolic leader of the army, he was discouraged from personally leading the army, not to mention engaging in hand-to-hand battle.¹⁵⁹ In any case, the Chinese emperor’s legitimacy lay in divine mandate (as the ‘Son of Heaven’), rather than personal charisma or

¹⁵⁷ Rudenko and Thompson 1970, fig. 89, pl. 178

¹⁵⁸ Di Cosmo 2002 85

¹⁵⁹ Rawson 2015

military prowess. Besides, the Chinese central power, from Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) onwards, was exercised in the form of ‘intensive surveillance and social control’, facilitated by minute bureaucracy—‘practices often associated with “modern” or “western” governance’.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, the ancient Chinese sovereign represents what Foucault calls ‘faceless’ institutional power.¹⁶¹ Because display of visual splendour in public was not required, gold and silver lacked their central stage.

Meanwhile, China had its own hierarchy of prestigious materials, which was the result of her specific historical developments and material practices. Jade can probably be seen as a parallel to gold. Like gold, jade is relatively rare in nature, durable, portable but containing high value in small bulk, so it provides an interesting point of comparison.

¹⁶⁰ Burbank and Cooper 2010, 46

¹⁶¹ Foucault and Sheridan 1991, 195ff.

3.3.1. The materiality of jade

In mineralogical terms, jade includes two groups: nephrite and jadeite.¹⁶² But the Chinese character jade (*yu* 玉) literally means ‘beautiful stone’.¹⁶³ In the Chinese context, jade refers to nephrite or nephrite-like minerals.¹⁶⁴ Jadeite has a different name, *fei cui*, and it did not come to attention until the fifteenth

¹⁶² Both nephrite and jadeite are composed mainly of silica, but analysis reveals significant differences in other components. Whereas nephrite contains a high proportion of magnesia and a considerable one of lime, neither of these is present except as traces in jadeite. By contrast jadeite contains plenty of alumina and soda, only weakly present in nephrite. Iron is present in each as traces, but even so provides useful markers. In nephrite it occurs exclusively as ferrous and in jadeite as ferric oxide.

¹⁶³ The entry for jade (*yu* 玉) in *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* (*Explaining Graphs and Analysing Characters*), an etymological dictionary of Chinese characters compiled in the second century.

¹⁶⁴ There are a huge variety of minerals known as *yu* in China, and not all of them are nephrite. The true nephrite used in ancient China ranges from the pure, white tremolite (the renowned ‘mutton-fat jade’ from Khotan and Yarkand in Xinjiang) to the dark green actinolite exploited during the later period of Liangzhu Culture (Fang 2015). However, most *yu* used in ancient China are nephrite-like minerals of various mineral compositions. For example, the so-called *xiuyan yu* 岫岩玉, occurring in Inner Mongolia and Liaoning and exploited by local Neolithic cultures such as Xinle 新樂 Culture (7200—6800 BC) and Hongshan 紅山 (4700—2900 BC) Culture, is indeed serpentinite, or serpentine containing varying degree of tremolite (Chen 2014). For mineral composition and metasomatic connections of nephrite, see Harlow and Sorensen 2001, 2005.

century.¹⁶⁵ This is not surprising, because as we shall see, the glassy quality of jadeite did not appeal to ancient Chinese aesthetics.

Indeed, what is ‘beautiful’ in a stone for the ancient Chinese embodies a completely different kind of aesthetic from that of gold and silver. Jade is certainly appreciated for its visual quality, but it does not have the bright colour and glitter of gold and silver. The colour of jade is rather muted, ranging from white to the various shades of green, yellow, orange, red, blue, mauve and black. Among them, white jade, opaque with a milky quality, from Khotan is most highly valued. These qualities are well described by its name ‘mutton-fat jade’. Jade has a degree of translucency, but it is but not glassy. It only has a gentle sheen. Reflectivity, lustre, shine, iridescence—qualities so essential in the western aesthetic for precious materials¹⁶⁶—are not found here.

But apart from visual appeal, the ‘beauty’ of jade lies in its tactile quality. To understand the appeal of jade one has to handle the material itself. Jade is smooth and cool to the touch, and these qualities improve by years of handling, as interaction with the hand further polishes and transforms the surface of jade,

¹⁶⁵ Jadeite was not really appreciated in China until Ming and Qing Dynasties. The Qing scholar Ji Yun (1724–1805) wrote, ‘when I was a child... jadeite from Yunnan was not considered jade... but now it has become precious and costs even more than real jade’ (Ji and Keenan 1999).

¹⁶⁶ Kalavrezou 2012.

giving it a gentle sheen and almost oily feel.¹⁶⁷ This creates between a jade piece and its owner a relationship rather personal and intimate, for only the owner is able to appreciate the jade through handling, which in turn increase the beauty of the jade.

Last but not least, the ancient Chinese liked jade for its sounds. They liked to wear jade pendants suspended from their belts; when they walked, the jades would hit each other and make a delightful tinkling sound.¹⁶⁸ Jade worked into flat pieces was known as *qing* 磬, a type of percussion instrument played at Zhou

¹⁶⁷ This is probably why the ancient Chinese were not interested in the glassy jadeite until a much later period.

¹⁶⁸ According to ancient texts, the sound of jade is associated with beauty and grace. See, for example, ‘Odes of Zheng’ (Zheng Feng 「鄭風」) in *Book of Poetry* (Shi Jing 「詩經」):

There is the young lady walking [with him],

With a countenance like the ephemeral blossoms of the hedge-tree.

As they move about,

The jades of her girdle-pendant tinkle.

「有女同行，顏如舜英，將翱將翔，佩玉將將。」

Adapted from James Legge’s translation. Book of Poetry was allegedly compiled by Confucius during the fifth century BC, but the body of the poems were probably composed in much earlier periods.

ceremonial rites.¹⁶⁹ The most spectacular example is an intact *qing* set excavated from the tomb of Marquis Zeng (5th century BC) in Hubei province. The set consisted of 32 stone pieces of varied sizes, suspended on a gilded bronze frame in two rows. When hit, they produce a range of three octaves with semitones. This *qing* set was found along with the famous set of bronze chimes *zhong* 鐘. *Zhong* and *qing* were probably played along with each other at ceremonies.¹⁷⁰

The brilliant lustre of gold and silver invites display that can be seen from a distance, whereas jade, with its muted colour and gentle sheen, is not that suitable for ‘conspicuous’ display. Instead, the tactile quality invites a more intimate, personal kind of engagement. Muted, subtle colour, translucency, tactile

¹⁶⁹ ‘Jiao Te Sheng’, in *The Classic of Rites* (Li Ji 「禮記」), ‘For the princes to suspend (their drums and bells) in four rows like the walls of an apartment (after the fashion of the king), and to use a white bull in sacrificing; to strike jade *qing* (or sonorous jade);...—these were usages which they usurped.’ 「諸侯之宮縣，而祭以白牡，擊玉磬……諸侯之僭禮也。」 Adapted from James Legge’s translation. *Spring and Autumn of Master Lü* (Lüshi Chunqiu) gives a mythical account on the invention of *qing*: ‘Emperor Yao was throned, and ordered Zhi to create music... [Zhi thus] hit stone with a stone, simulating the sound of jade *qing* of the Heavenly King. [The music] makes beasts dance.’ 「帝堯立，乃命質為樂……乃拊石擊石，以象上帝玉磬之音，以致舞百獸。」 One must note, however, that both texts were composed in a much period: Classic of Rites during the Warring States period (475 BC—221 BC), and Spring and Autumn of Master Lü in 239 BC.

¹⁷⁰ Hubeisheng and Zhongguo 1989. Marquis Zeng’s *qing* set, however, how made of stone, not jade. According to transmitted texts, jade *qing* was reserved exclusive for the court of the Zhou king. See note 169.

and auricular qualities—these seem to be what the ancient Chinese appreciated most in precious materials. Silk and high-class ceramics, for example, are as pleasant to the touch as to the eyes. To emulate Khotan jade, the Song dynasty (960-1279) imperial kilns produced high-fired porcelain with thick glazes that in their cool touch, soft colours and milky quality very much resemble the highly-prized jade.¹⁷¹

3.3.2. Value from mass production

According to the ‘exotic’ theory, the value of jade derives from the enormous distance over which it was transported from its source to the Chinese Central Plains. It is indeed the case with the most highly prized ‘mutton fat jade’.¹⁷² Such distance is not only physical but also cosmological, because Kunlun Mountains, which is the source of placer jade mined in the Yarkand River near Khotan, was believed to have been the land of immortals. Such a mystical source had given Khotan jade, on top of its prestige, a magical quality. However, exoticness only makes up a part of the preciousness of jade. As I have argued in the case of lapis lazuli and carnelian, being exotic alone does not make these materials precious. More importantly, they possess physical qualities appealing

¹⁷¹ Conversation with Jessica Rawson.

¹⁷² See note 164.

to the local aesthetics and material practices, and the distance over which they travelled made them even more exceptionally precious.

In fact, the majority of the ‘jade’ exploited in ancient China was mined at local placers. As mentioned earlier, Neolithic cultures in Liaoning and Inner Mongolia exploited the local *xiuyan* jade;¹⁷³ the source of Liangzhu jade was probably in the Tianmu 天目 Mountains of Lower Yangtze region;¹⁷⁴ and a number of jade weapons from the Late Shang tomb of Fuhao are made from *dushan* jade—a jade mined about 500 kilometres from Yinxu, where Fu Hao’s tomb is located.¹⁷⁵ Then what made the locally mined jades precious to the population who first created them?

I would argue that enormous time and labour invested in working the jade is a chief factor. Just like the control of a trading network is a source of power, so is that of mass production and subdivision of labour necessary for working jades.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ There is no confirmed source of jade for Liangzhu Culture but researchers generally agreed that it was mined locally. This is mainly because the microstructure of Liangzhu jade is rather different from those of the major known sources of jade, such as Khotan, xiuyan, and dushan just mentioned. Also, elemental analysis of Liangzhu jades shows a rather consistent pattern, suggesting that they were from the more or less same source. For reviews on the source of Liangzhu jade and further references, see Fang 2015, He 2005.

¹⁷⁵ KGXB, 1977.2.

As jade varies greatly in colour and texture, their ‘jade-like’ quality is to a large extent brought out by working. The production of jade is extremely labour-intensive and time-consuming. Jade is exceptionally tough because of its tight and dense structure composed of fine-grained fibrous crystals.¹⁷⁶ As a result, no kind of jade can be worked by cutting, flaking or pecking. The only way to shape it is to abrade it with harder substances. A simple way of doing this was to use sandstone saws. An alternative was to apply the abrasive in powdered form to saws of materials like bone, wood, or bamboo. The main cost was time. To render the smooth, ‘oily’ surface, intermittent polishing might continue indefinitely.

A speculation of the possible scale of jade industry in Neolithic China is provided by a jade workshop of the late period of Liangzhu Culture in Tangshan 塘山, near Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. There, archaeologists found about 100 half-finished objects of jade, as well as 400 tools of various types and sizes for sawing, carving and polishing jade.¹⁷⁷ Judging from the large number of tools and unfinished products, the workshop must have been of considerable size;

¹⁷⁶ Hardness is the ability of a material to resist scratch. On the Mohs scale for measuring the relative susceptibility to scratching of different minerals nephrite is rated at c. 6.5 by comparison with jadeite at 6.75, steel at 6 and diamond at 10. A mineral’s toughness is its ability to resist being fractured. On toughness scale, jadeite and nephrite both have a toughness graded as Exceptional (among Exceptional, Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor).

¹⁷⁷ Wang et al. 2002.

concentration of disciplined, skilled labour, perhaps with a degree of specialisation, was necessary for running a workshop of this scale. This cannot but be associated with complex societies organised as states, as have been generally agreed upon with regard to Liangzhu Culture. The emergence of prestigious material, namely jade, like that of gold and silver in Varna and Caucasus, was a part of growing social complexity and the formation of a new class of elites. In addition, the extended period of time required for working jade was only possible for sedentary societies. The Liangzhu elite chose jade to express their power and prestige, because to possess jade, they had to have the power to mobilise the resources needed to run a workshop probably of the scale of the one in Tangshan.

In fact, as Rawson has observed, not only jade but the major handcraft industries in early China—bronze, lacquer, silk—were all supported by large-scale manufacturing and sub-division of labour, over seen by the state.¹⁷⁸ It just so happened that the end products were also prestigious materials. Taking bronze as an example. Like the production of jade, making an elaborate bronze ritual vessel, from the procuring of raw material, creating and minutely decorating models and piece moulds, drying and firing them, casting, to final polishing, had

¹⁷⁸ Rawson 2015, 45; Ledderose 2000.

to be a long-term project.¹⁷⁹ Neither could it have been finished by an individual, but only by an army of artisans with tasks ‘rigidly assigned’.¹⁸⁰ As bronze ritual vessels were such important symbol of political, religious, and economical power throughout the Chinese Bronze Age, monopolising the bronze industry might well have the prerogative of the sovereign. As all these prestigious materials were produced in this mode, it is reasonable to assume that the preciousness of these materials to a great extent derived from the social control that made such mode of production possible.

This is, however, not how gold- and silversmiths work. Gold- and silversmiths work independently or in small workshops, because gold and silver can be worked simply by cold-hammering and cold-welding. Casting was also used; but because most gold and silver objects are relatively small compared with bronze vessels, there was no need for a huge supporting team with divided tasks

¹⁷⁹ The Shang and Zhou foundries are surprisingly small. See Houma. However, it is hard to estimate production scale from foundry remains. As Roderick Campbell points out, even though we can calculate the number of identifiable artefact fragments present on site, they would ‘overestimate the individual vessels represented (because the moulds for a single vessel inevitably produce multiple fragments)’. Campbell, 2013.

¹⁸⁰ The role of subdivision of labour and mass production in early China is discussed Ledderose 2000. Jessica Rawson further developed this idea as one of the fundamental aspect of Chinese culture and society, along with official organisation and writing system (Slade Lectures in Cambridge University, 2014). See also Introduction, notes 34, 35.

or a large-scale foundry. If the ancient Chinese associated prestigious materials with highly specialised large scale production, they might not consider gold and silver, which can be worked on a small scale, particularly precious.

3.3.3. The ideology of jade

The supreme position of jade in material hierarchy of ancient China corresponds with its role in ideology. Like gold in Western Eurasia, jade embodies exalted values and transcends the mundane into extraordinary; as in the case of gold, the symbolism of jade is closely inter-woven with its physicality. For example, being a symbol recurrent in Confucian discourse, jade is likened to a gentleman (*junzi* 君子)—both by rank the highest of their own kind. The physical qualities of jade are seen as symbolising the highest of Confucius' moral ideals, which lie at the core of Confucian teaching. Such a metaphorical link is beautifully articulated in *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* (Explaining Graphs and Analysing Characters), under the 'jade' entry:

[Jade] has five virtues:

there is warmth in its sheen, this is the manner of kindness;

its soft interior may be viewed from outside revealing (the goodness)

within, this the manner of rectitude;

its note is tranquil and high and carries far and wide, this is the way of wisdom;

it may be broken but cannot be twisted, this is the manner of bravery;

its sharp edges are not intended for violence, this is the way of purity.¹⁸¹

The physical qualities of jade I have discussed earlier—its sheen, translucency, sound, toughness—all stand for a gentleman's virtues. What is more, the process of jade working is also a part of jades' symbolism: the primary rock can only be transformed into a beautiful jade piece through endless abrasion and polishing; so must a man go through such ordeal to become a virtuous gentleman.¹⁸²

Such entangled relationship between the materiality and symbolism of jade is another illustration of what Malafouris calls 'thinking through, with, and about things':¹⁸³ one cannot appreciate the physical being of jade without being reminded of its symbolic values; likewise it would be difficult to construe the Confucian moral ideals without invoking the physicality of jade.

¹⁸¹ Quoted by Zheng 1959, 109.

¹⁸² 'Xue Ji', in *Book of Ritual*: 'The jade uncut will not form a vessel for use; and if men do not learn, they do not know the way (in which they should go).' 「玉不琢，不成器；人不學，不知道。」 See also 'Qi Yu', in *Book of Poetry*: 'there is our elegant and accomplished prince, as [a jade] from the knife and the file, as [a jade] from the chisel and the polisher!' 「有匪君子，如切如磋，如琢如磨。」 Translation by James Legge.

¹⁸³ See note 143.

Summary

It is interesting to note that, while both embody ideal qualities in both material and human, gold and jade, with their distinct materiality, inspire distinct values: for example, a ‘jade-like’ gentleman should have warmth and kindness that glows within (unlike the outward flamboyance of gold); his strength should be intended for ceremony (not military); and so on. The value of both materials was constructed through interaction between their unique materiality and their respective historical circumstances. Materiality, social practices and ideology, in each case, gave rise to and, over time, were deeply embedded within each other. It is, therefore, hard for new material, practices and ideas to penetrate this intricate web. This is probably why gold appears less prominent among the prestigious material for so long in ancient China. We will see in the next few chapters that from the second half of the second millennium, the importance of gold grew; and with the growing use of gold, China also started to adopt some elements of the visually-based system of power representation.

But gold never seriously challenged the supreme position of jade, as well as the system jade represents, in the material hierarchy of ancient China. Rather, what we see is an interplay of jade and gold—the traditional and the new prestigious materials. The gold and silver inlaid lacquer and bronze vessels, such

as those from the tomb the fourth-century Zhongshan tombs in Hebei province.¹⁸⁴ A most fascinating example is still the Liangdaicun cemetery.¹⁸⁵ The double-edged, taper-pointed sword from Liangdaicun M27 was not a part of traditional Chinese weaponry and was only introduced to China in the first millennium BC. This new type of weapon, however, was made of jade, as if they were jade ceremonial axes and *ge* knives found in the Shang tomb of Fuhao. But the scabbard is made of gold in the steppe fashion, just as the way it was placed next to the waist of the deceased, was in steppe fashion. The spectacular pendant sets found in the most luxurious M27, M26, M19 seem to share the same spirit. They consist of layers of jade *huang*—an ancient type of ceremonial jade—and imported carnelian beads. We shall observe similar phenomena in gold and silver artefacts from the sixth century.

¹⁸⁴ See p. - 125 -.

¹⁸⁵ See p. - 120 -

Chapter 4

Gold and Silver: the Steppe Language of Power

In the last chapter, I argued that the physical properties of a material provide potential for, and at the same time restrict, the ways, in which the material can be appropriated. In our case, the physical properties of gold and silver determine that the appropriation of these materials are visually-based, which gave rise to a tradition of expressing wealth, prestige and power through various superficial adornments on the body, weapons, and monuments. In ancient China, on the other hand, prestige materials, such as jade, provide different possibilities for manifesting status. Each system is so interwoven with other aspects of social practices and ideology in their own context that it would be difficult to introduce a new material into the existing hierarchy of materiality. This is probably why the role of gold in ancient China was not as important as it was in Western Eurasia.

However, there are periods in Chinese history, in which gold and silver did assume the role of prestige material. One of these periods is from the late Warring States to early imperial China (the Qin-Han empire). In this period, gold and silver appeared increasingly in tombs to enrich high-status objects. The next period that witnessed the increased use of gold of silver was the post-Han era. The non-Chinese rulers, who ruled north China during this period, brought gold and silver to the fore. These early phases paved the way for the prominent role of gold and silver during the Sui-Tang empire. In this chapter, I look at how, in these

early stages, gold and silver were appropriated, based on material remains of gold and silver objects from these periods. I argue that while adopting gold and silver objects, the Chinese gradually started to incorporate the Western Eurasian manner of representing power and prestige through visual display of glittering, colourful materials as in Western Eurasia; or reversely, in order to represent power and status to their neighbours, who were embedded in a visually-based system, the Chinese had to appropriate gold and silver as well. These gold-and-silver-using neighbours—the mobile peoples from the Arc in particular—played a key role in making the change take place, because it was through interaction with these people that gold and silver acquired more social and cultural significance in China.

4.1. The first phase: the first millennium BC

4.1.1. Context

The rapidly increased interaction between China and the mobile groups of the Arc and the steppes was probably due to a series of significant social changes on the steppe in the first millennium BC, including the advent of iron metallurgy and horseback riding. These new technologies fundamentally changed the lifestyle on the steppe. The rapid mobility facilitated by horseback riding gave rise to long-distance migration, as well as long-distance raiding and mounted warfare. Such intra-steppe interaction and alliance were crucial to the formation of complex society and the first nomadic empires. According to Di Cosmo, on the top of this new type of steppe society is a ‘military aristocracy, organised into

politically authoritative clans and lineages'. The source of power of this 'new type of leadership' was not only from military ventures, but also from trading and political networking with the sedentary society, which can be shown by the concentration of exotic goods, including huge amounts of gold, at, for example, Arzhan II.¹⁸⁶ These changes on the steppe, undoubtedly, led to military pressure against the Arc area bordering China; at the same time, they provided incentive for trading and political networking with the Chinese.¹⁸⁷

The pressure might have been mutual. The first millennium BC was also a turbulent period in China. The authority of the Zhou king was on the wane, whereas a series of independent polities, who were nominally vassals of the Zhou king, were involved in constant, heated competition with each other, until the powerful State of Qin unified China in 221 BC. In this context, alliances and military reinforcements with the outsiders became desirable. The Zhao State, for example, employed the Lin Hu, one of the tribes living on the northwest frontier,

¹⁸⁶ Di Cosmo 2002, 38, 85. See also p. 90.

¹⁸⁷ According to some scholars, the movement of steppe people towards the sedentary realm could also have been 'an eastern reaction to Alexander the Great's Central Asian campaigns' (Bunker 1993, 36), or climate change (Bokovenko 2003).

to provide cavalry forces in a battle against the neighbouring Zhongshan State.¹⁸⁸ By the late fourth century BC, most polities formally incorporated the military apparatus of the outsiders, including cavalry and riding outfit (tunic, trousers and boots), into their own armies, which rapidly became an indispensable part of the Chinese warfare.¹⁸⁹ Consequently, being the source of horses as well as that of the technical package required for mounted warfare, such as the keeping and training of the horses, horseback riding, archery, and so on, the importance of the outsiders further increased. The result of these antagonistic, as well as peaceful, contacts was the construction of the ‘Great Wall’ on the one hand, and the mutual assimilation on the other, especially in frontier states, such as the Qin, Jin and Yan States.

4.1.2. Appropriation of gold by the Chinese elite

Through such contact, the importance of gold—the material highly valued by the Arc people—became increasingly recognised by the Chinese elite. These outsiders, as mentioned in the first chapter, shared many aspects of their subsistence strategy and material culture with the steppe, including their taste for

¹⁸⁸ The Zhongshan polity is also one of the borderland polities that were influenced by the steppe use of gold. See below and footnote 199 for gold and silver objects from the tomb of Lord Cuo of the Zhongshan polity.

¹⁸⁹ Prusek 1971, 204.

gold and silver, as well as the notion of prestige and wealth associated with these materials.

4.1.2.1. The Liangdaicun Cemetery

The Liangdaicun cemetery, located near Hancheng, Shaanxi province, illustrates how the Chinese elites started to incorporate gold into their own ritual practices—in this case, in the mortuary context—during the late Western and early Eastern Zhou.¹⁹⁰ The cemetery was in use around the eighth century BC by the lords of the small Rui polity. The most luxurious tombs of the cemetery, M26, M27, and M19, yielded substantial sets of bronze ritual vessels with magnificent sets of bells and chimes, all traditional status symbols of the Chinese elite. The bronze vessel sets found in the Liangdaicun cemetery confirmed their owners' affinity to the Zhou regime and their corresponding rank in the Zhou social order after a major 'ritual reform' in the ninth century BC.¹⁹¹ For instance, the most

¹⁹⁰ For excavation reports of the Liangdaicun cemetery, see *Wenwu* (2007, 2): 3-14; (2007, 6): 3-22; (2008, 1): 4-21. Important finds from the Liangdaicun cemetery are published in the catalogue of an exhibition in Shanghai Museum (Shaanxisheng and Shanghai).

¹⁹¹ After the political crisis of this period, the Zhou introduced a series of attempts to formalise 'the key rituals—offerings to the ancestors and burials'—that involved the display and use of bronze ritual vessels. Rawson 2013, 6. The reform is characterised by the strong homogeneity in the number and types of ritual vessels found in elite tombs over large areas of the Zhou realm. The identification and significance of the ritual reform from late Western Zhou was proposed by Jessica Rawson in the 1980s and endorsed by Lothar von Falkenhausen. See *ibid*: 10ff.;

richly furnished M27, identified by archaeologists as the tomb of a lord of Rui, contained seven *ding* tripod vessels and six *gui* food containers; whereas M26, allegedly belonging to the concubine of the owner of M27, contained five *ding* vessels and four *gui* vessels.

But apart from the traditional possessions of the Chinese elite, Liangdaicun M27 also included a large number of exotics, mostly notably gold (fig. 4.1) and carnelians (fig. 4.2). These exotics have been well discussed by Jessica Rawson in relation to the Rui lords' connection with the Arc and the Eurasian steppes.¹⁹² Here I would only like to add that, by appropriating these exotic materials, namely gold and carnelian, the lords of Rui were at the same time appropriating the Western-style, visually-based representations of power. The gold artefacts found in M27 seem consistent with the steppe expression of power discussed in the last chapter, with two major focuses: body adornments and weaponry. The lord of Rui seems to have followed the Western Eurasian and steppe tradition of covering the body with gold, as body ornaments constitute a major part of gold artefacts from M27, all found close to the body of the tomb occupant. They include openwork plaques of various shapes, disc-shaped bosses (*pao*), archer's rings, and

Rawson 1985-87, 1990, Von Falkenhausen 2006, 78ff. In Rawson 2013, she discusses in detail the Liangdaicun cemetery in relation to the ritual reform.

¹⁹² Rawson 2017, 2013.

bracelets.¹⁹³ A group of ring-shaped gold plaques found near the waist of the deceased could well have been belt plaques, along with a jade dagger with a gold openwork scabbard next to the waist of the deceased,¹⁹⁴ —both symbols of elite steppe warriors as we have seen at Arzhan II. The lords of Rui were not alone in manifesting status through bodily display of gold, following the steppe fashion. From the tomb of a six-century Qin lord, Jing (577-537 BC), in Yongcheng, Shaanxi province, archaeologists also found gold disc-shaped bosses, openwork plaques, belt hooks, castings of small felines and birds.¹⁹⁵

4.1.2.2. The role of gold and silver in the Chinese elite context

As Rawson has argued, gold was valued first of all as exotic rarities acquired from ‘distant or even mystical realms outside’. The extravagant display of such exotics indicates that the lords of Rui and Qin polities attempted to visually express their connections with their neighbours in the north and west.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Shaanxisheng and Shanghai, cat. nos. 65, 77-89.

¹⁹⁴ Shaanxisheng and Shanghai, cat. nos. 75, 76.

¹⁹⁵ The tomb of Lord Jing of Qin was looted, but archaeologists still found these small gold ornaments. For report of the cemetery of Qin lords, see *WW* (1983, 7): 30-37; (1987, 5): 55-65. For gold objects from the tomb of Lord Jing of Qin, see Cai and Zhang 2016, cat. nos. 105-107. Gold artefacts, including castings of small feline and copies of hammered armour, were also found in tombs of lord of Qin in Li Xian in southern Gansu around the same period of the Liangdaicun cemetery. See Han 1995.

¹⁹⁶ Rawson 2013, 7, 73.

But apart from being merely exotic or something visually pleasing, gold seems to have also acquired significance in the local context. It is inferred from the fact that the use of gold seems to have been restricted to males.¹⁹⁷ The gold items described above were all from M27, whose male occupant is identified as the lord of Rui; whereas his concubines in M26 and M19 did not own any gold items, even though they did own huge quantities of exotic goods, most notably carnelian beads (discussed below). As I argued in the previous chapter, the display of the material body of the king, highlighted by the glittering gold, in the public space and the battlefield was a major source of power and legitimacy. Surely we must not be mistaken that this was the case in China in the first millennium BC. The chance of the lord of Rui engaging in actual hand-to-hand fight like a steppe warrior is slim—do not forget the sword was made of jade, whose ‘sharp edges are not intended for violence’.¹⁹⁸ However, given the shared categories of the gold objects found in Chinese elites tombs, I would suggest that the second half of the first millennium BC, gold seems to have gained growing importance as a part of the standardised male status possessions, at least in areas adjacent to the Arc area, such as the Rui and the Qin.

¹⁹⁷ According to Rawson’s observation, other male status symbols than gold include mirrors, chariot parts, and armour. *Ibid*: 8, 57.

¹⁹⁸ See p. 112.

Another trend we can observe from the late Western Zhou elite tombs is the taste for bright, contrasting colours, which is common in the prestige materials of Western Eurasia. The bright red carnelian beads, ultimately from the Indus Valley, played a significant role in the Liangdaicun cemetery. Huge quantities of carnelian beads, along with beads in faience and ceramics, cowries and bronze fish, made up the delicate hangings that decorate the outer coffin of M26, M27, and M19. The owner of M27 wore a splendid pendant set consisting of seven jade *huang* (jade arc) and carnelian beads. From M26 and M27, archaeologists also uncovered ornaments made of carnelian, agate, jet, and jades carved into various shapes (for example, openwork plaques, figurines in the shape of silk worms, fish, or birds). These different materials together create a dazzling visual effect with red, black and white.

The taste for contrasting colour, created by exotic materials, is even more prominent in a later Warring States tombs of the Zhongshan polity in Pingshan xian, Hebei province.¹⁹⁹ Apart from gold and silver body ornaments, such as disc-shaped bosses, belt hooks and various belt ornaments,²⁰⁰ the tomb assemblage of

¹⁹⁹ For the excavation report of the tomb of Lord Cuo of the Zhongshan polity, see Hebeisheng 1996a. Important finds from the tomb are published in the catalogue of an exhibition in Hong Kong Museum of Art (Liu and Zhang 1999).

²⁰⁰ Some of the bosses were found with leather backing, which, according to the excavators, could have been remains of leather armour Hebeisheng 1996a, 146ff. Gold and silver beads of

Lord Cuo (late fourth-century BC), gold and silver inlays were widely used to embellish bronze tables, bronze stands for panel screens, figurines, and chariot fittings. Some of these objects are clearly inspired by steppe iconography, such as silver-inlaid bronze figurine of a winged beast and a gold-and-silver-inlaid bronze stand depicting a tiger devouring a deer.²⁰¹ Also notable are a pair of gold and silver dog collars, found in one of the sacrificial pits, made of alternating gold and silver sections folded around the leather backing.²⁰²

4.1.3. Gold in political networking

The above-mentioned examples, namely the Rui, the Qin, and Zhongshan polities, all bordered the Arc and were almost for certain more susceptible to the steppe influences. Therefore, it is not surprising that the growing interest in precious metals is most visible in these regions. We must note, nevertheless, that such influences may have limited very much to these border areas. The richness

various shapes also have remains of leather belt. That is why the excavators interpret them as belt ornaments. *Ibid*, 152ff.

²⁰¹ Liu and Zhang 1999, cat. nos. 22, 25. Connection with steppe iconography is also evident in a group of six gold ornaments of feline inlaid with turquoise, also excavated within the territory of Zhongshan polity. They remind us of the feline ornaments from Arzhan II. *Ibid*, cat. no. 61.

²⁰² Liu and Zhang 1999, cat. no. 42, Hebeisheng 1996a, 154. For the sacrificial pit, see Hebeisheng 1996a

of gold at Liangdaicun M27, for example, is an exceptional case. As Rawson points out, it ‘is not equalled near the centre of the Zhou realm.’²⁰³

But how had these outsiders driven the Chinese to use more gold? One explanation could be that gold played a key role in the commercial and political networking between the Chinese and these outsiders. Such contact brought mutual interests: on the steppe side, there was a growing need for luxury goods for the rising elite class; on the Chinese side, the urge of expansion, as well as the need for horses and military reinforces, made connection with their nomadic neighbours desirable. Trade and diplomacy were inseparable in these exchanges, and gold served as an important medium for both. In a fictional account about King Mu (956-918 BC), who expanded the Zhou territory into the Arc, gold was prominent among the ‘gifts’ that King Mu sent to people from the West, included deer made of silver or gold, a silver bird, necklace of gold or precious-stone beads, and gold bullion’. In return the Chinese received horses, always at the head of any list, as well as cattle and sheep numbering in thousands.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Rawson 2013, 23.

²⁰⁴ The texts, *Mu Tinzi zhuan* (A Biography of the Heavenly Son Mu), composed in the forth-century BC). Quoted by Di Cosmo 2002, 132.

The importance of gold in such exchanges is confirmed by the rich steppe-style tombs ‘typical Scythian funerary assemblages’²⁰⁵ that appeared in greater number in the Arc areas from this period. As Di Cosmo has observed, in the aristocratic burials of this period, ‘precious metals predominate, while fewer weapons were buried, and the use of iron was more common.’²⁰⁶ Burials closer in date to the Liangdaicun cemetery are exemplified by the Jundushan site, near Beijing, dated from the early Spring Autumn to Warring States period.²⁰⁷ There archaeologists found gold ornaments, such as castings of felines (probably as garment appliques, like those found in tomb of Qin lords in Yongcheng, in Zhongshan State and Arzhan II), earrings, belt plaques, torques, and beads. But gold became more numerous from the late Warring States (fourth—third century BC). A great number of these sites concentrate in the Ordos region, notable sites including Nalingaotu in Shenmu, Shaanxi province; Aluchaideng and Taohongbala in Hangjin Qi; Xigoupan in Jungar Qi; and Nianfangqu village,

²⁰⁵ Di Cosmo 2002, 76.

²⁰⁶ Di Cosmo 2002, 84.

²⁰⁷ The date of tombs that contained gold ranges from the early (Inv. Nos. YYM2, 18, 250) to late Spring and Autumn period (Inv. Nos. YYM 151, 174). For gold objects from Jundushan, see Beijingshi 2007, 894ff., colour pls. 47-49; for dates of individual tombs, see *ibid*, 15, table 1.

Dongsheng City, all in western Inner Mongolia.²⁰⁸ There are also several recently excavated sites within the Zhou realm, such as the late Spring and Autumn tomb in Yimen, Baoji, Shaanxi,²⁰⁹ and the middle to late Warring States cemetery at Majiayuan, Zhangjiachun, Gansu—both only within two hundred kilometres from the ancestral cemetery of the pre-dynastic Qin State at Li Xian.²¹⁰ The gold items include ‘ornate headdresses, earrings, beads, garment appliques, belt plaques, scabbard covers, necklaces and bridle fittings.’

Many of the gold artefacts from these steppe-style tombs might well have been manufactured in China. Emma Bunker mentioned two plaques from the third century BC site of Xigoupan, with Chinese characters incised on the back indicating the weight of the gold. A cache of gold ornaments adorned with nomadic subject matter was found in Yixian, Hebei, the site of Yanxiadu. Many of the gold artefacts from Yanxiadu also carry Chinese characters incised on their

²⁰⁸ For Nalingaotou, see *WW* (1983, 12); for Taohongpala, see *KGXB* (1961, 1): 131-42; for Aluchaideng, see *KG* (1980.4): 333-38; for Xigoupan, see *WW* (1980.7): 1-10; for Nianfangqu Village, see *KG* (1991.5): 405-08, 389.

²⁰⁹ *WW* (1993, 10): 1-14.

²¹⁰ Gansusheng 2014; *WW* (2009, 10): 25-51; (2010, 10): 4-26;

reverse sides, indicating the weight of gold.²¹¹ What is more, Emma Bunker and Jessica Rawson have both noticed a few ceramic casting moulds excavated from Chinese bronze foundry sites resemble the design of gold artefacts from these non-typically-Chinese tombs.²¹² There are two iron daggers with cast openwork gold handle—one in the British Museum, said to be from Liyu, Hunyun, in Shanxi, the other excavated from Yimencun M2 (fig. 4.3-4).²¹³ Both swords have strikingly similar interlaced dragon design with (comma-shaped) cloud and pseudo-granulation pattern. Such a design can be matched on ceramic moulds excavated at a bronze foundry site at Houma, Shanxi (fig. 4.5). Clearly, the Chinese craftsmen attempt to imitate steppe goldwork with techniques they were more familiar with in the highly sophisticated bronze industry, and they managed to reproduce the visual effect of western goldsmith techniques, such as granulation, through casting. It is most likely, as Bunker argues, that the Chinese, such as the Jin, made gold objects specially to trade or gift-exchange with their northern nomadic neighbours.

²¹¹ For the two plaques from Xigoupan, see Tian and Guo 1986, 353, fig. 2, quoted by Bunker 1993, 45ff. For gold items from Yanxiadu, see Hebeisheng 1996b, , 715ff., colour pls. XXIX-XXXIII.

²¹² Bunker 1993, 34.

²¹³ See note 209 and Cai and Zhang 2016, cat. 120.

Gold might have also served as the reward for the outsiders who provided the military reinforces to the Chinese lords. One such example is the late Warring States cemetery at Majiayuan, near Tianshui City, Gansu. Like Yimencun M2, it is situated within the pre-dynastic Qin polity. The occupants of Majiayuan cemetery seem to have the same taste for glittering and bright-coloured materials for ornaments and weapons as the steppe and Western Eurasian people²¹⁴—that includes the lavish use of precious metals, gemstones and glass. For example, the body of the tomb occupant of tomb No.16 was adorned with gold ornaments from tip to toe in the steppe fashion: including headdresses, earrings, armlets, a torque, belt hooks and plaques of gold, as well as a silver insoles. The body is then covered with numerous blue and purple glass beads. In the same tomb, there were

²¹⁴ The excavators identify the owners of Majiayuan cemetery as Rong people, a group of semi-nomadic people who were neighbours of the Qin, living close to the Qin western border, according to transmitted texts. Although the Majiayuan cemetery is within the Qin territory, it shows many deviations from the standard Chinese practices. For example, many tombs at Majiayuan have stepped accesses to the shaft grave, head niches for the dead body, accompanied animal sacrifices (horses and oxen) and chariots within the grave. Although shaft tombs were common for the commoners and low ranking elites among the Chinese, steep stepped access was not known. For a general account of Qin burial practices for commoners and elites, see Thote 2013. The Chinese elites, the few who could afford horses and chariots, tended to bury them in separate pits, whereas only horse and chariot fittings are found in tombs. *KGWW* (2015, 4): 15-64. Neither is the extravagant use of gold at Majiayuan typically Chinese. Therefore, although we are not sure whether the owners of Majiayuan cemetery were indeed the Rong people, it is highly likely they were non-Chinese from Arc/steppe-influenced areas.

also iron spearheads with gold and silver inlays and a lacquer cup plated with gold, reminding one of similar items from Arzhan II.²¹⁵

However, what make the Majiayuan cemetery stand out is the use of gold and silver for chariot ornaments. Clearly chariots had special significance to the owners of the Majiayuan cemetery, as every grave excavated was furnished with at least one chariot. Gold, silver and colour materials were used to enhance the appearance of the chariot. An exquisite chariot unearthed from M14 is plated with gold and silver flat-sheet appliqué, gilt iron plaques and bosses all over the chariot, from the carriage to the wheels (fig. 4.6). Apart from gold and silver, the chariot is decorated with delicate hangings made up of strings of white, blue, and purple glass beads.²¹⁶ Some of the motifs, such as griffins and animal attack, are typical steppe motifs.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Cai and Zhang 2016, cat. nos. 29-43. The gold and silver plated iron arrowheads are illustrated in Čugunov, Parzinger, and Nagler 2006, cat. no. 16. For the excavation report, see *WW* (2010, 10): 18ff, figs.46-62.

²¹⁶ Large quantities of gold, carnelian, agate, turquoise, and glass beads (including eye beads) were recovered from most graves at Majiayuan cemetery. Judging from the use of such beads on the relatively well-preserved sample from M14, the excavators reasonably assume that they might have also been chariot ornaments. *WW* (2009, 10): 34ff.

²¹⁷ For example, a gold hair ornament with double-headed griffin from M16 (Cai and Zhang 2016, cat. no. 29) reminds us of a gold belt plaque with similar double-head design from Arzhan II (Čugunov, Parzinger, and Nagler 2006, cat. no. 18). For animal combat scenes, see, for example, Cai and Zhang 2016, cat. nos., 35, 36, 39, 40. For discussions of the gold artefacts

Raphael Wong suggests a wheeled vehicle from Pazyryk equipped with a felt carpet might have been a source of inspiration,²¹⁸ but the scale, intricacy and splendour of the precious materials used as chariot decoration at Majiayuan are unseen in other Iron Age burials in the Arc and on the steppes. Instead, I would rather suggest that the prestige of chariots is more likely to have been born out of connection with China. Although the horse-drawn chariot was one of the Western expressions of power, chariot burials in the steppe were more common in the second millennium than the period under discussion. On the other hand, since its introduction to China during the late Shang (around the thirteenth century BC), the chariot remained one of the key status symbols for the Chinese elite well into the late Warring States and early Imperial period, as we can see from the magnificent chariot pits of the First Emperor (259—210 BC). It is, therefore, not unlikely that the Majiayuan people served in the Qin army with roles related to chariot, as some have suggested.

The prominence of chariots at Majiayuan seems to be a combination of the significance of chariot in the local context combined with the steppe idea of

from Majiayuan in relation to the steppe, see Wong 2017 and Linduff and Yang 2013. Linduff and Yang claimed Issyk to be the main inspiration of Majiayuan, whereas Wong suggests that Pazyryk played an equally, if not more, important role.

²¹⁸ Wong 2017.

visually emphasising status-objects with glittering and colourful materials. As the gold artefacts, including the chariot ornaments, were perhaps manufactured by the Chinese,²¹⁹ this spectacular manner of representing chariots seems to have in return influenced the Chinese elites. We have, for example, from the tombs of Qin and Zhongshan lords, chariots with components and ornaments of gold.

Summary

In the specific historical context of the first millennium BC, interaction between the mobile and sedentary groups heightened. Gold played a significant role in these interactions, especially in the elite sphere of trade and political networking. The Chinese seem to have committed to manufacture gold artefacts for such purposes. During the process, the Chinese familiarised themselves with this exotic material as well as the prestige and wealth it represents in a different cultural context. As a result, the Chinese elite, especially those that had close connection with the outsiders, appropriated not only the material itself, but also this steppe manner of visually representing power and prestige through the display of gold and silver—as body ornaments, weaponry, and chariot fittings.

²¹⁹ Many of the gold belt ornaments—plaques and hooks—are cast in the same manner, with a combination of steppe and Chinese iconography and pseudo-granulation, as those from Yimencun M2, Xigoupan and Yanxiadu mentioned earlier. Also, Kathryn Linduff draws attention to the ceramic mould with animal-combat scene found in the tomb of Qin artisan near Xi'an. Linduff 2009.

4.2. The second phase: the post-Han era (3rd to 6th century AD)

The next period that features heightened interaction between China and their Arc and steppe neighbours, which also coincides with the increased use of gold and silver, was the turbulent period after the collapse of Han dynasty.²²⁰ In the beginning of the fourth century, various groups of outsiders from the northern steppes became the rulers of north China. Under their pressure, the Chinese regimes were pushed south towards the Lower Yangtze region. These outsiders, like those from the first millennium BC, belonged to the gold-using sphere of Western Eurasia and the Steppes. In this case, they did not only influence the taste of the Chinese elite through trade and political networking; but by being the actual rulers of north China, their visual manifestation of royalty and power through gold and silver became legitimate, and it continued into the Sui-Tang empire as a part of their legacy.

4.2.1. Gold and silver of the early Xianbei

As mentioned in the Introduction, most important among these non-Chinese rulers were the Xianbei. The Xianbei were originally from the Manchuria and the southeastern Mongolian steppe, which were a part of the Eurasian steppes

²²⁰ See p.64.

running from the Caspian Sea to Korea. This is the area where gold and silver were universally valued as status possession. So was it with the Xianbei.

Tombs associated with the early Xianbei, before they moved from their ancestral homeland of in southeast Mongolian steppe and the middle course of the Liao River to north China in the fifth century, were mostly simple pit graves or shaft tombs veneered by stone slabs (fig. 4.7). The dead were buried in a wooden coffin with joints of meat, clay and bronze cooking pots, iron weapons, and metal ornaments in the typical steppe fashion. The coffin and tomb chamber are often of trapezoidal shape, as it is a Xianbei custom to place the grave goods at the head of the coffin.²²¹

Gold and silver ornaments were found widely in high-status Xianbei tombs of this period. It is generally recognised that, stylistically, objects from this period were a continuation of the animal-style that flourished across the steppe from the first millennium BC. Their role as status symbols is clearly suggested by a gold plaque from Ulanqab in east Inner Mongol (fig. 4.8), which bears Chinese inscriptions reading ‘gold of Yituo’ (*Yituo jin*). Yituo (d.305) was a leader of the Tuoba Xianbei at the time of their ascendancy in central Mongolia and north China in the beginning of the fourth century. The plaque appears to depict a

²²¹ Dien 2007. For reviews of early Xianbei tombs in Liaoning and Inner Mongolia, see Sun 2001, Wang and Wei 2004, Jin 2005, Seo 2008.

symmetrical animal-attack scene in a highly stylised fashion that ‘can be regarded typically Xianbei’.²²² Apart from animal-attack, other typical steppe themes represented on Xianbei gold plaques include a single crouching animal in profile, as we can see on the horse plaques from Arzhan II, and a pair of symmetrical, confronted animals.²²³ Other typical steppe status items, such as belt ornaments, headdresses, and horse fittings, have also been found in Xianbei tombs.²²⁴ These objects show clearly Xianbei’s affiliation with the steppe gold-using tradition, iconographically and symbolically (fig. 4.9-10).

James Watt proposes that these steppe elements in early Xianbei art are the result of influence from the Xiongnu, with whom the Xianbei were in close contact from at least from the Han period. However, I would rather argue that the Xiongnu was not the only source of influence; rather, the Xianbei must have been in contact with wider communities of the Eurasian steppes, of which the Xiongnu were also a part. One example is cloisonné with tear-shaped enclosures for stone inlays—usually turquoise or coral, known as the ‘polychrome style’. Watt argues

²²² Watt 2004, cat. no. 32.

²²³ Watt 2004, 126. According to the Chinese historical accounts, the Xianbei tribes moved to Manchuria under Xiongnu pressure, but they defeated the Xiongnu in the second century AD and re-occupied large areas of southeast Mongolia, where many of the Xianbei tombs were found.

²²⁴ Watt 2004, cat. nos. 24-37.

that such an ornamental device shows Xiongnu influence because it was widely employed by metalwork identified as Xiongnu. However, ‘polychrome style’ is also common among the Scythian gold from Peter’s Great’s Siberian collection, as well as Samartian (6th—2nd century BC) gold exemplified by finds from the Datchi kurgan near the Azov Sea and those, as we shall see, from Tillya-tepe in Bactria.²²⁵ The same decorative style is employed in a pair of hat ornaments excavated from Ulanqab, Inner Mongolia, with animal head and antlers studded with turquoises. In other cases, without inlays, the enclosures were used as a decorative device on their own, as in the case of the *Yituo jin* plaque.²²⁶

Xianbei gold and silver from this period are also visually similar to the rich finds of gold from six tombs at Tillya-tepe in northern Afghanistan, dated the first century BC. The site of Tillya-tepe is attributed to the nomadic people, who were originally from the Eastern Steppes and took over the Hellenistic state in Bactria around 145 BC. The most notable find from Tillya-tepe is the gold crown with numerous thin, hammered disk- or leaf-shaped pendants, which swing when one moves (fig. 4.12).²²⁷ Several gold ornaments associated with the early Xianbei

²²⁵ Schiltz 2002. For other Samartian objects, see also Schiltz 1995, 1994.

²²⁶ Tear-shaped turquoise inlays are also found on the pairs of bracelets and boot buckles from Tillya-tepe (fig. 4.14) Hiebert, Cambon, and Museum 2011, 143, 267.

²²⁷ This ornamental devise with hanging gold leaves was probably inspired by Hellenistic gold funerary crowns, which imitate oak, olive or myrtle wreaths. See, for example, the gold crown

are decorated in this fashion (fig. 4.11). For example, a late-third/early-fourth century hat ornament excavated from Fangshan, Liaoning province, has an antler-like form with hanging leaf-shaped pendants (fig. 4.13). Another hat ornament from the tomb of Feng Sufu (d. 415 AD), a general who helped his brother Feng Ba to gain the throne of Later Yan (407—436 AD) in Longcheng (present-day Chaoyang, Liaoning province), has disk pendants.²²⁸ Similar headdresses have also been found in Silla tombs in South Korea dating from the fifth to the sixth century.²²⁹ In addition, a gold plaque excavated from Tongliao in east Inner Mongolia depicts a female figure flanked by two mythical creatures (fig. 4.15). The frontal position of the central figure, with strict symmetry of the monsters,

of the Macedonian King Philip II and the gold myrtle wreath of his wife Queen Meda. Kottaridē and Walker 2011. This decorative device was shared by the steppe people. For example, there is a gold tree with hanging leaves, dated fourth to third century BC, from Peter the Great's Siberian collection, now housed in the Hermitage Museum. It was found in the Altai and is attributed to Sakae Culture. Inventory no. Сн.1727-1/235.

²²⁸ Watt 2004, cat. nos. 37. For the excavation report of the tomb of Feng Sufu, see *WW* (1974, 3): 2-28.

²²⁹ Same type of crown ornament has been found in the Geumgwanchong Tomb and the Cheonmachong Tomb in Gyeongju. A pair of rectangular ornaments for the conical cap were made with the same decorative style. Ham, 2013: pls. 11, 12.

resembles the ‘dragon master pendent’ from Tillya-tepe.²³⁰ Even the openwork enclosures on the upper ridges of the plaque appear to be a stylisation of the manes of the dragons on the Tillya-tepe pendant (fig. 4.16).

Given examples shown above, it seems that the Xianbei were a part of a shared nomadic style that extended from the Central Asia steppes to Korea. As we have seen in all steppe cultures, the steppe was an open, dynamic system; it is susceptible influences from all directions—China and further west, such as West Asia and the Mediterranean—through commerce and political networking. This must have also been the case with the Xianbei.

4.2.2. Gold and silver of Northern Wei

The Xianbei’s affiliation with the gold-using tradition did not cease to exist after their power base moved from the steppe to north China. I am going to show that the Xianbei still employed the visually-based system in their expression of power by appropriating precious metals. Neither did the Xianbei cease contact with wider communities of the steppe. Many previous studies over-emphasise ‘sinicising’ policies of the Northern Wei dynasty, which, to a great extent, were

²³⁰ The Master of Animals is a very ancient composition adopted into the art of Achaemenid empire. The pendant from Tomb II at Tillya-tepe beautifully exemplify this composition. See Francfort 2012 for more discussion on the ‘dragon-master’ pendant from Tillya-tepe.

based on Chinese historical accounts written by Confucian literati.²³¹ These policies aiming at their Chinese subjects were certainly an important part of the Xianbei political campaign. But in recent years, Northern Wei is increasingly recognised as a multi-cultural, cosmopolitan empire. In such an empire, the steppe people must have also constituted an important component of the audience. So did the numerous diplomats, monks and merchants from as far as Central Asia, Persia, Rome, and India. It was to these people from varied cultural and ethnic backgrounds that the Xianbei rulers had to communicate their power effectively.

²³¹ According to the Chinese historiography, the ‘sinicisation’ of the Northern Wei climaxed at Emperor Xiaowen’s ‘sinicisation’ reform in the late fifth century. That included adopting a Chinese administrative system and a Chinese-style court. They sought to align themselves with the Chinese gentry by intermarrying Xianbei aristocrats with the Chinese gentry. The political reform was accompanied by the utilisation of cultural markers, such as dress, language, and moving the capital from the Arc (Pingcheng) to Luoyang within the core areas of the Central Plains. Through these drastic measures, the Xianbei rulers tried to portray themselves as the legitimate inheritors of the Chinese imperial tradition. Chinese elements were also incorporated into the Xianbei mortuary practices. For example, from the fourth century onwards, many Xianbei elite tombs adopted the Chinese-style domed brick tomb structure. See, for example, a tomb near Meidaicun in Inner Mongolia. *KG* (1962, 2): 86-87, 91; Su 1977. Xianbei elites tombs in Pingcheng (5th—6th century) are furnished, in the Chinese fashion, with lacquered wooden coffins, some of which decorated with Confucius subject matters (though the protagonists often wear Xianbei-style costumes, see a coffin excavated from Guyuan, Ningxia, described by Karetzky and Soper 1991, Bradford 2009, Ningxia 1988, and pottery figurines. For a summary of these different elements from excavated Northern Wei tombs, see Wu 2008, tables 1-3.

For these audiences, the visual expression of power with gold and silver would have been immediately recognised.

4.2.2.1. Gold and the Buddhism

The royal patronage of Buddhism by the Northern Wei rulers can be seen as a part of the visual package of their political agenda. The numerous Buddhist monasteries are rigorously described in *Luoyang Qielan ji* (Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Luoyang), composed in mid-sixth century. To the splendour of these monasteries, gold and silver contributed a great deal.

Buddhism was introduced to China during the later half of the Han Dynasty, but it only flourished from the fourth century under the protection of these non-Chinese rulers. Buddhism itself, originating in India and thriving along the Silk Road under the patronage of Kushan Empire (30—375 AD), belonged to the visual-based tradition of Western Eurasia. An important part of this tradition is image-making, which was largely absent in ancient China.²³² The Northern Wei rulers built the Yungang Caves on the key route to the capital Pingcheng, with imposing, monumental Buddhist sculptures in the likeness of the Northern Wei rulers themselves. As Tseng Chingying points out, this could have been a way of visually expressing the Northern Wei power to people who travelled to the

²³² Lectures by Jessica Rawson in the University of Oxford.

capital.²³³ Apart from monumental caves, Buddhist statues also became immensely popular for monasteries and private patrons. Many of these statues are plated with gold,²³⁴ following the instructions of Mahayana texts.

Indeed, gold and silver are highly prized in Mahayana Buddhism as one of the ‘Seven Treasures’ (*sapta-ratna*)—the others lapis lazuli, crystal, a white substance (pearl or cowrie), a reddish stone (red coral or carnelian), and perhaps emeralds and some other greenish stones. The ways to enlightenment prescribed by *Lotus Sutra* include ‘hav[ing] the image of Buddha made of the seven precious’; in *Western Pure Land Sutra*, the Buddhist heaven (‘Western Pure Land’ of Amitabha) was decorated with silk and the Seven Treasures. The overall visual effect of the Seven Treasures was supposed to be dazzling, with a combination of golden yellow, silver, lapis blue, transparent crystal, red, green, and in iridescent quality. As we have already discussed in the previous chapter, lustre and polychromy have been associated with the positive value judgment in Western Eurasia from the very beginning of the history.

The Seven Treasures, along with silk, had also been traded as precious items long before the advent of Buddhism. With the rise of the Kushan, a

²³³ Tseng 2012.

²³⁴ Watt 2004, 75, 76, 77, 128.

cosmopolitan commercial empire, with the merchant class in Central Asia being major patrons of Buddhism, a large number of luxury goods traded along the Silk Road flooded into Buddhist monasteries. Liu Xinru argues that these precious items were essential for the thriving of Buddhist institutions, because ‘the rich gifts from the merchants enabled Buddhist monasteries to build stupas [and temples] decorated with the Seven Treasures’; ‘and the beautifully decorated monasteries, evoking the paradises of the bodhisattvas, attracted even more worshippers and donors...’²³⁵

Under the royal patronage of the Northern Wei, Buddhist monasteries soon became the largest consumers of luxuries goods. Ruling elites, rich merchants and commoners alike made donations of exotic luxuries. In addition to the *Luoyang qielan ji*, archaeological records also confirmed the richness of Buddhist monasteries of this period. In a stone coffer excavated from the crypt of a Northern Wei pagoda in Dingzhou, Hebei, for example, archaeologists found Roman gold coins, Sasanian silver coins, objects and gold and silver, and a group of seven glass vessels.²³⁶ The extra layer of symbolic significance that Buddhism

²³⁵ Liu, Shaffer, and Norene 2007, 54.

²³⁶ For excavation report, see *KG* (1966, 5): 268-275. See, also the excavation report of Yongning Monastery, the grandest Buddhist institution in Luoyang during the Northern Wei, where archaeologists recovered pieces of gem beads, *Zhongguo* 1996.

endowed on these already precious materials further increased their value and enlarged their market.

4.2.3. Gold and silver vessels

I argue that the use of gold and silver may have also been an essential part of the visual package that the Xianbei rulers appropriated to establish their political legitimacy to a multi-cultural audience. But after the Xianbei moved into north China from the fifth century, the focus of display seems to have shifted from the body to the table. The typical nomadic assemblage of gold and silver, consisting of body ornaments and weapons, barely appeared in Xianbei tombs from this period. The old nomadic fashion of covering the body with gold and silver seems to have lost its central place in afterlife (and very likely in present life, too).²³⁷

Meanwhile, there seemed to be a growing interest in imported vessels made of gold, silver, and glass. Among the tomb assemblage of Feng Sufu mentioned

²³⁷ Admittedly, this might be due to tomb robbery as well as the Xianbei custom of burning the deceased's belongs at the funerary. The latter is recorded in Chinese historical accounts compiled in the second and third century. See 'Xianbei Wuwan zhuan' 鮮卑烏丸傳, in *SGZi*, 833. The claim may have been true to the extent that the custom was still practised by the Northern Wei imperial family on the funeral of Emperor Wencheng in 465: 'three days after the funeral of the emperor, all his clothes and belongings were burnt.' 「國有大喪，三日之後，御服器物一以燒焚。」 'Huanghou liezhuan' 皇后列傳, in *WS*, v.13, 328.

earlier, for example, there is a remarkably well-preserved glass bowl, which, judging from its soda-lime composition and free blown style, might have come from Rome.²³⁸ The Xianbei elites clearly associated prestige and wealth with the possession of such imported vessels. Yuan Chen 元琛, the Prince of Hejian 河間王 (d. after 497), proudly displayed in his residence in Luoyang

more than one hundred gold vessels and silver jars, about the same number of [gold and silver] bowls, footed containers, plates and boxes. Among other drinking vessels were several scores of quartz bowls, agate cups, glass bowls, ruby goblets—such marvellous craftsmanship was not to be found in China. All came from Western Regions.²³⁹

4.2.3.1. **The symbolic significance of gold and silver vessels**

The importance of imported luxury vessels in showing one's prestige and wealth is confirmed by material remains of such vessels from the mortuary context. For example, a group of silver and gilt bronze vessels were excavated

²³⁸ Watt 2004.

²³⁹ Yang and Wang 1984, 193. According to the same account, Yuan Chen also acquired horses from as western lands far as Persia. The year of birth and death of Yuan Chen is unclear. His last dated appearance in historical accounts was in 526, but he seems to have lived to an old age. This particular record, referring to his residence in Luoyang, must have been later than 495 AD, after Emperor Xiaowen moved the Northern Wei capital to Luoyang. See *WS* 20, 8; *BS* 19, 7.

from a cemetery in Pingcheng (fig. 4.19-20).²⁴⁰ Though clearly not Chinese, these vessels exhibit elements from diverse regions. Most of them are stem cups, a shape established in West Asia and the Mediterranean at least from the Bronze Age but less known in early China.²⁴¹ One of the gilt silver bowls with portrait medallion (fig. 4.17) is similar to a Sasanian silver portrait cup depicting the Sasanian king Bahram II (fig. 4.18), who ruled in the third quarter of the third century;²⁴² some also bear ornaments, such as acanthus leaves and grapevine scrolls, that derived from Greek and Roman art.²⁴³ According to Marshak, these disparate elements, along with the local Hellenistic legacy, were perhaps reassembled in Central Asia, particularly in Bactria.

In Western Eurasia and the steppes, luxury gold and silver vessels had long been associated with royalty and prestige. This had to do with the importance of feasting and drinking in these cultures. Feasting is an important occasion for aristocrats to impress their guests with generosity and benevolence, as well as their wealth and abundance, which gives legitimacy to their rule. Some scholars

²⁴⁰ For the excavation report, see *WW* 1977:9.

²⁴¹ There will be a more detailed discussion on the vessel shapes in the next chapter.

²⁴² Harper 1981, pl.2.

²⁴³ But according to Marshak, these vessels were most likely to have been made in Bactria, where these disparate elements, along with the Hellenistic legacy of Central Asia, were blended, Marshak 2004, 48. This phenomenon will be further discussed in the next chapter.

even argue that feasting played a crucial role in the formation of complex society, as it helped building the patron-client relationship, which was the key social bond in such societies. Essential for lavish drinking and feasting, apart from sumptuous, abundant food, is fine table service, usually made of glittering materials, such as precious metals, glass, and rock crystal.²⁴⁴

Apart from feasting, the consumption of alcohol was a source of legitimation of power in ancient Mesopotamia and Europe. Cupbearer, the person who served drinks at the royal table, is an honorific position reserved for people of highest birth and esteem.²⁴⁵ Cups, therefore, was endowed with special symbolic significance. In Greek mythology, for example, the cupbearer to the gods of Mount Olympus was Hebe, the daughter of Zeus and Hera. ‘Seated near Zeus... upon a golden floor’, she served them nectar in ‘cups of gold’.²⁴⁶

Drinking and feasting also played a key role in both Roman and Sasanian empires, being an innate part of the elite lifestyle as well as political apparatus. As Canepa argues, both empires used banquets for ‘political spectacle’. Luxury

²⁴⁴ That is the case even today in western countries and the Middle East. Even though dainty porcelain imported from China became enormously popular from the fifteenth century, it never took over the place of silverware and glass.

²⁴⁵ Altmann and Fu 2014, Aranda Jiménez et.al 2011, O'Connor 2015.

²⁴⁶ Homer, *Iliad* 5.1-5.

vessels of imperial banquet ‘participated in the wider celebration of the sovereign’s power and achievements’; ‘the protocols and various elements of the feast formed yet another common focus of competition, display and debate. The attendants, seating, and dining arrangements represent, in a tangible form, the ideals and power relations of both courts’ social world.’²⁴⁷ The importance of luxury vessels in these ceremonial banquets is indicated by the special attention paid to them by ancient observers. For example, Theo Simok described the marriage celebration of Maurice in 582 as:

The city... was garlanded with silver vessels; for they there were deep platters, basins, cups, bowls, plates, and baskets: Roman wealth was poured forth, and a luxuriance of golden adornment, the mysteries of the household, provided a spectacle to feast the eyes of all who wished.²⁴⁸

In Iran, royal wine banquets were known as *bazm*, at which

²⁴⁷ Canepa 2009, 182, 84.

²⁴⁸ Simokatta and (trans.) 1986, 1.10.10-12, quoted by Canepa 2009, 182. Canepa also quoted Corippus, who describes an imperial banquet just after the death of Justinian I (565 AD) with ‘golden platters on the purple tables, made even heavier with the weight of jewels.’ Corippus and Cameron 1976, 104-5, quoted in *ibid*, 184.

the king of kings served wine in crystal, gold, or silver cups decorated with images of Astral bodies, hunting, the king enthroned, or one of the xwarrah-manifesting animals.²⁴⁹

The symbolic significance associated with gold and silver vessels was shared by the steppe people. According to Herodotus's accounts on the origin of the royal Scythians, a drinking cup is among the four gold objects (the other three are a yoke, a sword and a plough) descended from the sky, signifying one of the major lifestyles of the Scythians—the shaman, the herder, the warrior, and the farmer. He also mentioned especially the cup-bearer and gold cups at the funeral of the royal Scythians.²⁵⁰ At Arzhan II, archaeologists found a miniature footed gold cup buried next to the man's dagger (fig. 4.21). A gold chain was attached to the bottom of the cup, which would allow the cup to be suspended from a belt, as depicted on stone statues found extensively on the eastern steppes.

4.2.3.2. Pictorial models of drinking and feasting

The significance of gold and silver vessels in visual display is double emphasised in pictorial representation. Images of drinking and feasting are widely spread in Western Eurasia. Such imagery had a long history, which can be traced

²⁴⁹ Melikian-Chirvani 1991, Abka'i-Khavari 2000, 82f., quoted by Canepa 2009, 186f.

²⁵⁰ Herodotus and Godley 1971, 202-05.

back to at least the Bronze Age.²⁵¹ But by the beginning of the sixth century, it seems to have become formalised and spread across Iran and Central Asia. As a rule, it depicts a high-ranking person seated on a carpet or on a divan, holding a drinking cup with two fingers, and surrounded by attendants and musicians. Notable examples include the murals in Balayk-tepe in Bactria (fig. 4.23), dated to the end of sixth century or the beginning of the seventh century,²⁵² and those in the ruins of Pendjikent (fig. 4.24), a Sogdian city that reached its height in the beginning of the eighth century.²⁵³ Both murals depict nobility feasting with cups in hand. A hemispherical gilt silver bowl, attributed to the Hephthalites of sixth or seventh century but found in the Perm region, portrays a royal couple sitting cross-legged on a carpet, holding stemmed cups with the thumb and forefinger,²⁵⁴ and finally, a stone tray, said to be found in Kashgar, dated late fifth to sixth century, depicts a man reclining against a cushion or a divan with a lobed drinking

²⁵¹ See, for example, the banquet scene in the Assyrian palace (fig. 4.22). The combination of banqueting and hunting was also popular in ancient Greek, associated with the cult of heroised dead.

²⁵² Al'baum 1960, Bekenitskij and Marshak 1979, 35.

²⁵³ For excavation report of the ruins of Pendjikent, see Belenitskiĭ et al. 1977, Belenitskii and Marshak 1973. For wallpainting in Sogdian cities including Pendjikent, see Azarpay 1981, Belenitskii and Marshak 1971, 1981.

²⁵⁴ Another hemispherical bowl in Freer Sackler Galleries, depicting the life cycle of a nobility, has a 'marriage scene', in which the male figure holds a cup in the same manner.

bowl in hand, while an attendant pours liquid into the bowl.²⁵⁵ In all above examples, the figures wear long-sleeved caftans with open necks, fastened with a belt, over trousers and boots—typical Central Asian riding outfit which became the generic costume of the Eurasian elites, including the Chinese, between the sixth to the eighth century.

These formalised banquet scenes might have derived from the Roman-Sasanian common aristocratic culture, where ceremonial drinking and feasting were mutually valued.²⁵⁶ But this particular model might have been more directly inspired by the Sasanians, whose empire already fell under the Islamic Conquest by the sixth century but still remained a model of imperial splendour for the Arabs as well as the steppe rulers of Central Asia. A gilt silver plate, dated to the Sasanian period, at Freer Gallery, for example, depicts the Greek god Dionysus

²⁵⁵ Watt 2004, cat. no. 99. Denise Patry Leidy attributes the stone tray to the Hephthalites, who ruled the area during the period, to which the object is dated, or to a local petty dynasty.

²⁵⁶ Although the symbolic significance of ceremonial banquets had a long history in West Asia (see note 251), Richard Ettinghausen argues that the representation of drinking scenes in Sasanian art seems to have been influenced by the Dionysian theme popular in Greek and Roman art, especially the female dancers (manaeds), panthers, and vine leaves and grapes—motifs associated with the Dionysian cult. One of the early surviving examples in Sasanian art is the mosaics in the palace of Shapur I in Bishapur, executed by Greek artists after Iranian sketches depicting a female dancer, a harpist, and various fruit (Sims, Marshak, and Grube 2002). According to Ettinghausen, the Sasanian most like transformed the meaning of the Dionysian motifs to fit the general Iranian fertility beliefs (Ettinghausen 1972, 5-6).

(here with female breasts) reclining on a carpet with beaded border under grapevines (fig. 4.26). He holds in his hand a shallow, fluted wine bowl that reminds us of the fluted silver bowls made in Iran and Central Asia since the Achaemenid period.²⁵⁷ Some of the elements, most notably grapevines, the carpet and reclining position, especially the gesture of holding wine cup, became staple elements of later feasting scenes produced in the post-Sasanian era. Apart from the royal imagery, many of the post-Sasanian silverware produced in Central Asia were imitations of the Sasanian court silver, which represent figures in the fashion and costume of Sasanian kings.²⁵⁸

Compared with actual banquets, these images provide more controlled space for conveying the cosmological views of people who created them, with carefully selected and choreographed elements with specific symbolic significance. Just like the artisans, who made the Sasanian court silver, paying special attention to reproduce the drapery of the king's costume, which might emphasise the soft, flowy texture of the highly-prized silk, Balayk-tepe and

²⁵⁷ Compared with Achaemenid fluted silver bowls, closer parallels of the depicted bowl are found in Eastern Iran (Russian scholars attribute them to Khwarezm, in particular), which were produced during and after the Sasanian period. See, for example, Smirnov 1909, cat. nos. 42, 45, 46, 47, 120, 286.

²⁵⁸ See, for example, a gilt silver plate in the British Museum (Inv. no. 1963.1210.3), one in the Israel Museum (Inv. No. 2002.110.77), and another one in the Hermitage (fig. 4.25) (Smirnov 1909, cat. no. 64).

Pendjikent murals reproduce the polychrome textiles with medallion design—a highly prized material produced in Iran and Central Asia—worn by the figures. Gold and silver vessels, which occupied a salient place (i.e., held by the figure in close proximity to the body), seem to be a key part of the imagery. Many scholars have noticed the specific manner of holding that was widespread across West and Central Asia.²⁵⁹ Y. A. Sher argues that, through this manner of holding—with the thumb and the index finger, the artists ‘intended to represent an aristocratism of a portrayed person by the softness of lines and somewhat elaborate curve [of fingers]’. Gold and silver vessels, along with the ‘aristocratic’ mannerism, were indispensable to each other in the representation of distinction and prestige.

As to the fingers, those who created these images also took care to reproduce the material, form, and ornamental details of the vessel, which might have been crucial to representing the prestige of the figures and the image itself. As archaeologists and art historians, we can therefore find parallels of the depicted vessels among material remains without difficulty. For instance, the Balalyk cups are goblets with a fluted body and a stem adorned with a beaded border—almost identical to a surviving example of the sixth century, now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York; the goblet is painted yellow, probably to represent gold. The Pendjikent murals depicted the kind of stemless oblong

²⁵⁹ Luo 2004 , 52ff., Sher 1966 , 68, Bradford 2009, 142ff., Hayashi 2003 .

drinking bowls common among Sasanian and Central Asian silver. The fluted cup with little dots on the rim, depicted on the Kashgar stone tray, almost faithfully reproduces the silver bowls allegedly produced in Khwarezm.²⁶⁰ Apart from drinking cups, the artisans also represented other gold and silver vessels, such as platters and ewers, for display, indicating the prestige associated with possessing and displaying such vessels in feasts.

The widespread presence of these imagery suggests that such a pictorial model, including the various status-marking elements represented in the picture, was widely recognised by the elite from the ethnically and culturally diverse communities of West and Central Asia. Gold and silver vessels, being a part of this package, appear to have not only had universal value, but become standard status symbols. It is, therefore, not surprising to find them reproduced across the area, and extensively exchanged until they reached China and the Perm region of Russia.

4.2.3.3. The appropriation of gold and silver vessels under the Xianbei rule

On the other hand, there is little evidence showing that drinking had equal significance in the development of Chinese society. Although offering alcoholic

²⁶⁰ See note 257.

drinks, along with foods, was a part of ancestral rites,²⁶¹ Rawson points out that drinking vessels, such as *jue* and *gu*, lost their dominant role after the demise of the Shang; as we can infer from the excavated ritual vessel sets, the focus of the ritual seems to have shifted from wine to food in the Zhou period.²⁶² After all, most Asian people lack the enzyme necessary for alcohol metabolism—some say the result of evolutionary adaptation in agricultural society.²⁶³ This might explain why the occurrence of alcoholism in Asians historically has been viewed as less prevalent than other populations. Finally, drinking was not encouraged under the strong influence of Confucian moral codes, which oppose any kind of excessive behaviour.

That is probably why the Xianbei nobility are notorious for their ‘excessive’ drinking in Chinese historical accounts written by Confucian literati. Originally from the Arc, the Xianbei appear to have been a part of the Western Eurasian tradition in terms alcohol consumption. It is therefore not surprising to find them

²⁶¹ The Chinese wine was not pressed from grapes, which are not native to China, but made from fermented grain or herbs. For alcoholic drinks in ancient China, see McGovern et al . 2004.

²⁶² Rawson 2009 , 34.

²⁶³ This enzyme is called aldehyde dehydrogenase (ALDH), which catalyses the conversion of acetaldehyde to acetate. The lack of ALDH is thought to produce the facial flushing reaction and uncomfortable sensations, a response to deter further drinking. Suddendorf 1989 . For its significance in evolutionary adaptation, see Laland, O’dling-Smee, and Myles 2010 .

appreciating gold and silver vessels, which are made of materials they admired and intended for functions that were already a part of their own culture. Other than possessing and displaying actual gold and silver vessels, the Xianbei were also aware of the pictorial model described earlier, which standardised the representation of gold and silver vessels in relation to high status. In both cases, the imported luxury vessels were tools the Xianbei appropriated to visually express their prestige—either through actual drinking and feasting, or through imagery.

One such example is a late fifth-century lacquered wood coffin from Guyuan in southern Ningxia (fig. 4.27).²⁶⁴ Though the context of the tomb and the identity of the tomb owner is lost, it is likely that the coffin belonged to a member of the highest-ranking elite of Northern Wei.²⁶⁵ The Guyuan coffin was

²⁶⁴ Ningxia 1988, 15, Bradford 2009, 6f. But some date it to the years 467-470, which is based on a Sasanian silver coin, attributable to King Peroz (459-84), from the same tomb, Karetzky and Soper 1991. In any case, it cannot be earlier than the second half of the fourth century.

²⁶⁵ Judging from the quality and design of the Guyuan coffin, its owner must have been a member of the Northern Wei elite. This is because, as Rosalind Bradford has also noticed, they are very similar to those of the lacquered panel screen excavated from the contemporary tomb of Sima Jinlong (after 420-484 AD) in Pingcheng (Bradford 2009, 6). Sima Jinlong descended directly from the Jin royal line on his father's side; his mother was a Northern Wei princess; he himself served as a high-ranking general in the Northern Wei court. The lacquered panel screen from his tomb is described in Watt 2004, cat. no. 69. See also *WW* (1972, 3): 20-33, for the excavation report.

covered with an intricate array of motifs, many of which have western origins, but most relevant to the discussion of the current thesis is the ‘portrait’ of the tomb occupant on the front panel. The so-called ‘posthumous portrait’ of the deceased in tombs only started to appear in the third and fourth century in areas bordering the Arc—that is, Gansu, Liaoning, and Koguryo—with frontal images of the tomb occupant (and sometimes the spouse as well) on the coffin or tomb mural, which might have also been a part of the visual package inspired by western practices (figs. 4.28-29).²⁶⁶

The main figure is seated on a couch with panel screen within a Chinese-style wooden building, flanked by attendants on either side; he holds in the right hand a round-bottomed cup, and in the left hand a flower-like object; in front of him are food vessels set on a low table. As Rosalind Bradford has also noticed, his gesture of holding, with the thumb and the forefinger, bears striking similarity

²⁶⁶ See, for example, Dingjiazha Tomb 5 in Gansu, Zheng 1995 ; a tomb in Yuantaizi, Chaoyang, Liaoning, *WW* (1984, 6): 29-45; and Dong Shou’s (357) tomb in Anak, Koguryō 1997 in North Korea (fig. 4.28), and the tomb of a prominent Koguryo official (d. 408) at Tokhungri, near Pyongyang, Chaoxian and Chaoxian 1986. Wu Hung has given a detailed discussion the development of the imagery of the deceased, which he equated with the so-called ‘spiritual seat’ of the Han. The Han ‘spiritual seat’, exemplified by the one at Mawangdui Tomb 1, however, only consisted of an empty seat and food and drinking vessels on the platform. The depictions of the deceased, given their late appearance and borderland location, might well have been inspired by the western visual tradition.

to the gestures depicted in the Central Asian examples described earlier;²⁶⁷ meanwhile, the round-bottomed cup resembles similar vessels popular in Iran and Central Asian, which have also been found in Pingcheng (fig. 4.30).²⁶⁸ What is more, the gesture of the figure's left hand, holding a flower-like object with two fingers, is also reminiscent of models from the West. It finds parallels in portraits of the members of the Sasanian royal family (fig. 4.31),²⁶⁹ which are dated to the second half of the third and the first half of the fourth century. Like the posture of the legs, this gesture was widely adopted in the Sasanian-influenced areas in Central Asia, as we can see on the central medallion of a Hephthalite gilt silver bowl in the Freer Gallery (fig. 4.32).²⁷⁰

Finally, the rigid frontal position—with knees wide apart and only toes touching the ground find closest parallels in the official portraits of Sasanian kings. The Sasanian rock reliefs At Naqsh-e Rostam, for example, has a figure of

²⁶⁷ Bradford 2009, 142f.

²⁶⁸ Watt 2004, cat. no. 64. Unlike the other medallion bowl, this one is without any trace of a soldered foot. See also a shallow glass bowl excavated from the tomb of Feng Sufu (Watt 2004, cat. no. 42), c.f., note 238.

²⁶⁹ This is judged from the royal headdresses worn by the figures and the fine workmanship of the vessels. Harper 1981, 24, Trever and Lukonin 1987, 53. The Sasanian medallion bowls were probably inspired by similar bowls of the Romans. See, for example, the Lucinius I and Lucinius II bowls (made c.a. 321/22 AD) (Kent and Painter 1977, cat. nos. 1, 2).

²⁷⁰ See note 254.

Bahram II (276-293), seated full face with his sword held vertically between his legs. His legs, ‘arranged symmetrically, are bent outwards at the knees, forming a sharp angle’,²⁷¹ just like the portrait on the Guyuan coffin. Such images, interpreted as ‘enthronement’, are also reproduced on the third- and fourth-century Sasanian rock reliefs at Bishapur (fig. 4.33) and Naqsh-I Rostam.²⁷² Towards late and post-Sasanian period, this posture appears extensively on the silverware produced in Central Asian in imitation of Sasanian court silver.²⁷³ For instance, the image of a Sasanian king in this posture is carved on the central rock crystal medallion of a gold plate with glass and rock crystal insets (fig. 4.34), presently in the in the Bibliothèque Nationale.²⁷⁴

All these three elements had their root in the Roman-Sasanian royal imagery. For this reason, they were borrowed and appropriated, even in the post-

²⁷¹ Harper 1979 Harper 1979, 50.

²⁷² *Ibid*; Duchesne-Guillemin 1966, 66, Lukonin 1969, 165ff.

²⁷³ Another famous example is a gilt silver plate found in Strelka, Perm, Russia, a oval silver bowl in Walter Art Gallery, Baltimore, and another silver plate in the British Museum. Harper 1979, pls. II, V, VIII.

²⁷⁴ Some believe that the plate is a product of the Sasanian court workshop, but I agree with Providence Harper that the use of coloured glass or paste inlays on objects of gold does not seem an orthodox Sasanian practice; rather, it had wide popularity in the art of steppe peoples such as the Scythians, Samartians, and Huns, known as the ‘polychrome style’, which I described earlier in the chapter.

Sasanian period, by people in Eastern Iran and Central Asia to represent their own idea of high status. In the Sasanian and Central Asian contexts, each of these elements apparent had their own significance and meaning. For instance, the posture of the legs was only associated with the enthronement scene, whereas the gesture of holding the cup was associated with banquet scene. But on the Guyuan coffin, they are juxtaposed in the same pictorial space.

Although their meanings must have been transformed, there is no doubt that the prestige of gold and silver, being an indispensable part of the imagery, was generally accepted. This imagery, with the main figure holding a luxury gold or silver vessel, became a formalised part of the posthumous portrait, often in the form of murals, of the Xianbei elites from the sixth century. For example, in a Northern Qi tomb in Shuozhou, near Pingcheng, one of the tomb occupants is depicted holding in her right hand what appears to be a lobed elliptical bowl (fig. 4.35).²⁷⁵ Drinking bowls of elliptical shape formed a major category of silver vessels made in Sasanian Iran and its neighbours in the sixth and seventh century.²⁷⁶ Material remains of bowls like this were also present in Pingcheng.

²⁷⁵ The part depicting the object held by the male is damaged, *WW* (2010, 12): 26-42.

²⁷⁶ See, for example, two such bowls/cups at Freer and Sackler Galleries. S1987.137, S1987.116. C.f. Smirnov 1909, nos. 76, 77. The figures in the Pendjikent murals also hold long, elliptical cups, see note 253. Some examples are made of glass, crystal, agate or jade—for example, the twelve-lobed elliptical glass cup is on the lower floor of the middle section of

For instance, an eight-lobed elliptical silver bowl (fig. 4.36) was found in a habitation site south of the old city of Pingcheng. In addition, on the right of the couple is a male attendant holding on a lacquer tray a footed cup like those found in Pingcheng. In another Northern Qi tomb of Xu Xianxiu (502-571) in Taiyuan, Shanxi, Xu and his are also depicted ceremonially holding a drinking cup with a thumb and a forefinger, although the cups appear to be made of lacquer (fig. 4.37).

Summary

In both the first millennium BC and the four hundred years of turbulent post-Han period, people from the steppe and the Arc played the crucial role in introducing gold and silver to China: in the former case, they networked extensively with the Chinese lords of the borderland polities; in the latter case, they became the rulers of north China. But in both cases, it was not just gold and silver objects that were introduced. More importantly, it was the manifestation of power and status in a manner distinct from the Chinese tradition. I argue that the main difference is the visual-focus approach of the steppe and Western Eurasia, which was realised through the appropriation of gold and silver—first as body ornaments, and then through ceremonial drinking and feasting with splendid gold

Shōsō-in (Harada, 1929 , cat. no. 398), and those from the Hejiacun hoard (Qi and Shen 2003, cat. nos. 9-11). For general discussion of this type, see Qi 1999, 75ff, 383ff, Gyllensvärd 1957, 57ff.

and silver vessels. Pictorial representation, being a part of the visual tradition, crystallises and consecrates those ephemeral moments, in which the symbolic significance of these objects was unfolded in their actual use.

The Xianbei, having been a part of this visual tradition and still being in contact with the rest of Eurasia in the fifth and sixth century, quickly took up not only the contemporary Eurasian practices of using gold and silver, but also the pictorial models that represented the prestige associated with such practices. While the Xianbei appropriated gold and silver vessels to mark their status in front of an audience from the steppe and Western Eurasia, who understood the visual language, the prestige of such vessels was at the same time increasingly established in China

Chapter 5

Gold and Silver in High-Status networking

Introduction

This chapter looks at the shared types of gold and silver objects found in widely distributed locales across Eastern Eurasia. These objects played important roles in cross-cultural, high-status interactions. These interactions may have given rise to the use of similar types of objects in various geo-cultural areas of Eastern Eurasia.

As already mentioned in the introduction, the period under discussion was an age of great empires. These empires were capable of funding great wars, and diplomacy on the equally grand scale. These high-status interactions took many forms, for various purposes: regular exchanges of embassies and hostages, inter-dynastic marriages, oaths of allegiance, investitures, negotiation and signing of treaties, and so on. As a rule, the delegation stayed in a foreign court for an extended period, during which the members attended court audience and were treated to state banquets on arrival and departure, accompanied by lavish entertainments. Elite hostages, often sons and younger brothers of rulers, were dispatched to the court of the patron, as a widely accepted Eurasian practice of guaranteeing covenants between rulers. These young boys served as pages at the Tang court and were therefore culturally familiar with the Tang. Diplomatic

envoys may also ‘remain in the imperial guard corps’, as a form of detainment, ‘functionally serv[ing] as hostages’.²⁷⁷ Finally, Turko-Mongol bridle officials,²⁷⁸ who served at the Tang capital, would have intermixed with the ranked military officers and members of the imperial guard corps, attending ceremonies and activities intended for internal and foreign audiences alike.

These interactions undoubtedly resulted in an intimate knowledge of each other’s court culture, which, in turn, gave rise to a common discourse within the close-knit community of Eastern Eurasian elites from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Similarly, Matthew Canepa argues that a so-called ‘common aristocratic culture’ was developed throughout the three-hundred-year’s co-existing history of the Roman and Sasanian empires. According to Canepa, mutually recognised discourse of ritual and art was necessary for sovereigns of the two states to ‘communicate complex, multivalent, and even contradictory messages about their identity’; they would also be able to ‘address, compliment,

²⁷⁷ See the examples of Sun Wangrong of the Khitan and Ashide Yuanzhen of the Türks, both former hostage-pages serving at the Tang court. When the Khitan rebelled against Empress Wu in 696, Sun used his knowledge of the Chinese language to help defeat approaching troops ((JTS 199b:5350; XTS 219:6168; ZZTJ 205:6505–7). Ashide rebelled against the Tang to form the Second Türk Qaghanate (XTS 112:4170–1; Zhang 1986, 101f.). For more discussion on hostage taking in Eastern Eurasia, see Skaff 2012, 130ff., 197f.

²⁷⁸ For bridle officials and their roles in the Tang Empire, see p.68.

challenge, or insult their counterpart in a language that had meaning for both' and 'even to cultivate similar tastes and leisure activities'.²⁷⁹

The common aspects of the Sui-Tang empire and with their steppe neighbours (mainly Turkic people during the period under discussion) have been well surveyed by Jonathan Skaff, which include political ideology, the patron-client relationship underlying political networking, diplomatic rituals, material symbols of status and political affiliation (such as investiture paraphernalia). Matthew Canepa, in one of his papers on cross-cultural interactions in the ancient world, also briefly examines the shared representation of kingship in an even wider context—across the Eurasia—among elites of Rome, Sasanian Iran, and Sui-Tang China. Canepa focuses especially on the visual aspect of kingship—grand architectural settings, royal art, sartorial experiences and ritual as an expressive whole.

Based on their studies of elite-level, multi-cultural interaction, I will explore the role of gold and silver in this chapter. I argue that it was on these diplomatic occasions that the Tang were most committed to use gold and silver. The Eastern Eurasian network, apart from Sui-Tang and Turkic empires, which Skaff has drawn attention to, also included the Tibetan empire and lesser

²⁷⁹ Canepa 2009, 81, 130.

kingdoms like Korea and Nanzhao. Their shared diplomatic rituals, as described by Skaff and Canepa, had a great emphasis on visual splendour, to which gold and silver contributed a central part. This chapter will focus on the use of gold and silver in three essential aspects in diplomacy: court display, ceremonial drinking and feasting, and equestrian activities. To join the Eurasian network of power, the Chinese had to incorporate Eurasian elements of diplomatic ritual, including the use of shared types of gold and silver items. In the meantime, the value of gold and silver was recognised through continuing engagement with gold and silver objects in these high-status interactions. Just like the value of bronze vessels derived not only from their sheer size and elaborate ornamentation, but also from their history of ownership and the occasions on which they were used, the prestige of gold and silver can be attributed, to a great extent, to the elite context, with which they were most commonly associated.

5.1. The splendid court: the setting

The importance of gold and silver in visual display must be understood in a context of Eurasian elite culture. During the period under discussion, visual aspects of the elite culture, including that of China, were much emphasised. As Skaff points out, the creation of splendidly decorated court was an essential aspect of medieval diplomacy.

Skaff's description of the splendid court focuses on the architecture and interior decoration. He argues that, for the sedentary empires, such as the

Byzantine, the Sasanian and the Sui-Tang empires, monumental architecture was a principal visual expression of the imperial power to impress both domestic and foreign audiences;²⁸⁰ whereas, ‘as pastoral nomads, Turko-Mongol rulers often relied on mobile forms of visual pageantry, such as beautifully decorated tents and lavish thrones.’²⁸¹ The custom of holding court in a large, elaborately decorated tent was rather ancient in Inner Asia. The tent, in which the court was held, tended to be huge and could easily accommodate more than one hundred people.²⁸² The sheer size of these tents, on the one hand, was out of necessity—the higher the rank of a patron is, the more clients he or she was more likely to

²⁸⁰ The heart of the Byzantine imperial power, for example, was expressed through the great architectural complex, consisted of the Great Palace, the Hippodrome (with the Egyptian obelisk), Augustaion (with the column of Justinian), and Hagia Sophia. See Canepa 2009 for a description of the city of Constantinople as the stage for the visual expression of the Byzantine power. In Iran, the Taq-i Kisra, the royal palace built by the Sasanian king Khusraw I (r. 531—579 AD) in Ctesiphone, was one of the wonders of the ancient world, not to mention the magnificent royal rock reliefs at Naqsh-e Rostam, Bishapur, and Taq-i Bostan. For the expeditions to Ctesiphone, see Breck 1931, 1932, Fino 2010. For an in-depth discussion of the Sasanian rock reliefs in relation to the royal identity, see Harper 2006. In China, Taiji Palace and, later, Daming Palace served as the major stages for the Tang political theatre.

²⁸¹ Skaff 2012, 150.

²⁸² For example, Skaff mentions Uighur golden tent, which held one hundred people, and the tent that the Sui Emperor Yangdi erected, in order to impress Qimin Qaghan, which is said to hold either one or several thousand people. Skaff 2012, 150. Also, Chinese historical accounts mention a huge felt tent presented by the Tibetan *btsanpo* Mangsong Mangtsan (r.650-676) to the Tang emperor, Gaozong, measuring about 1.5 metre in height and 39 metres in width.

have; on the other hand, as an object of display itself, a huge tent could create even grander displaying, with more room for decoration.

The Golden Tent was unequivocally associated with the qaghans of Turko-Mongols, including the Orkhon Turks, Uighurs,²⁸³ Khazars,²⁸⁴ and later the Qurai Turks and the Mongols,²⁸⁵ though the Tibetans, the Abbasid caliph, and Charlemagne, emperor of the Franks, had equivalents of the golden dome at the symbolic centre of their capitals.²⁸⁶ Throughout the Middle Ages, ‘golden tent’ seems to have become a universal symbol of kingship across Eurasia.²⁸⁷ The symbolism associated with the Golden Tent was so powerful in the Turko-Mongol tradition that, even in the Victoria Age, Lord Auckland, the British Governor-General of India between 1836 and 1842, had to live and hold *darbar*

²⁸³ XTS: 217b:6149; ZZTJ: 202:6403, 246:7947; Minorsky 1948.

²⁸⁴ Dunlop 1954, 98.

²⁸⁵ Allsen describes in great detail the later medieval Mongol qaghans’ golden tents, which were lined with gold brocade (*nasj*), Allsen 1997, 13-15. The Kereit khan’s court had a ‘sumptuous gold palace-tent with golden vessels and a special staff’, which was captured by Chinggis after his defeat of the Kereit, Atwood 2004, 296; c.f. Dunlop 1954, note 38.

²⁸⁶ For the Tibetan gold tent, see note 282, 291 and 292. The Abbasid caliph’s Heavenly Dome of the Palace of Gold, under which was his throne, was in the exact centre of his circular-plan capital, Baghdad.

²⁸⁷ Skaff 2012, 150, note 29., Beckwith 2009, 148, note 29.

(ceremonial or formal meetings) in a tent, following the Moghul practice, during his official progress up-country from Calcutta.²⁸⁸

As the name suggests, gold played a prominent role in the symbolism of the golden tent. As a rule, these tents are lavishly adorned with gold. Menander the Protector provides a detailed account of how gold was used to adorn the Türk court in 569 AD. The Byzantine envoy Zemarchus was received by the Turk Sizabul in three different tents, all enriched by gold and multi-coloured silk hangings. The first tent had a ‘golden throne with two wheels, which could be drawn by a horse’. The second tent had a gold divan made of solid gold; ‘in the middle of the building were golden urns, water sprinklers and also golden pitchers.’ The third tent had ‘gilded wooden pillars and a couch of beaten gold which was supported by four peacocks. In front of the dwelling were... wagons containing many silver objects, dishes and bowls, and a large number of statues of animals, also of silver and in no way inferior to what those which we make.’²⁸⁹ The Chinese monk Xuanzang, who visited the Western Qaghan Ton Yagbhu half

²⁸⁸ The grand progress is recorded with vivid details in Emily Eden’s (Lord Auckland’s sister) letters, who accompanied George, Lord Auckland, in India and served as his consort. The sedentary Lord Auckland and his sister suffered deeply from the tent life, and they nicknamed their tents ‘the Folly Palace’ and ‘the Misery Hall’, respectively. Eden 1930.

²⁸⁹ Blockley 1985, 119ff.

a century later, was equally impressed by the ‘large tent embellished with golden flower ornaments that blind the eye with their glitter’.²⁹⁰

The Tibetan *btsanpo* had marvellous gold tents too, which could hold several hundred people.²⁹¹ The Tibetan tents were made of a special kind of felt made from sheep and yak wool. This textile was a prized gift sent by the Tibetan *btsanpo* to other Eurasian rulers. The tent was adorned with ‘gold dragons, tigers, and leopards’,²⁹² though we are not sure whether these referred to gold statues like those found by Zemarchus in front of Turkish tent, or gold appliqués in the shape of animals like the group of gilt silver repoussé figures, including eight *kinnaras* (half-human, half-bird celestial musicians in Indian mythology and Buddhism)²⁹³ and eight phoenixes. As Heller suggested they were probably once affixed to a wooden casket, like similar gilt silver plaques excavated from a

²⁹⁰ Beal 1911, 42.

²⁹¹ Demiéville 1952, 202-3.

²⁹² XTS: 217b. See note 282 for details of such a gift.

²⁹³ According to Edward Schafer, in Eastern Asian art *kinnara* is often confused with *kalavinka*, which is also a half-human, half-bird mythical creature, though the two are distinct and unrelated Schafer 1963, 103. Here I refer to them as *kinnara*, following Amy Heller, Heller 2003a, whereas the Chinese scholars, such as Huo Wei and Xu Xinguo, refer to the same group of figures as *kalavinka*.

Tibetan-period cemetery in Dulan, Qinghai.²⁹⁴ However, it is not impossible that they were once a part of tent decoration.

The fact that both Menander and Xuanzang paid close attention to gold and silver in their descriptions of the Turkish court indicates that they have some non-trivial, shared meaning for those who created them. Gold appears to have been an essential element of court display for the Turko-Mongol rulers. As a universally prized material (in this case both by the Byzantines and the Chinese), gold undoubtedly enhanced the beauty and grandeur of the court. As ornaments, gold was used to plate the interior, such as wooden pillars. Sets of gold and silver vessels, which we will soon discuss in more detail, and sculptures were displayed in central space of the court—in the middle of the tent or in the open area in front of the tent. The gold throne was another crucial element. The throne is a universal symbol of sovereignty, which was often represented on coins, across Central and West Asia.²⁹⁵ The throne of the Sasanian kings, who served as the model of kingship in the whole area, was probably made of gold, as the chairs for other great kings and clients in the throne room in the royal palace of Ctesiphon are

²⁹⁴ A wooden casket covered with thin sheet of gilt silver was found in tomb M1 at Reshui, Dulan, Qinghai. The gilt silver side panel with a standing phoenix resemble the phoenix plaques in the Pritzker Collection. Tong 2008, 109ff., Xu 1994.

²⁹⁵ For the depiction of thrones on various media as a part of royal propaganda in West and Central Asia, see Harper 1979.

said to be ‘golden’.²⁹⁶ The throne, combined with glittering gold, must have emphasised and elevated the physical presence of the ruler.

Apart from the architecture and interior decoration, the material body of human was also a part of the splendour court. The arrangement of human beings in the court, as with the architecture and interior, was a manifestation of ideal cosmology. Despite the apparent differences in religion and ideology, Canepa and Skaff recognise many shared aspects of the cosmology of the Sasanians, the Chinese, and the Turko-Mongols. For example, rulers of all these empires saw themselves as the sole mediator between the heaven and the earth, divinely mandated, ruling the world in its entirety. With the growing interaction with distant lands, these empires inevitable incorporated their growing knowledge of a wider universe into their cosmology. Such cosmological ideologies found their visual expression in the court: their empire was presented invariably as the centre of the world; any foreign states or domestic clients that entered into the imperial court was thus assigned a subordinate status accordingly in this highly structured system. The throne room of the Sasanian king mentioned earlier, for instance, symbolically placed the golden chairs for the Chinese, Roman and Hephthalite

²⁹⁶ Le Strange and Nicholson 1921, 97.

kings on the right, left, and rear of the throne of the Sasanian king, and below the throne were the chairs for governors and nobles.²⁹⁷

In Eastern Eurasia, the material bodies of the courtiers also contributed to the visually impressive display of orderly pattern—through standing position, garment colours, and badges of offices, all prescribed according to official rank. When the Tang emperor held an audience for foreign envoys as well as domestic rituals, courtiers, including Turko-Mongol bridge officials and hostages, were arrayed in the courtyard with standing position determined by status:

‘The shades transitioned from the emperor in yellow ochre at the centre..., to purple at the inner layer of high officials, to red, green, and then the black of low-ranking officials on the outside.’²⁹⁸

It is worth mention that purple remained the most prestigious colour throughout the Tang period. Apart from the highest-ranking officials, it was also the colour for the emperor’s robe for daily business. Ochre yellow, the traditional colour of the emperor, was designated exclusively for his ritual robes. Liu Xinru correctly points out that such prestige of purple is most likely due to the influence

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Skaff 2012, 141. C.f., *XTS* 24: 527, Liu 1996, 64-65.

of western rulers' influence, as purple silk was used exclusively for royal robes in the Roman empire.²⁹⁹

Xuanzang's encounter with the Western Türk qaghan Ton Yabghu and his entourage returning back from a hunting trip shows equally elaborate display of rank through physical position and garments:

the Khan's person was covered with a robe of green satin, and his hair was loose, only it was bound round with a silken band some ten feet in length, which was twisted round his head and fell down behind. He was surrounded by about 200 officers, who were all clothed in brocade stuff, with their hair braided. On the right and left he was attended by independent troops all clothed in furs and fine spun hair garments.³⁰⁰

This can be further compared to the Nanzhao court, according to a Chinese envoy's report in 879. Also returning back from a hunting tour, the Chinese saw the Nanzhao ruler Longshun, standing out from the group by his crimson garment and a vermillion silk hair band, escorted a group of cavalrymen with long spears

²⁹⁹ Liu 2010, 88. the purple-coloured *porphyra* dye extracted from a gland of the murex shell produced by the Minoans and the Phoenicians. Both silkworm and the murex shell were natural products, which added a miraculous quality to them.

³⁰⁰ Beal 1911, 42.

in hand.³⁰¹ Although these states seem to have had different codes of colour, the garments and the physical position must have had some universal significance in denoting rank and status, so that they were the first things that the foreign travellers noticed and thought worth reporting.

The display of foreign rulers and diplomats with varied physiognomy and costume is another way of showing imperial dominance in the ‘global sphere’. The foreigners were there as spectators of the splendid court, but at the same time, they were objects of spectators themselves—just as Lady Henry in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* would have said, ‘[foreigners] make one’s room so picturesque’ (not surprisingly, the story is set in the Victorian Age, the pinnacle of the British imperial power overseas). Not only in actual ceremonies, the incorporation of foreign subordinates into the imperial cosmology is also crystalised in the pictorial representation. The theme of tribute bearers was a long-established, popular one in Western Eurasia.³⁰² In the late Antiquity, the reliefs on the base of obelisk in Constantinople, erected by Theodosius I (347—395 AD), represent

³⁰¹ The long silk hair band worn by the Türk and the Nanzhou ruler both reminds us of the flowing silk streamer on the diadem of Sasanian kings depicted on the Sasanian court silver, which, like the Central Asian riding outfit, might have been adopted as a symbol of rulers by the Türks and the Nanzhao.

³⁰² One famous example is the tribute bearers from Lydia depicted on the bas-relief at Apadana Palace (first half of the sixth century BC), Persepolis of the Achaemenid Persia. Representations of foreign tribute bears are also found in ancient Egypt and Assyria.

‘barbarian’ tribute bears, wearing trousers and ‘Phrygian cap’, kneeling in front of the emperor with his court.³⁰³ The Sasanian equivalent of the submission scene on Theodosius’ obelisk can be found on the rock reliefs at Bishapur, which depict tribute bearers, who could have been interpreted as Romans.³⁰⁴

During the Tang, the incorporation of foreign dignitaries into the court was also a part of the manifestation of imperial power. Turko-Mongol officials, foreign diplomats and hostages participated in major state ceremonies, such as sacrifices to Heaven and ancestors, Feng and Shan rites, and funerals of important members of the imperial family. The Feng and Shan rites, conducted at the sacred Mount Tai, for example, was one of the most august rituals that involved a huge number of imperial retinues as well as spectators.³⁰⁵ Foreign dignitaries lent symbolic prestige to the gathering, as external peace was one of the preconditions

³⁰³ On the northwest part of pedestal. They could have been intended to portray the Persians. Matthew Canepa points out that this scene would not have been visible to Persian envoys, who passed the obelisk from the other side. Canepa 2009, 168.

³⁰⁴ Bishapur relief III, register 4 and 5.

³⁰⁵ Feng Shan rites were considered the most august by Confucius ritual specialists, conducted only six times throughout the Chinese imperial history. The rites were conducted at the sacred in Mount Tai in Shandong to thank Heaven and Earth for their blessing. There were two Feng Shan rites conducted during the Tang: once by Emperor Taizong in 666 and once by Emperor Xuanzong in 725. Empress Wu carried out a seventh performance at the sacred Mount Song near her capital Luoyang in 695.

for the Feng and Shan rites. The ceremony during the rule of Emperor Gaozong in 666, for example, included representatives of the Türks, Silla, Paekchae, Koguryō, Japan, India, Khmer, Khotan, and the exiled Persian court.³⁰⁶ The necessity of the inclusion of foreign dignitaries, especially those from the powerful neighbours, on those occasions—not merely necessary as part of cosmology but also necessary to be seen—is better illustrated in the Feng Shan rites of 725. As their relationship with the Türks were strained during the period, the Tang devised a plan to make the Türks participate in the Feng Shan rites on the pretext of marriage negotiation.³⁰⁷ As in Western Eurasia, the significance of these moments was materialized in pictorial form, such as the murals of diplomats in Prince Zhanghuai and the stone statues of foreign dignitaries at the mausoleums of Emperor and Gaozong.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ *CFYG* 36:2a.

³⁰⁷ *JTS* 194a: 5175; *XTS* 215b:6053–4; *ZZTJ* 212:6764–5.

³⁰⁸ Upon Emperor Taizong's death in 649, Emperor Gaozong ordered sculptors to fashion statues of fourteen 'barbarian monarchs and chiefs', who had been captured in battles or 'voluntarily submitted' to his deceased father. The statues were placed inside the north gate of Taizong's tomb complex. The recent discovery of three inscribed pedestals partially confirms the record. *Tang Hui Yao* 395-6; Eckfeld 2005, 17, note 30. Skaff dismisses the claim of 'voluntary submission' in transmitted texts as tenuous. He gives the example of Zhenzhu Bilgä Qaghan of Sir-Yantuo, who received the Tang investiture as the independent ruler of Mongolia but later became an enemy, as well as the Tibetan *btsanpo*, who formed marriage alliance with the Tang but was not a vassal. Skaff 2012, note 9. Later, sixty-four life-sized stone statues were

Finally, an important sign indicating the growing importance of visual representation of power in Eastern Eurasia was the growing visibility of the Chinese emperor. I have argued in the previous chapter that in early China, the emperor was not supposed to be seen in person; his power was, instead, exacted through minute bureaucracy, intense surveillance and social control rather like the modern society. However, the Tang emperors frequently broke this rule and dismayed the Confucian literati by personally leading military campaigns, throwing themselves in the frontline of the battle, and participating in public pageantries.³⁰⁹ The most splendid public pageantry during the Tang was the Feng Shan rites mentioned earlier.³¹⁰ Apart from the rites themselves, the ritual progress, which lasted several months, also included grand touring, hunts, and banquets. The imperial progression to and from Mount Tai created a public spectacle that allowed the emperors to display their wealth and benevolence to their subjects. The early Tang emperors also reduced the distance ambassadors and the emperors prescribed by strict ritual codes through the exercise of imperial

erected at Qianling, the burial complex Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu, after her death in 705.

³⁰⁹ For example, Emperor Taizong personally led numerous military campaigns throughout his life. Even after he took the throne, he led the military expedition against Korea. He was reported to have personally confronted Xieli Qaghan of the Eastern Türks, who led his trooped to the vicinity of Chang'an.

³¹⁰ See note 305.

prerogatives. At times, they held direct discussions with foreign diplomats,³¹¹ and, against the protests of court ritual specialists, joined the ceremonial drinking and banquets held for foreign envoys. Although we cannot be sure whether these instances, documented in official historiography, did take place, at least we can be sure that this is the way the Tang emperors would have liked to be portrayed for the posterity.

5.2. Insignia

The significance of gold and silver paraphernalia—the explicit visual emblem of one's rank and office must be understood in this context of court display. Among the splendid visual paradigm of ideal cosmology, consisting of colour, physical position, and even physiognomy, glittering gold and silver explicitly denoted one's rank and office. Like the rest of the visual symbols (e.g., purple as the royal colour), the insignia tend to be universally recognised status items made of universally valuable material, namely, gold and silver, so that the status of the wearer could be recognised in trans-cultural contexts—not only on diplomatic ceremonies, but also in regular court audiences, which Turko-Mongol bridge official and hostages also attended.

³¹¹ *JTS* 196a: 5231.

First of all, elites from diverse geo-cultural background of Eastern Eurasia all chose gold and silver as the material for official insignia. In the Sui-Tang empire, the material of the belt explicitly denoted one's status, as it was regulated in sumptuary laws. Gold and jade, gold, silver, etc, were used for different levels of civil officials. Each category had a corresponding colour for the official colour—purple, vermillion, crimson, blue and green. Glitter, colour and standing/seating position in the court together created a paradigm of the ideal cosmology.

Also, the Eastern Eurasia elites shared a series of paraphernalia for badges of officials. One of most important and most universally recognised insignia was the belt. A typical belt consisted of a strip of organic material, usually leather, closed with an elaborate buckle with removable tongues, and adorned with plaques of precious metal. Some of these belt plaques had slits in the middle, with pendant leather thongs, from which small utility items, a cup or whetstone, and weapons could be suspended (fig. 5.27). Such a pragmatic design had its origin in the steppe,³¹² as it is essentially a nomadic accessory for a riding outfit along with a caftan, trousers and boots. They are found extensively in tombs from the

³¹² The type of belt buckle with movable tongues were relatively new. Ghirshman observed that the earliest known examples came from 5th- and 6th-century burials of the nomadic Avars in Mongolia and southern Siberia, Ghirshman 1953, 69

steppe, as one of the most important status possessions (fig. 5.28).³¹³ The significance of the belt as status symbol can also be inferred from the Scythian and Turkic stone statues, on which the belts are depicted in minute detail.

By the Middle Ages, the belt became a part of Eurasian aristocratic costume, based on Central Asian riding outfit, along with caftan with round neck, side slits, and opening in the middle, trousers and boots. Often the belts are adorned with precious metals and gems, as they are reproduced in minute details on 6th— to 8th—century wallpaintings at Dandan Oilip and Penjikent. The belt was also an official insignia in diverse cultures across Eurasia. In the Byzantine Empire, official belt was known as *cingulum*, the term is used metaphorically to mean ‘official position’.³¹⁴ Examples of Byzantine gold belt plaques include the wallpainting of a magistrate’s tomb at Durostorum (Silistra) in Bulgaria, which depicts a servant handing to the tomb occupant his dress of office: a pair of belted trousers, a cloak with fibula, the *cingulum*, and a tunic.³¹⁵ Material remains of

³¹³ See p.87 for the gold belts found in elite Scythian tombs, such as Arzhan II (fig. 3-11) and Pazyryk. The Eastern steppes peoples, such as those of Xiongnu and Xianbei, also designated special symbolic significance to the belt.

³¹⁴ For example, *discingo* (to deprive of the girdle), was synonymous with being stripped of official rank, and likewise, *dare cingulum*, *sumere cingulum* and *deponere cingulum*, meant ‘to give’, ‘to assume’ or ‘to resign’ office. Johansen 1994.

³¹⁵ Quote by Johansen 1994, 126.

such luxury belts include a group of Byzantine gold belt plaques, dated fourth-century AD, now in the British Museum. In Iran, belts, being a part of the royal insignia, are represented on court silver and rock reliefs in ʿTaq-e Bostan.³¹⁶ But, as Harper has observed, this particular type of belt only appeared during the later part of the Sasanian period—exemplified by the rock reliefs at ʿTaq-e Bostan and silver plates dated to the late Sasanian period³¹⁷—and may well have been the result of Central Asian influence.

Examples of gold belt plaques, which are stylistically similar are found in Dulan (Qinghai) and those attributed to the Turks on the Eastern Steppes (Kiselev). In China, there are belt ornaments from Hejiacun.

Among various diplomatic rituals, one context that might have directly fostered the adoption of a common series of paraphernalia in different geo-cultural areas is investiture. Unlike modern diplomacy, which assumes all states are equal (nominally at least), in the medieval diplomacy strategic alliances were created through investiture. Investiture is a practice of formalising a patron-client ties through the overlords investing the vassals with indigenous titles and various paraphernalia in accord with their rank. The paraphernalia not only represented

³¹⁶ Peck 1969, pls. III, IV, VI, IXa, XIII, XVI-XIX

³¹⁷ This has been noted in Harper 1981, 65, note 67, pls. 17, 22, 27.

a personal bond between the ruler and client, but also served as a form of non-verbal communication: on the one hand, the designs and colours of the paraphernalia varied to identify the political affiliation and status of the wearer or possessor; whereas on the other hand, the paraphernalia had to have universal significance that transcended cultural differences of the vassal and the overlord. This is probably why, as Skaff notices, that the Tang investiture paraphernalia exhibited ‘a combination of the Turko-Mongol and Chinese elements’, which included, among the Turko-Mongol elements,³¹⁸ robes, belts, battle flags, arrows with golden heads; and, among the Chinese elements, letter of investiture, fish-shaped tallies with gilded lettering, and ‘treasured swords’.

In the medieval world, external and internal relationships followed the same rules of patron-client relationship. In fact, the boundary between ‘foreign’ and ‘domestic’ spheres was blurred and fluctuating. Therefore, investiture paraphernalia for outer clients were to a great extent indistinguishable from those granted in the bureaucratic system. This undoubtedly allowed the non-Chinese elements of the investiture paraphernalia to acquire equal significance in the Chinese context as well. Both outer-clients and Tang officials were symbolically incorporated into the same patrimonial cosmology and was thus invested with

³¹⁸ As I have argued earlier, the so-called ‘Turko-Mongol’ elements should be more appropriately interpreted as generic Eurasian elements.

paraphernalia appropriate to their ranking in the same hierarchical system. In addition, in many cases, the roles of those two were interchangeable. For example, in the case of hostages mentioned earlier, many adult foreign hostages remained in the Tang court as members of Imperial Guard Corps and thus a part of the domestic hierarchy. Also, Turko-Mongol bridle officials could be invested with offices in the Tang official hierarchy. For example, Ashina Zhong (611—675 AD), a high-ranking member of the royal Ashina clan, was appointed General of the Left to lead the Eastern Turks, who moved into the Tang territory after Xieli Qaghan was defeated in 630. But later he came back to China and served in the Tang court until he died.³¹⁹ Ethnicity was not a key element in determining a person's role in either the internal or external hierarchy, as many generals who served in the Tang army, including Ashina Zhong mentioned above, the famous An Lushan and Gao Xianzhi, were of non-Chinese ethnicity. Given the various ethnics, cultures, and identities of those who served in the Tang court, it is necessary to have visual symbols of status and office that make sense to members of diverse backgrounds.

³¹⁹ For the life of Ashina Zhong, see his epitaph. Zhou 1992, vol. 1, 601-03.

5.3. Ceremonial banquets

The universality of ceremonial banquets in high-status settings gave rise to the use of shared types of gold and silver. In most Western Eurasian and steppe societies, ceremonial drinking and banquets with luxury vessels made of visually stunning material, such as precious metals and glass, was an innate part of their culture. While the Chinese actively participated in high-status networking with these Eurasian powers, they adopted not only the common diplomatic rituals, including ceremonial drinking and feasting, but also the enthusiasm for similar types of gold and silver vessels.

As I argued in the previous chapter, ceremonial drinking and feasting had been an inherent aspect of Western Eurasian and steppe societies, as it helped establish and maintain patrimonial relations and political legitimacy. Since medieval diplomacy was also based on patrimonial relations, ceremonial drinking and feasting played a central role in it. Skaff argues that strong patrimonial elements are present in both the Tang and Turkic cultures, which served as a common ground for the mutual inclusion of patrimonial elements in diplomatic rituals. But apart from these two empires, patrimonial elements, pageantry, status ranking, display of obeisance, gift exchanges, drinking, and feasting, would have been familiar to ambassadors from Europe to Japan.

5.3.1. The shared practice of ceremonial drinking and banquet across Eurasia

5.3.1.1. The Turks

In steppe societies, ceremonial feasting and drinking were an essential part of *quriltai*—‘an assembly of nomadic chiefs that either determined a successor to a deceased qaghan or proclaimed the formal accession of a ruler who had united tribes by conquest.’³²⁰ These assemblies tended to last for an extended period, usually over a month, with a series of rituals. The chiefs ritually requested one of them to become their overlord in a patrimonial relation; the proclaimed leader signalled his acceptance of the role by offering banquets and gifts, organising the tribes politically, and then sending the chiefs back to their territories to serve as clients.

As Menander’s accounts show, the Türks shared a great many aspects of diplomatic practices with the Romans.³²¹ This includes ceremonial drinking and feasting. The tent, especially the lavishly decorated ‘Golden Tent’, provided the setting for these grand parties. Imagery of such scenes, some of which involve the Türks, is preserved on the Sogdian stone sarcophagi and funerary couches

³²⁰ According to Skaff, the *quriltai* of the Turks is not well documented. His interpretation is based on the use of the term in Orkhon inscriptions and thirteenth-century Mongol *quriltai*. Skaff 2012, 120.

³²¹ See pp. 218f.

found in China. A famous example is a panel on the left side of such a stone couch in Miho Museum, Japan. The upper half of the panel depicts a large figure sitting in a domed tent, served by attendants, with a row of guests on a carpet outside the tent. The domed tent resembles the felt yurt still used today by Turkic people. The figures, with their long hair divided into strands or braids and bound at the neck, also identify them as Türks.³²² We will see later in the chapter that ceremonial drinking and feasting in a tent became of a shared Eurasian practice.

Another crucial element in ceremonial banquets was the consumption of large amounts of alcoholic beverage, which is also the focus of ancient observers. On Roman's visit to the Turkish court, the Byzantine envoys feasted in the tent, where they were also lavishly entertained, for three successive days. Instead of the food, Menander paid attention to the alcoholic beverage, pointing out specifically that the wine, which 'the Turks drank to their fill', was not grape-wine, but a 'barbarous kind of sweet of wine'. The Chinese monk Xuanzang also gave a detailed account of the lavish banquets at the Turkish court, which started with wine, accompanied by music; and then feast; and then wine again.³²³ In this

³²² Among the wallpaintings at Samarkand that show foreign delegations appear similar long-haired figures that are identified by inscriptions written directly on the paintings as Turks. For more about the Miho funerary couch, see Juliano and Lerner 2002, Juliano and Lerner 2001, 1997.

³²³ Beal 1911, 44

case, it was grape-wine that was offered. As grapevines do not grow on the steppe, grape-wine had to be imported. To have such a luxury commodity served at the banquet indicates the importance of ceremonial drinking in diplomacy for the Türks.

5.3.1.2. The Tibetans

Feasting and drinking were equally important in the Tibetan patrimonial rituals, including allegiance and diplomacy. A political institution similar to *quriltai* existed in Tibet as well. In its formative stage, the Tibetan Empire grew out of a loose tribal confederation. The clan chiefs held assemblies to elect a leader and sworn oath of allegiance in ‘true medieval Central Eurasian fashion’.³²⁴ A group of clan chiefs in southern Tibet swore an oath of fealty to Namri Songtsen (?—629 AD), a lord from a small side-valley of Yarlung River, calling him *btsanpo*, a title which later became an equivalent of the Chinese ‘August Emperor’ and the Turkic ‘qaghan’. Together they established the Yarlung Dynasty, which ruled the Tibetan Empire until the mid-ninth century. Even after that, the Tibetans kept this tradition of holding annual assemblies to

³²⁴ Beckwith 1987, 16. The importance of such allegiance is recorded in both Tibetan and Chinese accounts. For example, the text of the oaths of allegiance taken by the clan chiefs are fully recorded, see Old Tibetan Chronicle, iv. Also, according to *Xin Tang Shu*, ‘their lord and his ministers—five or six persons, called “common-fated ones”—make friends with each other. When the lord dies, they all commit suicide to be buried with him...’ *Xin Tang Shu*, 216a: 6073; c.f., Pelliot 1961, 81f. Quoted by Beckwith 1987, 14f.

discuss state affairs, with the involvement of powerful chiefs, now known in the *Old Tibetan Chronicles* as ‘ministers’. According to the Chinese account,

btsanpo and his subjects hold small assemblies annually, (on which they) sacrifice sheep, dog, and monkey; (they hold) big assemblies every three years, feasting at night at the altar, (on which they) sacrifice humans, horse, cattle, and donkey (?).³²⁵

Drinking and feasting were indispensable parts of these assemblies, and alcohol consumption was central to the Tibetan ritual practices.³²⁶ Wooden coffin planks excavated from Guolimu, Delingha, Qinghai Province, which I will discuss in greater detail later in the chapter, depict settings almost identical to the Turkic ceremonial banquets, with the host seated in a tent and the guests on a

³²⁵ *Xin Tang Shu* 217a. Assemblies were also held on special circumstances, such as wars and signing of treaties. These occasional assemblies are also extensively recorded in both Tibetan and Chinese texts. See, for example, the assembly in 822 for the signing of the last Sino-Tibetan treaty.

³²⁶ The Tibetans are also known to have been feverish drinkers. The indigenous alcoholic beverage of the Tibetans is known as *stsang* or *rtsang*, or *skyems* in honorific terms, in excavated Tibetan documents, such as the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (P.T. 1042) and the Tibetan documents from Milan (ii: 423, 292; vi: 2a). It was probably a kind of sweet barley wine with about 10% alcohol. Other alcoholic beverages mentioned in P.T. 1042 include millet wine, wheat wine, and mead.

carpet outside the tent, drinking.³²⁷ According to the excavated Tibetan texts, there were so many occasions (namely, the rising of the moon; the day of washing hair; the beginning, middle, and end of writing a Buddhist text, etc.) that some argues that ‘it was almost feasts that kept the Tibetan society functioning.’³²⁸ Drinking was, of course, also a part of diplomatic ceremonies. For instance, In 822, upon their arrival in Tibet for the signing of the last Sino-Tibet treaty, the Tang delegation were treated to lavish feasts and drinking parties, accompanied by music, at the *btsanpo*’s summer tent.

The Tibetans’ love of alcohol is most apparent in their depiction of drunken revelry, which seems to have been a popular theme in Tibetan art. In the Guolimu coffin paintings, apart from drinking with relish, there are several scenes depicting drunken people vomiting or being carried by others.³²⁹ A silver jug, now at Jokhang Monastery, Lhasa, still being used for ceremonially offering *chang*, Tibetan barley beer, depicts a similar scene: a man who appears to be so drunk that he had to be carried by two people, one of whom was crouching to carry the man’s leg.³³⁰

³²⁷ See p. 207.

³²⁸ Luo 2006.

³²⁹ Plank I: A; Plank II: A.

³³⁰ The silver jug is describe in Heller 2003b.

5.3.1.3. The Tang

When the ancient Chinese historiographers commented on the rituals organised by the Tibetan side for the 822 Sino-Tibetan treaty that ‘their system (of rituals) is similar to that of China’, they were probably mistaken (as some modern scholars) to assume that these ‘uniform elements of Eurasian rituals had origins and target audiences mainly among the Sinic people’; whereas the Turks ‘lack ritual protocols, just like the ancient Xiongnu’.³³¹ However, as Di Cosmo and Skaff have argued, Eurasian elements had been an innate part of Chinese rituals, especially those of patrimonial nature, from at least the Zhou period. For example, blood covenant (*meng* 盟), one of most solemn types of oaths, probably had its origin in the steppe, for it involved the sacrifice of an animal—generally a sheep, an animal not native to China but more commonly reared on the steppe and in the Arc—and the use of its blood.³³² The Zhou themselves came from the Arc, and their diplomatic exchanges with the non-Zhou peoples from the Arc and the steppes undoubtedly increased the significance of these rituals in the Chinese context.

³³¹ ZS 50:909; BS 99:3287, quoted by Skaff 2012, 135.

³³² Di Cosmo 2002 116ff., notes 64, 76. For more details of blood oath rituals in early China, see Lewis 1990, 32-50.

The Eurasian elements were even more explicit in the Sui-Tang diplomatic rituals. This is most clearly demonstrated in the series of rituals held when the Tang Emperor Taizong was proclaimed the ‘Heavenly Qaghan’ by Turkic tribes in 630. The title combined ideologies of kingship of both the Chinese and the Türks: ‘heavenly’, referring to the Chinese ‘Son of Heaven’, and the Turkic title ‘qaghan’.³³³ Similarly, the ceremony to honour this event was dominated by shared Eurasian patrimonial elements. Apart from investing the Türk with official paraphernalia, such as polychrome silk robes, swords—both Eurasian symbols of investiture—and an iron fish tally with gilded lettering—the credential of a Tang official, the ceremony was concluded with a grand drinking party in the Eurasian fashion in Chang’an. The drinking party was most marked by its steppe elements: Taizong and his several thousand Turkic chiefs were seated under pavilions—the Chinese equivalents of tents, entertained by musicians while feasting and drinking.³³⁴ Like his Turko-Mongol counterparts, Emperor Taizong apparently

³³³ The honorific title ‘heavenly’ would also resonate with the cult of Turkic god of Heaven, called Tängri, which played a primary role in legitimising qaghans. In fact, ‘Son of Heaven’, the Chinese title for emperor, goes back to Western Zhou. The Zhou, who originally came from the Arc, introduced the cult of Heaven in the place of the dominant ancestral cult of the Shang. This all-encompassing god of Heaven might have been inspired by the cult of Tängri from the steppe. See Barfield 1989, Skaff 2012, 109ff.eld, 1989; Skaff, 2012: 109ff.

³³⁴ Taizong secluded himself in a separate pavilion, as per Confucian ritual prescription, Schafer 1963, 133.

wanted to impress his new steppe subordinates with superabundance of alcoholic beverages—symbolising his ‘boundless wealth, power and generosity’—and the display of fantastic gold and silver vessels. Therefore, in front of Taizong’s pavilion was ‘a tall pedestal topped by a silver pitcher overflowing with wine’; ‘produced from a hidden source, the wine flowed downward into a silver basin with a capacity of one hundred *hu* (6,000 litres). Supposedly, the assembled chiefs drank their fill and the basin was not even half empty.’³³⁵ The silver wine fountain resonates with the huge urns filled with wine in front of the yurt on the Guolimu paintings (plank I-B, plan II-A) (fig. 5.23-25), as well as the golden urns and pitchers in Sizabul’s tents described by Menander.

5.3.2. Gold and silver vessels

The shared practices of ceremonial drinking and feasting across Eastern Eurasia, especially their prestige in high-status interaction between the great powers, gave rise to the shared use and prestige of gold and silver vessels. The majority of the shapes and ornaments of these vessels is universal, though not uniform, across Eastern Eurasia. I will focus more on the shared shapes in this chapter, and discuss the ornaments in greater detail in next chapter. Among the vessel types, stem cups, lobed cups, elliptical cups, ewers, and plates, predominate. All these shapes evoke western prototypes, especially gold and

³³⁵ Quoted by Skaff 2012, 121, c.f., JTS 195:5196; XTS 217a:6112–3; ZZTJ 198:6244–5.

silver vessels of Roman and Sasanian empires, which were also imitated in wider areas under the influence of the two empires.³³⁶ Material remains of these shared types of vessels have been found in widely distributed locales, and pictorial representations of these vessels appeared regularly in high-status tombs in these culturally and ethnically diverse areas. Here are a few examples of the major types.

5.3.2.1. Ewer

The ewer typically consists of a pinched lid, a slender neck, and a deep oval body with a curved handle attached to the rim and shoulder. This type of ewer is attributed to the Byzantines and the Sasanians (fig. 5.14), but it was also reproduced in Central Asia, and found its way to the Arc and eventually to China. For surviving examples, we have a gilt silver ewer from the sixth-century tomb of Li Xian in Guyaun (fig. 5.15), with figures that appear to narrate the story of the Judgement of Paris—presumably of Bactrian provenance³³⁷—and a plain seventh-century silver ewer in ‘typically Sogdian’ form excavated at Aohan Banner, Inner Mongolia (fig. 5.16).³³⁸ Also, a gold and a silver miniature ewer of

³³⁶ The ornaments appear to evoke the western sources as well, which will be discussed in next chapter.

³³⁷ For stylistic and iconographic analysis of this ewer, see Watt 2004, 256f., Juliano and Lerner 2002, 99f., Luo 2004, 77ff., Cheng 2010, 81ff.; for the excavation report, see Wenwu (1985, 11): 1-20.

³³⁸ This ewer was excavated a tenth-century Liao tomb along with four other silver vessels attributed to Sogdian workmanship by Marshak, Watt 2004, cat. no. 208, Aohan Qi 1978: A

this type were recovered from the burial complex of Bilga Qaghan (fig. 5.17), along with other miniature gold and silver vessels. Although material remains of this type of ewer are less numerous than those of the cups, their importance can be inferred from the imitations made in other materials. Notable examples include a silver-inlaid lacquer ewer (fig. 5.18) and another one of glass (fig. 5.19) in the Shōsō-in, Japan, in addition to a large number of ceramic replicas in China.

5.3.2.2. Stem cup

The stem cup is a major type of gold and silver vessel found widely in Eastern Eurasia. In the Introduction, I mentioned a Tang silver stem cup in the British Museum. The cup is made of two layers of beaten silver. It has a deep bell-shaped body with vertical wall slightly exerted at the lip. A roundel below the lip separates the body into two registers. The body rests on a flaring stem with a nodule passing over into a broad foot-plate. The whole cup is covered with engraved and chased decoration against a ring-matted background (fig. 5.1). There is no parallel of this type of cups in early China; nevertheless, the stem cup is a common vessel type in Western Eurasia. But this particular type of stem cups resemble Roman silver stem cups, which also feature a bell-shape and a flaring

silver handled jug among this group was mentioned earlier. See note 356. For other Sogdian examples, see Marshak 1971, figs. T11, T24, Pletneva 1981, fig.33.14

foot passing through a nodule.³³⁹ Similar stem cups were also popular among Sasanian aristocrats.³⁴⁰ It appears that silver stem cups were a part of the common aristocratic material culture shared between Roman and Sasanian empires and imitated by wider areas under these empires' influences. The influence of this common culture could be felt as far as China in the sixth century, exemplified by the group of gilt bronze cups found in Pingcheng, which might have been made in Central Asia and reached China through Central Asian intermediaries.³⁴¹

From the seventh century, such stem cups seem to have become a part of the common aristocratic culture of Eastern Eurasia, and their shape became rather uniform. For example, the Metropolitan Museum, New York, recently acquired a gold cup of presumable Tibetan provenance (fig. 5.2) that is almost identical in shape to the Tang cup described earlier.³⁴² It is also constructed of two layers of gold sheet: the outer layer is decorated in a similar manner, with the imagery rendered against a ring-matted background (though the imagery is in repoussé with chased details rather than engraved); like the Tang cup, it has a bell-shaped

³³⁹ The Roman stem cup might have derived from the Greek *kylix*, or *skyphos* and *kantharos* (often with two handles), all drinking cups with stems.

³⁴⁰ See, for example, Harper 1981, pl. 2.

³⁴¹ See p. - 145 -.

³⁴² The cup was allegedly found in Xinjiang, which was under Tibetan dominion between the late seventh and the mid-ninth century. Leidy 2002.

body with vertical wall and exerted lip and a stem consisting of a nodule and a flaring foot. Although the shape of these cups was clearly inspired by Roman-Sasanian cups, the shared Eastern Eurasian version developed some new characters, such as the double-layered shell and ring-matted background with chased ornaments.

Stem cups had been known to the steppe people at least from the Scythian period. We have already seen the miniature stem cup from Arzhan II (fig. 4-16), though we have few surviving examples from the Turkic period. However, they were regularly represented in the Turkic stone statues found across the Eastern and Central Asian steppes.³⁴³ It is an ancient custom of some steppe people to erect stone statues of the deceased (or the ancestors) on the surface of their burial, and the depiction of a high-status person holding a drinking cup—often a rhyton—at the waist or chest can be traced at least to the Scythian period.³⁴⁴ Some identified the ceremonial role of holding a cup as the consumption of Haoma juice in Vedic and Zoroastrian ritual, or offering perpetual nourishment to the spirits of ancestors.³⁴⁵ But, as I have argued in last chapter, it may also have to do with the

³⁴³ For a review of Turkic stone statues in Soviet Union, see Grach 1961, Sher 1966, Kiselev 1951; for those in Xinjiang, see B. and X. 1996; for those in Mongolia, see Hayashi 1996.

³⁴⁴ Sher 1966, Chen 2013, fig. 2-10.

³⁴⁵ Ibid, 61f, DeWeese 1994, 47, no. 36, Erdélyi 2000, 97-8, Golden 1998, 203-4, Vainshtein 1989-61.

cultural and political significance of drinking, which involved the display of luxury drinking vessels, made of precious materials (gold and silver) in distant lands.

5.3.2.3. Rhyton

The rhyton is associated with Achaemenid Persia and ancient Greece. Luxury gold and silver rhyta were status symbols in the Aegean area and West Asia from the Bronze Age, used not just in feasting but also ceremonial libation. During the Hellenisation period, rhyton spread to Central Asia (fig. 5.3), as we can see from material remains and depiction of such vessels on Sogdian stone funerary couches (fig. 5.4).³⁴⁶ Along with other Roman-Sasanian-Central Asian gold and silver vessels, rhyton became a common luxury drinking vessel treasured by Eastern Eurasian elites. In China, rhyton was reproduced not only in other exotic, luxury material, exemplified by the agate rhyton from Hejiacun (fig. 5.6), but also in cheaper materials, such low-fired ceramic replicas found frequently in mortuary context. We have also, of presumable Tibetan workmanship, a gilt silver rhyton in Cleveland Museum (fig. 5.7). Rhyton are also depicted in the coffin paintings found in Qinghai, then under the influence of Tibetan Empire.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ Pfrommer 1993.

³⁴⁷ See p.21.

5.3.2.4. Handled cup

The handled cup is characterised by a small loop attached to the body. Typically, the cup consists of a cylindrical (or octagonal), slightly concave body, rounded bottom and straight everted foot-rim (fig. 5.8). The handle is soldered at the lip, or just below. A flat thumb-piece and a comma-shaped tendril are sometimes attached on top of the handle for comfortable grip. There are large groups of handled-cups among Tang gold and silver. The Tang also developed their own variation on the basic idea of a handled cup. For example, a parcel-gilt silver cup from Hejiacun, while retaining the typical design of the foot and the handle, has an eight-lobed body (fig. 5.12). The shape of the body was probably inspired by the Sasanian lobed elliptical cups; but it may have also been intended to imitate a flower, as the lower part of each lobe is embossed with a lotus petal.

Gold and silver cups with the characteristic handled design have also been found within the Tibetan Empire. These cups exhibit a rather uniform design.³⁴⁸ One example is a parcel-gilt silver cup, now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (fig. 5.13), belonging to the same group as the gilt silver rhyton mentioned

³⁴⁸ Other very similar examples include several handled cups in the private and public collections, for example, one in Pierre Uldry Collection, the Rietberg Museum, Zürich, one in Nizhne Novgorod Museum, Gorky, Russia, mostly described by Amy Heller, Heller 2003b. For another example in Pritzker Collection, Chicago, see Huo 2009, pl.3.

earlier.³⁴⁹ It is ‘heavily cast’ with much squatter rounded sides compared with the Hejiacun cup; also, it sits on a simpler flared foot-ring. But the design of the ring-handle is very similar to that of the Hejiacun cup, especially the cloud-shaped thumb-piece adorned with an animal. As in the case of the stem cup, the Tibetan and the Tang handled cups shared many decorative devices, such as the beaded rim and the intertwined floral scroll filed with leafy tendrils, both, as we shall see in the next chapter, are characteristic ornaments for luxury goods across Eastern Eurasia.

Unlike the stem cup and the rhyton, the prototype of the handled cup is less easily identified. It was not a common type in the Roman-Sasanian corpus of gold and silver vessels. In the Chinese literature, the handled cups are known as the ‘Sogdian cups’ (fig. 5.8), because they have closest parallels among the Sogdian silver identified by Marshak.³⁵⁰ It is almost certain that the Tang gold- and silversmiths were influenced by their Sogdian counterparts; and given the large number of Sogdian immigrants in China, it is highly probably that there were

³⁴⁹ See p. 202.

³⁵⁰ In older publication, the Sogdian silver was intermingled with Sasanian silver. Marshak, however, argues that, though interrelated, these two groups have obvious difference in terms of size, decorative technique, and shapes of the objects. For an introduction of the Sogdian silver, see Marshak 1986; for discussion about the difference between Sasanian and Sogdian silver, see Marshak 1999.

Sogdian craftsman working for Chinese clients. But all the Sogdian handled cups are no earlier than the sixth century. In other words, they are contemporary with and developed as a part of the Eastern Eurasian common aristocratic culture. This is another example showing that Central Asia played a key role in defining what is considered high-status in Eastern Eurasia: they did not just transplant the Roman-Sasanian common aristocratic culture to the East, but also added their own understanding and contribution.

I would also like to suggest that the Sogdians were not the sole creators of the ‘Sogdian cups’; rather, it seems to me more of a steppe design, which might have inspired the Sogdians. The basic idea of a cup with a handle is an ancient one. Nomads must have used them from ancient time, as seen in the steppe pottery tradition.³⁵¹ Herodotus describes the Scythians as having cups suspended from their belt (or harness strap) — a handy design for mobile life style.³⁵² During the period under discussion, the handled cup was also a common category among gold and silver found in the steppes. Although handled cups with cylindrical body were found,³⁵³ more closely related to the steppe culture is a type of ‘bag-shaped’

³⁵¹ Chen 2013, fig. 4-6, 4-7.

³⁵² Herodotus and Godley 1971, 272.

³⁵³ For example, the groups of miniature gold and silver cups found at Bilga Qaghan’s burial complex.

body, with a handle like those of the ‘Sogdian cups’ attached. For example, two gold vessels from Burial Mound No. 2, Kopeni *chaatas* (big mounds, literally ‘stone of war’, fig. 5.9), Khakassia, and a silver vessel from the Tuyahta kurgan, Tuva (fig. 5.10),³⁵⁴ have a bulging body with pronounced shoulder, often defined by a raised border, and long, slender neck. Another version of the ‘bag-shaped’ body, exemplified by a gold mug from Pereshchepina Treasure in Ukraine, does not have the pronounced shoulder (fig. 5.11). According to Marshak and Chen, this type of body derived from the nomadic tradition and had been produced in pottery as well as precious metal.³⁵⁵ As several examples of this design are present among silver identified by Marshak as of Sogdian production,³⁵⁶ it is not unlikely that the Sogdians got this idea from the steppe, rather than the other way around.

³⁵⁴ Kiselev 1951, fig. LII, LVI, Mongaït and Skvirsky 1959, 305ff.

³⁵⁵ See, for example, a bag-shaped gilt silver jug excavated at Shangsunjiazhai, Datong, Qinghai Province. The jug was found in a tomb dated to the *third century AD*, but Marshak dates the jug to the *first century BC* on stylistic ground, and he argued that the ring-handle might have been a later addition. Marshak relates this shape to the ceramic jugs from the famous Issyk tumulus in Kazakhstan about the fourth century BC, Watt 2004, cat. 100.

³⁵⁶ Smirnov 170, 172. See also a silver jug, excavated from Aohan Banner along with the Sogdian silver ewer mentioned in note 338. Handled jugs with bag-shaped body are also found among the Hejiacun collection. See Hejiacun 71-66 (closest to the Tuyahta jug).

5.3.3. Pictorial representation

Not only were similar types of gold and silver vessels found in widely distributed locales of Eastern Eurasia, they were also depicted in the highest-ranking tombs in those areas. Although actual objects of gold and silver are poorly documented in mortuary context due to tomb robbery, these pictorial representations provide us with invaluable information about their use as important elements of Eastern Eurasian elite material culture, showing indeed that the elites wished to be portrayed with these objects in their tombs, and perhaps to continue to own them in their afterlife.

During the early Tang, the tombs of several members of the imperial family contain wall-paintings depicting gold and silver vessels like those I described above. For instance, in what appears to be an interior setting, the tomb murals of Princess Fangling, completed in 673, depict three female attendants—one holding a ewer and a stem, one a ewer and a lobed cup, and the last tripod platter (fig. 5.20).³⁵⁷ Similar images of ladies-in-waiting holding ewers were found in the tombs of Princess Xincheng (663) (fig. 5.21), Dowager Consort Yan (d.671) (fig. 5.22), and Crown Prince Jiemin (710).³⁵⁸ In the Princess Xincheng's and

³⁵⁷ For descriptions of lobed cups, see note 276.

³⁵⁸ For excavation report of these tombs, see *Kagou yu wenwu* (1997, 3): 3-29; Shaanxi and Fupingxian 2004, Gao 2002.

Dowager Consort Yan's tomb murals, even the rosette and the beaded ornaments, characteristic of this type of metalwork, were reproduced.³⁵⁹

A late eight-century tomb in Guolimu, Delinghua, Qinghai Province, yielded coffin paintings with scenes in which similar types of gold and silver vessels were depicted (fig. 5.23-25).³⁶⁰ During the period under discussion, Qinghai was known as Tuyuhun in Chinese texts or Aza in Tibetan texts, inhabited by a nomadic people remotely related to the Qiang. Little is known about the identity of the tomb occupant, but by the late eighth century, Tuyuhun had been under Tibetan rule for almost a century, and the tomb assemblage not surprisingly shows predominantly Tibetan features, most notably the painted

³⁵⁹ Rosette ornaments resembling those on the depicted ewers can be found on a gold handled cup from the Hejiacun Hoard. They are rendered by filigree and granulation, Qi and Shen 2003, cat. no. 2. For rosette and 'flower spray' ornaments of Tang gold and silver, see Qi 1999a, 139ff., Rawson 1982, 16ff.

³⁶⁰ The excavators date the tomb to the late eighth century based on stylistic analysis of textiles recovered from a nearby tomb, which yielded almost identical coffin paintings. My observation of the flower spray motifs in the paintings supports a late-eighth-century date. For a description of the archaeological contexts of these two tombs, see Tong 2008, 94ff. Only coffin paintings from M1 is published, see Luo 2006, Xu 2005, 2007, Huo 2007, Tong 2008. Those from M2 are describe in Tong 2008, 159ff., figs. 6.5.1-3, 6.5.1-4.

coffin planks, in which figures wore Tibetan costumes.³⁶¹ So we can see these paintings as more or less representative of the culture of the Tibetan Empire.

One of the coffin planks from M1 (Plank 1-A) depicts an exuberant banquet scene. In the middle is a yurt in which a couple are drinking from stem cups—the headdress of the male figure, which resembles that of the *btsanpo*, indicates his superior status. A group of guests gather on a carpet in front of the yurt drinking—the man sitting closest to the host and hostess drinks holds a similar stem cup; another guest was drinking from a rhyton. On the right of the yurt, there are two attendants amid the merry-making guests: one holds an ewer, the other presents a set of stem cups on a plate or tray. Another grand banquet is depicted on the other plank (Plank 1-B) with a similar setting; only in the central area in front of the yurt are three huge urns; attendants scoop out wine and pass it on to the guests.³⁶² M2 yielded a pair of almost identical painted wooden planks,

³⁶¹ The costumes, especially the turban-like headdress, resemble those of the Tibetan nobles worshipping Buddha depicted in Dunhuang murals (e.g., cave 158) and stone carvings at Leb Khog valley (near Jeykundo, Eastern Tibet), as well as a statue of Songtsen Gampo (?-650) in Potala Palace, Lhasa, all dated to the period of Tibetan occupation period. Xu 2005, 59ff.

³⁶² It is generally agreed that Plank II represents the mourning theme. Therefore Luo Shiping and Huo Wei interpret the banquet on Plank II as ceremonial feasting on funeral, which is supported by Old Tibetan texts excavated at Dunhuang (P. T. 1042) and Milan, Xinjiang (vii, 3; vii, 5), Huo 2007, 56f., Luo 2006, as well as Chinese texts, XTS: 216a (from the day of the death of the emperor, those who are going to be buried with the emperor drink to their fill day

but the banquet scene on one of them (Plank II-A) contains richer details in the use of gold and silver vessels. As in Plank I-B, servants stand around two huge urns filled with drink in front of the yurt; between the urns and the yurt is a small table, upon which stand four cups; one of the servants holds a ewer, while the others were ladling wine into cups and passing them on to the guests.

Finally, as mentioned earlier in the case of stem cups, drinking cups resembling metal models are depicted in Turkic stone statues across the Eastern Eurasian Steppe. A wide range of vessels are represented, including stem cups, handled cups and jugs, elliptical (with or without a ring-foot) and hemispherical cups, or rhytons.³⁶³

Summary

The value of objects comes not only from the material and the workmanship, but also from their history of use, ownership and occasions on which they were used. The important occasions include grand court ceremonies and ceremonial drinking and feasting, both involving multi-culture audiences. In

and night). Tao Tong, on the other hand, interprets it as the depiction of paradise, in which drinking and feasting in present life goes on. Tong 2008, 161.

³⁶³ See Chen 2013, 105ff. for a summary of Turk stone statues with various types of vessels.

turn, these Eurasian-style high-status interactions increased the value and prestige of gold and silver vessels.

On the one hand, the use of gold and silver were the *result* of interaction; but on the other hand, the deliberate use of similar types of gold and silver objects probably reinforced interaction, as they created a common ground for rulers from different cultural and ethnical background to engage with each other. Along with other material symbols, gold and silver vessels, insignia and horse fitting constituted a common aristocratic identity, shared by all the major Eastern Eurasian powers.

Chapter 6

Gold and Silver as Diplomatic Gifts

Introduction

In the last chapter, we discussed the roles of gold and silver in high-status networking activities, such as ceremonial feasting and court display. This chapter focuses on another role gold and silver played in high-status interaction: as diplomatic gifts. Gold and silver vessels, often with the image of the sovereign, had served as served as diplomatic gifts in the Roman and Sasanian world from at least the third century AD;³⁶⁴ by the period under discussion they became highly prized and widely exchanged by the elite across Eurasia, including those of the Eastern Eurasian empires, such as the Turks and the Tibetans. The Tang participated in this Eurasian elite network by exchanging visually similar gold and silver objects to those exchanged in Western Eurasian. Their roles in high-status networking in turn increased the prestige and desirability of such gold and silver objects in China.

But from the sixth century, the practice of giving and receiving gifts seems to have gained special significance or prominence in Eastern Eurasia. In China at

³⁶⁴ Johansen 1994, 57-58.

least, this is manifested in the edicts issued in order to restrict ostentatious gift giving,³⁶⁵ and the range of prestigious objects linked to individual emperors and aristocrats, either preserved or described in literary sources.³⁶⁶

6.1. Gift giving

The anthropological theories on gifts provides the basic theoretical framework for this chapter.³⁶⁷ The ‘theory of gifts’, was first developed by L. Morgan in 1877, expanded by M. Mauss in 1925 and C. Levi-Strauss in 1949, and recently re-evaluated by A. Weiner and O. Pyyhtinen.³⁶⁸ The gift theories describe a type of societies, in which gift-exchange played a crucial role constructing and mediating social relations, and this is mostly the case with premodern societies, including early medieval Eastern Eurasia.³⁶⁹ In a gift-

³⁶⁵ See, for example, Emperor Gaozong (r. 649-683) issued several edicts banning local magistrates to buy precious goods, such as pearls, gem stones, and gold and silver, as tribute to the court on various occasions. *QTW*, 11, 12. Although these edits by no means effectuated, given the number of preserved luxury goods dated the seventh century, they reflect contemporary concerns about ostentatious gift giving.

³⁶⁶ See, for example, the Famen Si offering (see p.2f.) and the gifts mentioned in *A Biography of An Lushan* (see note 447).

³⁶⁷ See p.57.

³⁶⁸ See Gregory 1982, 15-24.

³⁶⁹ In the case of China, David Keightley has observed during the Zhou period vast network of donor-recipient relations which established political obligations based on bronze ritual

oriented society, there are three imperatives: to give, the receive, and to give in return. One must always respond to the gift one has received, under the threat of private or public warfare, or at the expense of losing one's 'face'—one's honour, prestige, or authority. Such an obligation creates a relation of reciprocity between the giver and recipient, and the gift served as a materialisation of the intangible bond—they two parties are bound to one another by the gift. The objects given as gifts are seen as 'inalienable'—tied to the social membership, imbued with the sacred history of the owner, and the obligation to be returned, as opposed to the 'alienable' goods, that is, goods with a value independent of the rank or status of the individual involved, such as money. Nobody indeed 'owns' the object; instead, the circulation of objects through giving, receiving and reciprocating created an entangled web of economics, morality, and political relationships, which Mauss terms a 'total system of giving'.³⁷⁰

The original meaning of the Chinese character for gift, *li* 禮, is the cosmological order, according to which everything in the universe, including the

vessel inscriptions. The inscriptions carefully itemize the gifts given by the king which accompanied the charge and often record the gift ceremony, banquet, or ritual outing that surrounded the event Keightley 1981, quoted by Yang 1994, 235; Creel 1970, 125-6, 391-5, 403-5. See also Cook, Khayutina 2003, 2010, 2002.

³⁷⁰ Mauss 1970, Gregory 1982, Douglas and Isherwood 1979, Sahlins 1974, Weiner 1992, Cowell 2007, Davis 2000.

human society, operates. It thus gives rise to the other primary signification of *li*: rituals that formed the basic social structures in accord with the cosmological principles, namely sacrifice of food offerings to spiritual beings or deceased ancestors, from the very beginning of Chinese history.³⁷¹ The original meaning of the Chinese character *li* strongly suggests a self-awareness of gift in relation to social relations, especially in status consolidation.

The social relation most concerned in this thesis, the medieval interstate relations, was also constituted and sustained largely on gift-exchange. Although various forms of economy co-existed (including the that of commodity), the elite sphere of exchange, to a greater extent, operated on the principles of the gift culture. As I argued in the previous chapter, medieval interstate relationship was also a form of the patron-client, or patrimonial, relationship, that relationship transcended what now we consider rigid boundaries of state, culture, and ethnicity.³⁷² According to historical and anthropological studies, gifts played a central role in forming and sustaining the patron-client relationship. In steppe societies, the tribal leaders attract followers and their service by disseminating

³⁷¹ Yang 1994, 224. See note 369.

³⁷² See p.68ff.

gifts, typically silk.³⁷³ During the period under discussion, a Tang envoy, Prince Li Yu 李瑀, who visited the Uighur court in 758, witnessed the Uighur qaghan distributing all the gifts of silk, clothing, and gold- and silverware from China to his tribal clients.³⁷⁴ In return, there are customary expectations that the client of lower status would render loyal service to the patron in return for generous, but undefined remunerative, symbolic and/or other rewards. In China, as Skaff has argued, there also existed patriarchal networks maintained by gift-exchange in a similar manner.³⁷⁵ The objects that could have served as gifts, therefore, are not

³⁷³ Many scholars believed that this might have been one of the main incentives for the nomads to raid and force payment from sedentary societies, such as China and Byzantium. These raids, therefore, were not purely material driven. Rather, the power and honour associated with violent seizure, as well as the generosity and justice of redistributing seized luxury goods, probably formed the base of nomadic states. Barfield 1989, Beckwith 2009. For payments that the Romans paid to the nomadic invaders, such as the Huns and Avars, see Ammianus Marcellinus, Salvianus of Marseille, and Priscus. For China, in earlier chapter we have mentioned the silk and other luxury goods that the Chinese, including the Li Yuan, who later became the first Tang emperor, sent to the Türks and other nomadic tribes.

³⁷⁴ *JTS* 195,5205; *XTS* 217a, 6116; Mackerras 1973, 64–5. A similar instance took place in 790. After helping the Tang defeating the Tibetans, the Uighur prime minister Il ügäsi (or Xieganjiasi 頡干迦斯 as Chinese transliteration) was rewarded by the qaghan with ‘state tokens’ from China; he, in turn, gave all the gifts out to his soldiers and followers. *JTS* 195. For the Turkic transliteration of the name Il ügäsi, see Yamada 1969, 111, Moriyasu 2007 303.

³⁷⁵ Skaff 2012, 75ff. Evidence that Skaff quotes to illustrate patrimonial generosity are drawn mainly from Tang frontier army in Tang army, where generals tended to present generous gifts to their followers. However, as many have noticed, the identity and social practices, including political networking, in the frontier regions tended to be more fluid and often closer to steppe

impersonal commodities alienated from other categories of the modern society. The prestige of a gift depends not only on its expensive material and fine craftsmanship, but more importantly, on the honour symbolically embodied in the item itself due to its own specific history of ownership, usage and circulation. The gift theories draw attention to the process through which meaning was created and enacted, which is also this chapter will focus on.

This chapter, therefore, explores the role of gifts, gold and silver gifts in particular, in these networks. I will first scrutinise the concept of the gift in the given period and area based on the gift theories. Secondly, it looks into how textual accounts portray gold and silver as diplomatic gifts. It then discusses the role of gold and silver in diplomatic exchange, especially as ‘token gifts’ that accompanied diplomatic letters, based on both archaeological and textual evidence. Lastly, it demonstrates how medieval elites competed with each other by controlling and manipulating the act of giving and the meaning of things given.

6.1.1. Textual accounts of gifts

The Chinese ancient texts contain extensive description of gifts and the contexts in which gifts were exchanged.³⁷⁶ These include the official historical

practices to Chinese ones. It is, therefore, hard to determine whether the same principle can be applied to the Sui-Tang civil administrative system.

³⁷⁶ See chapter 6.

accounts, namely *Ce Fu Yuan Gui* (Prime Tortoise of the Record Bureau), the *Jiu Tang Shu* and *Xin Tang Shu* (Old and New Annals of Tang), *Zi Zhi Tong Jian* (Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance). Other accounts are scattered in miscellaneous texts. Notable examples include *An Lushan Shi Ji* (The Story of An Lushan), which contains descriptive information on the gifts exchanged between Emperor Xuanzong, his concubine Yang Guifei, and General An Lushan; *Quan Tang Wen* (The Complete Tang Essays), and *Tai Ping Yu Lan* (Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era).³⁷⁷

There are basically two kinds of occasions on which gifts are mentioned in texts. The first, and the predominant, occasion is when gift exchange is involved in the narrative, as shown in the beginning of the chapter, the other is when gifts are mentioned in diplomatic correspondence quoted by historical accounts, which I will discuss with more detail later in the chapter. Descriptions of gold and silver are extensive in these texts. Consistent with the material evidence, they served as

³⁷⁷ Most of these texts are compiled during the Late Tang (10th century) or Song dynasty (960-1279), but they are based on documents preserved from the Tang dynasty. The Story of An Lushan was however composed in during the ninth century, based on eighth century documents Levy 1960, 8-9.

gifts exchanged in both internal and diplomatic contexts and were given in the form of both utensils and bullion.³⁷⁸

The attention the texts give to ensure the proper reception and interpretation of gifts makes it clear that gift-exchanging strategies were of utmost importance for the state. However, the textual accounts do have issues that we must bear in mind. First of all, the texts quoted above are all Chinese and were intended for the internal Chinese audience. Hence, the information is inevitably China-centric and does not represent all polities equally. Also, the historiographers, most of them being Confucian literati, had their own political and moral agendas and were biased with the material they wrote about. For example, they argue that ostentatious gift-giving was a sign of moral corruption and unrighteous rule and, therefore, tend to cast such acts in a negative light. Moreover, when portraying interstate relationship, the historiographers tend to pay more attention to gifts brought from foreign countries than those given by the Chinese, probably because the former fits their cosmology better, in which China was the centre of the world and all other foreigners paid tribute. Thirdly, the texts do not represent all the different polities equally. The ancient writers seem to have paid much more attention to the gift-exchange between China and Tibet.

³⁷⁸ See Qi 1999, 261ff. for a summary of the exchange of gold and silver gifts recorded in historical accounts.

Although gold was a central part of the gifts sent between these two empires, we do wonder whether that represents the gifts exchanged between other Eastern Eurasian polities.

6.1.2. Material remains of gifts

The ancient texts suggest a group of gold and silver objects, such as *hu ping* (foreign ewers), plates, and cups, most frequently served as diplomatic gifts.³⁷⁹ These types of object can be identified with material remains of gold and silver objects, especially with the help of ancient inventories, which contain the name of the objects. However, we have to admit that there is a huge gap between textual accounts and the material remains of gold and silver. There is very little evidence from preserved objects to help us pin them down as gifts. Even if we can identify the objects as gifts at the point of deposition, as in the two cases we are going to discuss, we must bear in mind that even these objects had a much longer ‘social life’, in which they might have changed hands many times and moved between categories or even occupied multiple categories at the same time.³⁸⁰ Even though it is difficult to argue for a one-to-one correlation between the preserved materials and diplomatic gifts described in ancient texts, these

³⁷⁹ See p.188 for descriptions and material remains of these types of vessel.

³⁸⁰ Appadurai 1988.

preserved objects preserved today could have served as *potential* gifts exchanged among the rulers of medieval Eastern Eurasia.

In spite of this, their role as gifts has been confirmed by a number of gold and silver vessels bearing inscriptions that explicitly state the identity of the object as a gift, either from officials to the imperial court, or the other way around: from the emperor to his or her subjects.³⁸¹ In the above-mentioned examples, gold and silver are mostly in the form of utensils, such as platters, plates, bowls, cups and ewers,³⁸² but they could also have been circulated in the form of bullion, as indicated by inscriptions.³⁸³

There are also a few notable groups of objects that can be identified as gifts. One group is the Famen Si collection in Xi'an, China, mentioned earlier.³⁸⁴ An inscription found together with the objects attributed them to the Tang emperors,

³⁸¹ Most of these examples were found in China. For a list of such objects, see Qi 1999a.

³⁸² See chapter 3.

³⁸³ However, the ingots' identity are rather blurred, whether as tribute from officials or as taxes, as the terminology used in the inscription is the same for both tribute and tax: they are both indiscriminately identified as 'tribute'; and often times, the name of the official who presented the ingots was listed in the inscription as the person who 'paid the tribute', thus further blurring the line between personal gifts and fiscal contribution to the government. For a discussion of the archaeological finds of gold and silver ingots, see Qi 1999a, 272-76, Qin 1972.

³⁸⁴ See chapter 1.

Yizong (r. 859 – 873) and Xizong (r. 873 – 888), and their close family members and entourage, who donated the objects as gifts on the occasion of the deposition of Buddhist relics in 874. This rich imperial collection consists of gold and silver reliquaries decorated with pearls and precious stones, gilt bronze Buddhist statues, gold, silver, ceramic and glass utensils, jade, rock crystals, agates, amber, clothes, and coins.

Another remarkable example of imperial gifts is the Shōsō-in collection in Nara, Japan, also mentioned earlier.³⁸⁵ The collection amounts about 9000 items, including gold, silver, lacquer and glass utensils, musical instruments decorated with lacquer and silver and shell inlays, clothes, medicines, war and hunting equipment, playthings, books and documents. Again, as they are scrupulously documented in the *Tōdai-ji Kenmotsu-chō* 東大寺獻物帳 (Memorandum of Dedication), we know that the nucleus of the collection were personal objects of the Emperor Shōmo (701 – 756 A.D.), donated to the temple by the Empress Dowager Kōmyō (701 – 760 A.D.) in 756 after the emperor's death. Another group of eight-century objects, were also donated by members of the imperial family in the tenth century.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁵ See p. 31f.

³⁸⁶ They were brought to the Shōsōin from the damaged Twin Repositories of the Tōdai-ji. Among them are articles used at the consecration of the Great Vairocana on April 9, 752; those

These two collections are associated with the highest-ranking elites of China and Japan, respectively, but they exhibit a remarkably similar taste and preference for exotic materials, such as precious metal, glass, rock crystal, agate and amber, polychrome silk textiles, with gold and silver clearly standing out. These are the same group of materials that have been found consistently in elite contexts across Eastern Eurasia as new marks of aristocratic distinction.³⁸⁷ Although the Famen Si and Shōsō-in collections were not intended as diplomatic gifts, they both came from the imperial family. The range and quality of materials from these collections represent the highest-ranking objects that one could give as gifts.³⁸⁸

In fact, many objects from the Shōsō-in collections may well have been acquired through gift exchange, probably from the Tang court. For example, a silver tripod platter decorated with a deer has a number of parallels in China (fig. 7.10). A gilt silver platter found on the site of the Tang Palace *Da Ming Gong* in

used at the memorial service for the Imperial Consort on July 19, 755; those used at Emperor Shōmu funeral on May 19, 756 and his first anniversary; those used at the New Year's court observance in January 758; those dedicated by Empress Regnant Shōtoku (718 – 770) on her visit to the temple on February 4, 767; and those dedicated by the same Empress on her visit on April 3, 768. Kunaichō 1976, ii.

³⁸⁷ See introduction.

³⁸⁸ For discussions on diplomatic gifts, see chapter 6.

Xi'an has an almost identical design. Like the Shōsō-in platter, it has a six-lobed rim, a flat bottom and a flat rim, supported by three feet bent in the end forming a little spiral. It is decorated with a gilded central motif of a roaring lion (in the place of the deer of the Shōsō-in platter) in relief, and the rim is decorated with gilded flower sprays, also in relief. Another silver platter, found in Kuancheng, Hebei, features a similar central deer motif, although the contour of its rim is slightly different, and its tripod stand is missing.³⁸⁹ But most importantly, the Shōsō-in platter has an inscription that has been found on many gold- and silverwork items made by the imperial workshop of the Tang court.³⁹⁰ As Japan had not engaged in war with China during the period, it is unlikely that the platter arrived in Japan as booty; neither is it likely that the platter was purchased on market, as it is unlikely that the work of the imperial workshops was circulated in the commercial market. Therefore, the chance is that the platter, like other

³⁸⁹ There are many other objects in the Shoshoin that appear to have been originally from China. Remarkable objects of gold and silver also include a pair of jars depicting equestrian hunters in a miniature landscape on a matted background. The particular motif, as well as the techniques with which the motif was rendered, has been found on several samples of Tang silver. See chapter 1.

³⁹⁰ The inscription reads 字字號二尺盤一面重一百五兩四錢半 (A yu labeled platter size two chi weight one hundred and fifty liang and four qian and half). A series of inscriptions suggesting manufacture labels, including the yu label, have been. It appears that these labels were used to differentiate the various sections in the imperial workshop Wang 1996 Liang approximates 40 grammes. Zhu 1986.

objects in Shoshoin that were presumably produced in China, was brought to Japan by one of the numerous missions to the Tang court, if it was not from any other country which originally got it from China.

Therefore, we can safely assume that the gifts given to foreign delegation would not be of strikingly contrasting nature. I argue that gift-exchange, especially in the diplomatic context, is an important way, in which these prestigious materials circulated and reached widely-distributed locales of Eastern Eurasia.

6.2. Context: gifts in diplomacy

As I have argued in previous chapters, over the three hundred years of co-existence allowed the Eastern Eurasian polities, such as China, Tibet, and the Turk Qaghanate, to familiarise themselves with each other's visual, ritual, and discursive language and subsequently developed a series of shared diplomatic rituals that embraced Turkic, Chinese, and generic Eurasian elements. Diplomacy thus became an arena of interstate competition, in which the sovereigns could address, compliment, challenge, or insult their counterparts in a language that had meaning for all parties. It also encouraged them to cultivate similar tastes and leisure activities, which provided a cultural common ground. This intimacy with each other's culture and tastes gave rise to shared marks of aristocratic distinction.

Being a central part of Eurasian diplomacy, gift-exchange must be understood in this context. Not only did the Eastern Eurasian polities have similar gift-exchange ceremonies as a part of their diplomatic rituals, they also seem to share, to a great extent, the core components of what should be given as diplomatic gifts. As with the rituals themselves, this is out of the necessity of a common ground to communicate; and at the same time it is out of their common taste for prestigious materials, most notably and most universally, gold and silver.

6.2.1. Gift ceremonies in diplomacy

To understand the significance of gift exchange in medieval diplomacy, we must understand some important features of medieval diplomacy itself. Across Eurasia, including the Eastern Eurasian polities, hospitality is the basic rule for receiving envoys. All arrangements were meant to impress the foreign envoys with the supreme power, enormous wealth, and generosity of the monarch. that were meant to impress the envoys with the wealth and generosity of the emperor. The host country was not only supposed to provide food, lodging and transportation for the envoys, but also to entertain them with organized spectacles, lavish banquets, and aristocratic activities, such as hunting and polo. Special government institutions were devised to take care of all the needs of the emissary as soon as they entered the former's territory. In China, the Office of Visitor Protocol (*dianke shu* 典客署) under the Court of State Ceremonial and the Bureau

of Visitor Reception (*Zhuke si* 主客司), were government departments designated especially to take care of diplomatic issues.³⁹¹

The exchange of gifts was an important and obligatory component of every diplomatic mission built into diplomatic protocol. It must be noted that, as a rule, gifts were presented along with letters from the sovereign of the visiting envoy. As has been observed by many, the exchange of gifts and correspondence were customary elements of Byzantine-Sasanian diplomatic protocols,³⁹² which had also been shared ubiquitously by their nomadic neighbours. One of the main tasks of the envoy was to present gifts and letters, which usually took place during the audience with the emperor, the climax of the entire visit. The importance of such diplomatic ceremonies involving gift exchange is demonstrated by the attention given by ancient writers from Byzantium to China. For example, when describing Justin II's audience with Zemarchus, the Sogdian envoy sent by the Turk qaghan, in 568, Menander mentioned

he (Zemarchus) handed over the letter and the gifts to those who were sent to receive them,' and then 'when the Emperor read the letter, written in

³⁹¹ For a study of diplomatic institutions in ancient China, see Li 1998.

³⁹² Blockley 1985, 16, Cameron 1987, 120, Canepa 2009, 135-38, 154-66, Wiesehöfer 2007.

*Scythian, through an interpreter, he most willingly granted an audience to the embassy.*³⁹³

Similarly, the Chinese monk Xuanzang described his experience with the exchange of letter and gifts between the Western Türks and the small oasis king of Gaochang (Turfan). At the Türk court,

they introduced... legates from Gaochang with their letters of introduction and presents. The Qaghan (Ton Yagbhu) examined for himself the one and the other and was much pleased thereat.

Upon Xuanzang's departure, Ton Yagbhu appointed a close retainer to prepare letters of commendation for the different countries and to accompany the Master to the kingdom of Kapisa.³⁹⁴

In China, a long series of gift exchange started from the point when the delegation arrived on the outskirts of the capital: a Tang official, acting on behalf of the emperor, delivered an imperial edict of greeting, treated the emissaries to a banquet, and bestowed *gifts*.³⁹⁵ As soon as they arrived, the envoys were asked to report the number and type of items that they brought as gifts to the Office of

³⁹³ Blockley 1985, 115.

³⁹⁴ Beal 1911.

³⁹⁵ Wang 2005, 103.

Visitor Protocol, who ensured that the gifts were appropriate to be presented at the court audience. The actual exchange of letters and gifts was reserved for special ceremonies designated specifically for the purpose, as described in the *Kaiyuan Ritual Code*, as well as passages concerning the handling of diplomatic gifts in other historical texts.³⁹⁶ When the emperor held an audience with the envoys, the latter were arrayed in the courtyard with standing positions determined by status. The envoys presented their letters and gifts to officials of Secretariat; the latter then ascended to the monumental building, where the emperor held his court, to present the letters to the emperor; thereafter Tang officials escorted the envoys from the courtyard to be seated in the audience hall and continued to handle communications between the emperor and the visitor.³⁹⁷

6.2.2. The hierarchy of gifts

According to the gift theory, the act of gift giving is hierarchical in nature. It is ‘a means by which the relationships of domination and control are established.’³⁹⁸ Between individuals or groups of differing status, ‘the disparity of the (gift) exchanges both articulated and defined the direction and degree of

³⁹⁶ Li 1998.

³⁹⁷ TKYL, 79, 1a-80b; Skaff 2012, 139, Wang 2005, 126.

³⁹⁸ Gregory 1982, 19.

subordination.³⁹⁹ This is because while the initial giver usually obtains a higher status, the recipient is forced into an obligation or debt of reciprocating. Therefore, competitive giving—to give more and better, even to the extent of bringing ruin on oneself—is a typical of gift-oriented societies. The tension inherent in gift-giving is even more pronounced in the type of giving that works towards the social elevation and differentiation of an individual, as opposed to the type of giving which consolidates the existing social order within a group. Andrew Cowell terms the former ‘antagonistic’ giving. In such acts, gift-giving can often be understood as an aggressive act, which leads not only to moral debt and obligation, but to actual shame and loss of social status.⁴⁰⁰

The hierarchical element of gifts is also inherent in gift exchange in diplomatic context. As I have argued in the beginning of the thesis, unlike modern diplomacy, which assumes all states are equal (nominally at least), medieval diplomacy was based on a hierarchical network of rulers. Empires, such as China, Tibet and the Turk Qahanate, were commonly recognized as the great powers, even though they constantly competed with each other—they all saw themselves as the sole supreme power, whereas none of them was willing to admit any other country as an equal. Next in rank of the hierarchy are lesser states, such as Japan,

³⁹⁹ Geary 1988, 173.

⁴⁰⁰ Cowell 2007, 19.

Korea, Bohai, Nanzhao, as well as the numerous oasis kingdoms around the Tarim basin.

Inevitably, the hierarchical elements of medieval diplomacy were manifested in the exchange of diplomatic gifts. Gift exchange at the state level was not only a gesture of friendship and alliance, but also an important means to establishing dominance and subservience, and often involved with more naked expression of power. We hear from Salvianus of Marseille, when he speaks of the gifts the Romans paid to the ‘Barbarians’: ‘We even make ourselves additionally ridiculous by pretending that the gold we pay is merely a gift. We call it a gift, yet it is really a ransom - but a ransom paid on unusually hard and wretched terms.’ In the Chinese context, the hierarchical element inherent in the exchange of diplomatic gifts is probably more explicit. The generic term for gift in Chinese, *li*, is rarely used in the context of diplomatic gift-exchange. Instead, the ancient writers appear to have been more concerned with the power relationship between the giver and the recipient. They took great care to pin the role of the things exchanged in a hierarchical relationship—either as tribute (*jin* 進, *jin feng* 進奉) from below, or bestowal (*ci* 賜) from above. An obvious example is the investiture paraphernalia, which serve as the materialisation and visual manifestation of the bond between overlord and vassal. Lateral exchange between equals is rare. The terms used in contexts involving foreign states is not differentiated from those involving internal subjects, both being a part of the

patriarchal relationship. It seems that the distinction between these categories indicating power relationship is way more critical to the ancient observers than the distinction between the diplomatic and domestic contexts.

While gift exchange creates and affirms cordial relationship, the non-involvement in the gift-exchanging network can signal hostility—‘a stranger, someone not tied to the community by a bond both formed and manifested in gift exchange, was dangerous and suspect’, and there was little ground between the status of friend and that of non-friend, that is, enemy.⁴⁰¹ For example, when the Türgish qaghan Sulu requested Tang investiture and marriage to a princess in 717, the Tang emperor Xuanzong declined by refusing the Türgish envoy’s gifts of horses. The rejection sent Sulu an unmistakable signal of Tang’s unwillingness of engage with him on amicable terms. In fact, at the moment, the Tang court was involved in a debate whether to attack or appease Sulu.⁴⁰² Another interesting instance of gifts playing a role in Qapaghan Qaghan complained that the gold

⁴⁰¹ Geary 1988, 173. Geary points out that in medieval Europe, the opposite of the term *amicus* (friend) is *inimisobcus*, literally non-friend, or enemy.

⁴⁰² Even though, in keeping with the ‘diplomatic’ decorum, the Tang emperor praised Türgish for their effort of procuring the horses and enduring the hardships to travel to Chang’an. *CFYG* 971: 2b; Chavannes 1903, 33-34. In this case, the Tang’s rejection of gifts was not a completely downright breakup of the relationship. Coupled with the well-versed verbal message, it conveyed a more ambiguous message and allowed room for further manipulating the relationship in the future.

and silver ware, which Empress Wu sent as a part of the payment for the Turk attack on Khitan in 697, were of inferior quality, and he used it as one of the pretexts to justify his attack of Hebei.⁴⁰³

Finally, it has been argued that, according to the customary Eurasian tradition, overlords have the exclusive right to monopolise external affairs. They expect to receive the exclusive loyalty of their client, and they restricted their clients from making contacts with other external powers.⁴⁰⁴ This is based on historical incidents of how the overlord reacts after their client violated the expectation. For example, Bilga qaghan dispatched a general to attack the Qarluq because their leaders had submitted to the Tang and stopped sending tributes to the Türks.⁴⁰⁵ Similarly, the Türk-Byzantine alliance of 568 was strained when the Avars, whom the First Türk Empire claimed as 'slaves' or clients, submitted to the Byzantines.⁴⁰⁶ Sending gifts and letters to a new recipient violates the established power balance and was considered a serious challenge to the status quo. An incident in the mid-730s well illustrates the crucial role of gifts in switching alliance. The Tang were then increasingly intimidated by the joint force

⁴⁰³ *JTS* 194a: 5169; *XTS* 215a: 6045-6; *ZZTJ* 206: 6516, 6530-1; Pulleyblank 1952, 329-30.

⁴⁰⁴ Barfield 1993, Skaff 2012.

⁴⁰⁵ Tekin 1968, 278.

⁴⁰⁶ Blockley 1985, 175-79.

of the Arabs and the Türgish. They were also worried that the Tibetans, their allies at the time, would switch allegiance to the Türgish. Their suspicion was confirmed when they captured a Türgish mission which, led by an envoy named Kül Inancu, was crossing the Pamirs with letters, a silver ewer, spices and other gifts for the Tibetan prime minister Mes ag tshoms. These gifts served as sufficient evidence for the Chinese to accuse the Tibetan of breaking the treaty and shifting alliance to those who were supposed to be their common enemies.⁴⁰⁷

6.2.3. The hierarchy of letters

Apart from gifts, the diplomatic correspondence was also an area for establishing hierarchy. Unfortunately, we only have diplomatic correspondence preserved in Chinese textual records, which are translated into the Chinese language as well as the ‘ideologically correct’ language for the Chinese.⁴⁰⁸ From the Chinese perspective at least, the hierarchical nature of diplomatic

⁴⁰⁷ *WJ* 11, 7.

⁴⁰⁸ We do not know the original language of the diplomatic correspondence preserved in Chinese historical texts. But it is most likely that they were in the language of the sender, as is the case of the letter from the Western Türks to the Byzantines, which was written in ‘Scythian’. See note 393. Also, the letters carried by the Türgish envoy to the Tibetan court also seems to be in some non-Chinese language. See note 407. So we must be aware that when these letters were translated into the Chinese language, they must have also been translated into the ‘ideologically correct’ language that reflects China’s supreme position in the cosmological order.

correspondence is first illustrated by how they are identified: ‘state letter’ (*guo shu* 國書) refers to correspondence between states of (more or less) equal rank, whereas ‘memorial’ (*biao* 表) and ‘edict’ (*chi* 敕), terms used for communication between the Emperor and his or her subjects, in diplomatic context refer to correspondence between the Emperor and the vassal states.

Furthermore, the hierarchical elements are found in the protocols of these carefully worded diplomatic letters. Based on the extant diplomatic correspondence in Chinese at least, scholars have found remarkable consistency in the structure of these letters, despite the varied geo-cultural background of the senders.⁴⁰⁹ As a rule, the letter begins with a standard address, including the regnal titles of both sender and addressee, sometimes with familial terms expressing the relationship between the sender and addressee. The correspondence between equals opens with a salutation: the sender ‘salutes’ (*wen* 問) or ‘salutes with awe (*jing wen* 敬問)’ the addressee; whereas the ‘edict’ from the Emperor to the vassal state simply opens with ‘edict to’ and then the title of the addressee.⁴¹⁰ The body of the letters comes next, where the subjects of

⁴⁰⁹ Kaneko 2001, 111-17, 125-72, Hori 2002, 63-84.

⁴¹⁰ In actual cases, the hierarchy is, however, not so clearly demarcated. The hierarchical elements in diplomatic letter can be highly ambiguous and even self-contradictory, which I will go into more details later in the chapter.

discussion arise in serial order. Following the body, the sender typically lists a number of ‘tokens’, or credentials (*xin* 信 or *xin wu* 信物), that accompany the letter and verify the identity of the sender.⁴¹¹ In some cases, there is an acknowledgement of the reception of ‘tokens’ that came with the last correspondence. An extended salutation formula immediately follows, which first brings up the change of weather in the particular season, and then wishes well for the addressee. Elaboration of the formula includes the well-wishing of the family members, close retainers, and subjects of the addressee.

6.3. Gold and silver as diplomatic gift

Eurasian elites of the period under discussion show remarkable consistency not only in the manner, in which they exchanged diplomatic gifts, but also in the things they exchanged. According to the textual records, diplomatic gifts tend to be a combination of universal valuables and rare exotic marvels, including regular items of gift include domestic utensils, jewellery, clothing, medicines, furniture, military and hunting equipment, exotic animals and livestock.⁴¹²

⁴¹¹ In many cases, only the existence of the ‘token’ gifts.

⁴¹² A Tang edict issued in 737, regarding gifts brought by foreign envoys, lists the common materials of diplomatic gifts as following: ‘gold, silver, pearl, jade, hide, leather, plume, fur, brocade, felt, various types of woven silk, spices, dyes, clothing, food, objects of daily use.’ Recorded in Noburo 1983, quoted in Iwami 2009.

Lists of diplomatic gifts exchanged between the Nanzhao Kingdom and the Tibetan Empire in 715, when the two polities were negotiating an alliance, is reproduced in the Chinese annal *Zi Zhi Tong Jian* (Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance).⁴¹³ The Nanzhao delegation, who travelled to the Tibetan court, presented ‘a large amount of silk and treasures’. In return, the Tibetans entrusted the delegation with return gifts to the Nanzhao king Piluoge: a gold crown, an embroidered robe, a belt decorated with gold and precious stones, a bed with curtains made of golden threads, a canopy, saddles, utensils, pearls, carpets, clothes, camels and horses. The Chinese text also mentioned, on an earlier occasion, the Tibetan court gave Piluoge ‘two rare silver plates in the shape of a horse head’.⁴¹⁴ Among the numerous records of gifts recorded in *Ce Fu Yuan Gui*, there was a mutual exchange in 649. Upon the death of the Tang emperor Taizong’s death, the Tibetan *btsanpo* Songtsen Gampo pledged his loyalty to the new emperor Gaozong and sent ‘fifteen gold and silver (items) and various jewels to present at Taizong’s spirit seat’. For this gallantry, the Tang court returned Songtsen Gampo with ‘three thousand *duan* polychrome silk textile’ along with more honorary titles. In 717, the Turk delegation presented the Tang court with

⁴¹³ It must be pointed out, though, that *Zi Zhi Tong Jian* was compiled in the eleventh century.

⁴¹⁴ *ZZTJ* 216.

unrecorded number of horses. In return, the Tang court sent ‘a silver *hu* ewer, plates, and seventy *duan* of polychrome silk textiles.’⁴¹⁵

The Eurasian elites of China, Tibetan and Nanzhou seem to have had shared ideas of what they should send as diplomatic gifts. We can see from the above example that the material of the recorded gift consists mainly of gold, silver, glass, rock crystal, along with other imported precious or semi-precious gems, and luxury silk textiles—remarkably similar to the range of materials from the Famen Si and Shōsō-in collections described in the beginning of the chapter. This might have been, like the gift ceremony, the result of following the customary Eurasian convention. It might have also due to the shared aristocratic taste in precious materials, as I have argued in previous chapters.

Among the gift items, precious metals and silk textiles constitute the body of gift items. They were so important that, in Chinese texts, gifts are often referred to as *jin bo* 金帛 or *jin zeng* 金繒 (gold silk).⁴¹⁶ The Turks seem to have shared this notion with regard to gifts, as testified in the Kül Tegin inscription of 733: they (i.e., the [Tang] people) give (us) gold, silver, and silk in abundance.’⁴¹⁷ In

⁴¹⁵ CCYG 974: 11445.

⁴¹⁶ See, for example, CEF, 170, 964, 968, 973, 979, 980, 984; XTS, 215a.

⁴¹⁷ Tekin 1968, 261.

fact, these two categories of goods appear to have been ‘unifying elements’ in gift-exchange across socially and culturally diverse societies of Eurasia. As early as the second century, the Han mission, lead by General Zhangqian, took with them ‘tens of thousands of cattle and sheep and carried *gold* and *silk goods* worth a hundred million cash’, when they sought alliance with ‘the Great Yuezhi’ in Ferghana. When the Xiongnu *chanyu* Hu-yan-ye attended the Han court in 51 BC, he was given, together with investiture paraphernalia, ‘20 catties of gold, 200,000 cash, 77 robes, 8,000 pieces of silk fabrics, and 6,000 catties of silk floss.’ The next year, Hu-han-ye came to the court again and received an additional increase of 110 robes, 9,000 pieces of silk fabric, and 8,000 catties of silk floss.’⁴¹⁸

6.3.1. Silk

Although this thesis focuses primarily on gold and silver, it is worth making a few comments on silk, because its role in diplomacy is no less important than precious metals. The silk traded along the Silk Road was usually not luxury polychrome silk but plain white silk, a common medium of exchange. This type of monetary silk, along with coins, had always been a form of currency in China, produced by farming households to the government standard size (twelve metres

⁴¹⁸ HS 94b:2a-b, quoted by Yang 1967, 45-46.

long by 54 centimetres wide) and paid as a portion of their taxes.⁴¹⁹ On the one hand, the monetary silk was standardised, convenient to be transported, with high denomination,⁴²⁰ all of which made it an excellent medium for long distance trade. On the other hand, silk was desirable as a luxury item in Western Eurasia and was so in Central Asia and steppe, where people profited from trading silk to Western Eurasia and had a strong motive to exchange surplus livestock for more stable form of wealth, such as silk.

The Han was already aware that, like gold, silk had universal values even in areas outside China, hence the huge amount of silk and gold taken by General Zhang Qian and his delegation, as well as the remark in the Chinese official history that ‘silk was so highly valued by people of the Western Regions that in some places the Chinese had to use it, along with gold, to trade for food.’⁴²¹ Monetary silk remained strong throughout the Tang, even more so in the light of

⁴¹⁹ China had had a dual coin-silk monetary system from the Qin-Han empire. The standardised monetary silk had always been a stabiliser in the Chinese monetary system, less fluctuating in value and quality compared with coins. The Tang had a complex monetary system (mainly because of the shortage of coins), in which three currencies—textile (both silk and hemp), grain and coin—circulated alongside each other. For discussion on the role of silk in Chinese monetary system, see Peng 1994.

⁴²⁰ According to Valerie Hansen, the purchasing power of forty bolts of silk in 673 was a camel, and in 731 an eleven-year-old female slave. Hansen 2012.

⁴²¹ *HS* 96B: 4b.

the burgeoning Silk Road trade. Due to its standardisation and convenience for transportation and storage monetary was the major purchasing power on the Silk Road—as we can see from the Dunhuang papers, most of the transactions were reckoned in silk. Also, due to its high denomination, silk was the dominant currency for large payment and purchasing valuables. The Tang government mainly used silk to pay for their military expeditions and garrisons on the frontier. Valerie Hansen gives the example of a payment of fifteen thousand bolts of silk to the garrison near Dunhuang. Garrison officials converted the tax cloth into coins and then into grain, some used to feed soldiers in the garrison, some paid directly to local merchants.⁴²² The Tang government also used monetary silk to purchase horses from the Turko-Mongols as well as the latter's military service.⁴²³

Gold and silver were valuable, too. However, they were never incorporated into the monetary system during the Tang.⁴²⁴ As we shall see later, in diplomatic context, they were circulated mainly in the form of luxury ware, highly

⁴²² Hansen 2012, 184.

⁴²³ Skaff 2012, 252ff., 258ff.

⁴²⁴ Gold and silver, silver coins minted by the Sasanian empire and, after 651, by their Islamic successors, circulated widely throughout Western China. See Skaff 1998.

individualised with a personal nature, rather than in the form of coins or bullion, as it was the case in Western Eurasia.

6.3.2. Gold and silver

The Chinese, from as early as the Han dynasty, had clearly understood the universal value of gold, especially in their interaction with people from the steppe and the western regions, which has already been discussed in previous chapters. In Western Eurasia, gold and silver had long served as diplomatic gifts, as we can see from the gift lists on the Amarna Letters, which include gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and various semi-precious stones, circulated in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East around the fourteenth century BC.⁴²⁵ Depictions of gold and silver bullion and luxury tableware presented by foreign envoys were also widely distributed across the region.⁴²⁶ From the late Republican and Imperial period,

⁴²⁵ The Amarna Letters are an archive, written on clay tablets, were excavated in Upper Egypt in Amarna, the modern name for the ancient Egyptian capital *Akhetaten* founded by pharaoh Akhenaten (1350s – 1330s BC). The letters consist primarily of diplomatic correspondence between Egypt and its neighbours during the New Kingdom. For a discussion of the diplomatic gifts of that period, see Feldman 2006, chapter 6.

⁴²⁶ For example, Tutankhamun's tomb wall-paintings depict Asian envoys kneeling or prostrating in front of the Pharaoh, while gifts, in this case gold and silver bullion and tableware, are being presented by attendants. From Assyria in the ninth century BC, the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC) shows a procession of men coming with camels, elephants, horses and other animals, jars, *gold- or silver bullion*, costly wood, cloth and elephant tusks. Among the inscriptions describing the campaigns are passages like the following: '... countries [far away] towards the West, [heard] the fame of my rule [... and brought] - without exception

gift-exchange was central to the network of patron and client, which constituted a large part of the Roman society. Being the patron of his subjects, the emperor gave out *missilia*, or tokens symbolising various goods, which included gold and silver.⁴²⁷ But it was not until the late Roman Empire that gold and silver vessels, which we will also find familiar among the Eastern Eurasia material, became regular items of diplomatic gifts widely circulated across Western Eurasia and Central Asia.

According to the observation of Johansen, only from the reign of Diocletian (244-312 AD) onwards do we start to see gold and silver objects with inscriptions or decorations which identify them as imperial, exemplified by the commemorative dishes (*missoria*), silver ingots, as well as rings and fibula. Compared with gold and silver coins and bullion, which were given as gifts throughout history, these objects appear to have a more personalised nature. The finest of the commemorative plates have scenes, in relief or engraving, representing the Emperor and members of the ruling house. They were produced stamped and/or decorated in state controlled workshops to celebrate important

as their tribute: *gold, silver*, [male and female camels, and all kinds of spices to [me and kissed my feet.’ As for Persia, according to Herodotus, most of Persia’s vassals paid their tribute in *gold* or *silver*. Summarised by Johansen 1994, 12.

⁴²⁷ For the patron-client relationship in Roman society, see Kloft 1970, Millar 1977.

imperial events. Some of them even have inscriptions specifying the context of their manufacture and intended purpose. These imperial vessels had been given as a part of an imperial *largitio* (largesse)—also as political propaganda—to subjects, especially those in border areas beyond the imperial frontiers. In fact, the largest number of discoveries of such vessels has been made in areas ‘where danger was greatest, on the borders of the Empire—in Britain, in the Danube provinces and in South Russia’.⁴²⁸ Surviving examples include the so-called ‘Licinius plates’, found in Yugoslavia as well as the ‘Munich’ Treasre of AD 324. Around the rim is the inscription: LICINI AVGVSTE SEMPER VINCAS.⁴²⁹ Licinus, in his struggle with Constantine for mastery of the state, presumably

⁴²⁸ Kent and Painter 1977, 19. See the same catalogue of an exhibition at the British Museum for major finds of Roman gold and silver in these border regions. Sending gifts of precious metals beyond the border is also mentioned in textual sources. For example, we hear from Priscus that the Roman ambassador presented a Hunnic queen with three *silver bowls*. See Priscus, *fr.* 8; *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* IV, p.77ff; Blockley 1981-1983, 11.2. Another example regards Boa, the Queen of the Sabir Huns, who in 528 made an alliance with the Romans; we hear that she had been won over by Justinian ‘with many gifts of imperial raiments and a variety of *silver vessels* and not a little money.’ Malalas 18.13 ed. Bonn 430.18ff. Both examples quoted by Johansen 1994, 144. Johansen also mentions one example of the surviving plates specifying it was given as *LARGITAS DN VALENTINIANI AVGVSTI*.

⁴²⁹ See *ibid*, 17, cat. no. 10. Similar political presentations continued to be made throughout the period by Constantine and his successors. On a larger scale all gave generous presents of gold coins and silver bars to the troops to ensure their loyalty. See also *ibid*, cat. no. 11 for a silver dish with the triumph of Constantius II.

gave his supporters presents in the form of these commemorative plates. The Sasanians, perhaps under the Roman influence, adopted the same practices around this period, too. The Sasanian kings also sent silver plates, bearing the image of the sovereign, as a form of royal propaganda to their vassals from turbulent areas, such as Central Asia, where these plates were greatly valued and widely imitated; and it was through people from these areas that these objects, as well as the practices of exchanging them in high-status interaction, reached Eastern Eurasia.

6.3.3. Categories of gold and silver gifts

I would like to divide gold and silver sent in diplomatic context into two categories, state gifts and personal gifts: state gift and personal gifts.

6.3.3.1. State gifts

The state gifts are referred to in texts as ‘state tokens’ (*guo xin* 國信, or *guo xin wu* 國信物) or ‘private meeting gifts’ (*si di wu* 私覲物). In Chinese, they literally meant stated funded diplomatic fees. According to Jia Zhigang, the former, accompanying diplomatic missions, were given in the name of the imperial court, whereas the latter were given in the name of the envoy for non-official negotiation and commercial activities. Both types consist primarily of silk and gold. The state funded gifts tend to entail a large amount of wealth, funded

by the Imperial Treasury, which was included in the annual fiscal budget.⁴³⁰ For one mission to Tibet in 733, the state gifts amounted to '10,000 *pi* (of silk bolt) as state tokens, 2,000 *pi* as private meeting gifts, together with polychrome silk fabrics'.⁴³¹ A Japanese mission to China is said to have carried 'ten ship-loads of state tokens, with billions of treasures'.⁴³² For polities that did not produce silk themselves and therefore could not render such massive payment in the form of monetary silk, gold and silver assumed the central role. For example, the Tibetans sent 'gold- and silverware, jade belt, and horses' as state tokens and, on another occasion, 'gold scale, agate ewers, antelope wool, gold and silver ingots and ware'.⁴³³ Though masquerading as gift exchange, these exchanges were often intertwined with commercial and strategic interest.

⁴³⁰ JIa . However, there is disputation on whether the 'private meeting gift' was funded by the state or by private persons.

⁴³¹ *THY* 6; *JTS* 112. Due to Tang government's confusing practice of using a single aggregated unit to represent all currencies, we cannot completely sure whether the gifts actually consist of that number of silk bolts, or gifts worth the amount reckoned in silk. However, I am more inclined to think that the delegation took with them monetary silk as diplomatic fees, as the large instalment of monetary silk that the Tang government sent to Dunhuang for military expenditure. See note 422.

⁴³² *TPGJ* 661.

⁴³³ *CFYG* 972; 978.

6.3.3.2. Personal gifts⁴³⁴

The other category I would like to term ‘personal gifts’. I define them as the small number of luxury goods that accompanied and were mentioned in the end of diplomatic correspondence. The correspondence between the Tang and Tibetan courts during the first half of the eighth century provides the body of this kind of diplomatic correspondence detailing personal gifts exchanged between the two states. Compared with the ‘state tokens’, which can easily amount to thousands of bolts of silk, these small groups of fine gifts seem to have a more personalised nature. The Chinese character *xin* 信 literally means token or

⁴³⁴ Here I disagree with Iwami, who does not distinguish between state and personal gift. He identifies what I will classify as personal gifts, that is, the small number of luxury items that accompanied diplomatic letters, as ‘state tokens’, too. Iwami 2009. Admittedly, the distinction between the two categories is fluid and ambiguous. For example, a letter from the Tibetan *btsanpo* to the Tang emperor in 733 identifies the gifts sent along the letter as ‘state tokens’ (CFYG 979: 11503b). Another letter from the Tibetan *bstanpo* in 730 also describe a small group of gifts sent along with the letter as ‘gifts from a humble state’ (CFYG 979: 11502a). However, a letter from the Tang emperor to the Tibetan *bstanpo* explicitly differentiates the personal gifts to Princess Jincheng from the rest of ‘state tokens’ QTW: 286. On some occasions at least, these two categories are interchangeable for the ancient writers. Despite the ambiguity, for the argument’s sake, I still think it is helpful to emphasise the differentiated the more generic, ‘alienable’ gifts from the ‘inalienable’ gifts, which served as personal bonds between rulers.

Another reason is the often large number of the ‘state tokens’ mentioned in texts, and the small number of gifts mentioned in diplomatic letters do not seem to suffice as state gifts between great powers, such as China and Tibet.

credential. Some luxury gold and silver objects have identities of the owner inscribed on them.⁴³⁵ For example, a gilt silver cup of presumable Tibetan provenance in the Cleveland Museum has a one-line inscription on the base, which reads,

/:/phan: shIng: gong: skyes: gyi: sug: byad: //

The inscription is translated ‘personal possessions of the high-born princess’.⁴³⁶ If objects like these ever served as gifts, as they definitely had the potential for such an intended function, they could have literally been tokens to verify the sender of the letter.

Also, unlike the state tokens, which are supposedly tokens for the state, the personal gifts are typically sent on account of a personal bond with specified senders and recipients. For example, upon the departure of a Tibetan delegation in 719,

the Tang emperor Xuanzong presented, in his own name, 2,000 bolts of polychrome silk fabric to the Tibetan bstanpo, 500 bolts to bstanpo’s grandmother, 400 bolts to bstanpo’s mother, 200 bolts to the qatun

⁴³⁵ Heller 2013, 268ff.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid*, 276 ff. For descriptions of this group of gilt silver vessels in the Cleveland Museum, see Carter 1998.

(bstanpo's wife), and varied number of gifts to the ministers and generals; meanwhile, the Empress sent 1,000 bolts to the bstanpo, 700 bolts to bstanpo's grandmother, 500 bolts to bstanpo's mother, and 200 bolts to the qatun.⁴³⁷

Along with the 730 letter from the Tibetan *btsanpo* to the Tang emperor mentioned earlier, the *btsanpo* and his Chinese consort, Princess Jincheng, respectively, enclosed token gifts under their own names, under their own names. The *btsanpo* sent, as 'gifts of a humble state', a gold ewer (*hu ping* 胡瓶), a gold plate or platter (*pan* 盤), an agate cup, a bolt of antelope felt (?) (*ling yang shan duan* 零羊衫段); in addition to those items, Princess Jincheng sent 'gold duck plates and cups (*ya pan zhan* 鴨盤盞), new seasonal goods, and so on.'⁴³⁸

6.3.4. Gold and silver vessels as personal gifts

Gold and silver, or luxury gold and silver vessels in particular, played a central role among the personal gifts that accompanied diplomatic

⁴³⁷ CFYG 980: 11511a.

⁴³⁸ See note 434. It is not clear that whether the gold plates and cups sent by Princess Jincheng were in the shape of duck or with embossed duck ornaments. On the one hand, the Tibetans are known in texts to have once sent the Tang emperor a gold wine flask in the shape of a goose (CFYG 970: 11400a); on the other hand, duck and mandarin ducks are a common motif on both Tibetan and Chinese gold and silver. See Gyllensvärd 1957, 144, figs. 89, 90, Su 2013, cat. no. 48.

correspondence. Gold and silver vessels, particularly ewers, plates (or platters) and cups, are included in almost all these letters. A silver ewer, along with 70 bolts of polychrome silk, was also sent along with a letter from the Tang emperor Xuanzong to Bilga Qaghan in 717.⁴³⁹ Besides, a silver ewer was included among the small number of gifts, which apparently served as ‘tokens’ accompanying the diplomatic letters, from the Türgish to the Tibetans captured by the Tang army in the Pamirs in 735.⁴⁴⁰ The type of vessel, *hu ping*, or ewer, seems to have played a particularly important role. Thanks to the *Tōdai-ji Kenmotsu-chō*, the Shōsō-in inventory, we know that the so-called *hu ping* is the type of ewer with a pinched lid, a slender neck, a deep oval body with a curved handle attached to the rim and shoulder. It has a Roman-Sasanian origin but has also been popular across Central and East Asia, both in expensive materials, such as gold, silver, and glass, and as imitations in cheaper materials, such as ceramics. Plates, platters, and cups were also popular forms described in the previous chapter. Although in the Eastern Eurasian context, these vessels do not bear the images of sovereigns and therefore could not have been intended as a form of royal propaganda as it was in the Roman-Sasanian context, the practice of sending luxury gold and silver vessels as personal tokens of the sender to accompany the diplomatic missions certainly

⁴³⁹ CFYG 974: 11445a.

⁴⁴⁰ See note 407 and 408.

had spread from the Roman-Sasanian sphere and become a common Eurasian custom.

6.4. Competition through gift-giving

As diplomatic letter- and gift-exchange were so central to medieval diplomacy, they became the heated arena for interstate competition. Rulers did not only compete with each in wars and plunder, but also in symbolic spheres exemplified by the exchange of diplomatic gifts. They did not only compete with each to give more and better; ultimately, they sought to control and create the symbolic value of objects given or received. That includes the power to define the nature of the gift – whether it is a tribute or a bestowal, a voluntary or forced gift (ransom), as well as the meaning of the visual language of the given object. The competition is indeed what Susan Gal calls ‘symbolic domination’, or the ‘ability to make others accept and enact one’s representation of the world’.⁴⁴¹ The luxury goods that could have served as ‘token gifts’ and written letters constituted parallel ‘types’ within the medieval diplomatic network, functioned in similar ways, and were intended for a similar context. Thus, if the letters served as important items of exchange linking the rulers, the objects may be seen to have played a comparable role, with one form occupying the verbal and the other the

⁴⁴¹ Gal 2001, 424.

visual realms of interaction. I argue that the close arena of competitive gift-giving, a shared visual language of gold and silver gradually took shape.

6.4.1. Negotiating hierarchy through diplomatic letters

I discussed the shared structure and protocols of diplomatic correspondence that seem to have been observed by Eastern Eurasian rulers from various cultural and ethnical backgrounds. However, the hierarchical relationships of these players reflected from these letters are not as straightforward as they seem. the distinction between the ranks is sometimes blurred, and one can often see one moving from one rank to another, as the power balance fluctuates. For example, correspondence with the Türks during the Sui Dynasty were termed ‘state letters’ (*guo shu* 國書) in Chinese texts, but after Tang’s defeat of the Türks in the early seventh century, they were termed ‘edicts’. However, Tang’s correspondence to the Turks do not open with ‘edict to’ but with a salutation, which was reserved for an equal state, indicating the ambivalent, yet no wonder important, role of the Türks.

Diplomatic correspondence reflects not only the existing hierarchical order, but were also used as a tool to negotiate power relations. Although the standard protocols of letter and gift exchange were meant to reinforce the hierarchical order of the Eurasian elite network, with rhetorical tools, aspiring polities can always mediate existing relationships and elevate their own status. For example, even though rulers had to admit one another as an equal, they still struggled to

intimidate one other by inventing even grander regnal titles in the opening of the letter, as Hori has shown with the correspondence between the Sui emperor and the Türk qaghan. Familial terms are also common in the opening address. On the one hand, these terms are not just metaphorical—indeed, they reflect patrimonial ties were sealed by blood-sworn brothers and inter-dynastic marriages; on the other hand, the inclusion of familial terms in the formal address allows nuanced manipulation of the established pattern. For example, in a letter from the Tang emperor to the Uighur Qaghan, the former started the letters with ‘Emperor salutes my younger brother qaghan with awe’. While recognizing the equal status of the two states, by calling the qaghan a *younger* brother, the Tang emperor stresses the fact that the Uighur Qaghan is lesser in hierarchy. Likewise, the Tang could not openly address the Tibetans as a subordinate and were forced to follow the protocols reserved for an equal. Nevertheless, through the marriage of Princess Wencheng and Princess Jincheng, the Tang emperor assumed a higher rank in the familial relationship, address the Tibetan *bstanpo* as ‘nephew’.

6.4.2. Negotiating hierarchy with gifts

Given their same function and context, it is highly likely that the protocols for diplomatic correspondence and gift-exchange were based on the same principles, even though the gift protocol was even subtler than language and thus more open for manipulation. Through gifts, medieval rulers were able to communicate nuanced messages that could not be elaborated by language alone.

Like the protocols of diplomatic correspondence, those of gifts seem to share certain formulas. First of all, they were described in a similar fashion. Unlike we modern scholars, the ancient writers seem to consider the sensory delight and aesthetic thoughts irrelevant. Rather, it is the materiality of the objects that comes to the fore repeatedly. This includes their luxurious or valuable nature and some descriptions with which both sender and receiver could quantify and assess. As we can see from the gift lists quoted earlier in the chapter, the principle concern for the ancient writer was to record the type of object, its material, technique and its quantity or weight.

Furthermore, whether tribute, bestowal, or token, the Eastern Eurasian elites seem to have shared the *categories* of the things given in a hierarchical order, even though their *positions* (which category) in the order might have differed. As the hierarchical positions were not intrinsic to the object but mediated by context, Eastern Eurasian rulers struggled to define the nature of the gifts, that is, the power relation between the sender and the receiver, within a shared framework of categories. For example, apart from maintaining a higher stance in the familial relationship, the Tang also interpreted the gifts from the Tibetans as ‘tributes’ in a diplomatic letter in 781, and thereby returned with ‘bestowals’. The deliberate distortion of the Tibetan’s intention certainly did not escape the latter’s political sensitivity. The *bstanpo* protested in his reply,

Your letter says, “[I] (the Tang emperor Suzong) have received your tribute. I hereby bestow on you (the Tibetan bstanpo) a few tokens. [You] shall claim them on the arrival [of the envoy or the letter].” But we are countries of in-laws (referring to the 641 and 709 marriage alliance), why should you use protocol for subject and lord?

In response, the Tang emperor thus changed the word ‘tribute’ into ‘offer’ and ‘bestow’ into ‘send’.⁴⁴² A similar incident happened during the late Tang when the Nanzhao Kingdom sought a marriage alliance with the Tang. Two ranking officials of Nanzhou expressed to the Tang diplomat Xu Yunqian their concern of correct protocol of gifts,

Your [prefectural] government wants our master to become a subject [of the Tang], present memorials, and offer tributes [to China]. But he recently sent an envoy to seek a brotherly relationship [with the Tang emperor] or a marriage alliance. [The proper etiquette between] brothers or between father-in-law would be exchange of letters and gifts. Why should he present memorials and tributes?⁴⁴³

⁴⁴² CFYG, 981, 11528b.

⁴⁴³ ZZTJ, 253, p.8212; c.f. XTS, 222b, p.629. Translation by Wang 2013, 133.

6.4.3. The visual language of gifts

Although visual elements, such as vessel shape and ornaments, as well as execution techniques, with which modern scholars are concerned most, seem to have escaped the attention of ancient writers, we can hardly assume that they were not important to those who produced and used them. I would rather argue that the design of gold and silver vessels were carefully conceived and related to their potential role in diplomatic exchange. Like the shared categories of their hierarchical position, these objects must also have assimilated and developed a great deal of shared visual elements in order to fulfil their roles in the highly formulated diplomatic context.

This assumption is supported by the organisation of production of luxury gold and silver vessels. Upon receiving the gifts, Office of Visitor Protocol was in charge of cataloguing and inspecting the gifts.⁴⁴⁴ Officials from the Department of Palace Construction (*Shao Fu Jian*) were also involved to reckon the market value of the gifts so that an appropriate return could be formulated. The care the text gives to ensure the proper reception of gifts, and the amount of human resources the court devoted to appraise them correctly, makes it clear that

⁴⁴⁴ In Byzantium, according to Peter the Patrician, the emperor's household staff (*vestosacrani*) were in charge of evaluating the monetary and symbolic value of the gifts to enable the emperor to formulate a suitable statement in return, Canepa 2009, 155, note 6

interpreting gifts properly was of utmost importance for the state. Coincidentally, the imperial workshop which produced the prestigious gold- and silverware mentioned earlier in the chapter was under the supervision of the Department of Palace Construction.⁴⁴⁵ Textual accounts are explicit about these imperial workshops being responsible for producing objects intended as gifts for foreign dignitaries.⁴⁴⁶ These palatial institutions together played a role in choosing the correct visual statement and communication between the court and craftsmen.

Therefore, the choice of gold and silver as diplomatic gifts could be anything but the mere result of agentless transmission of objects and motifs. Rather, the close affiliation between the reception and manufacturing of objects intended as diplomat gifts suggest that the choice of material, design and

⁴⁴⁵ Historical texts and inscriptions on objects shows that the imperial Workshop of Gold and Silver (*jin yin zuo fang yuan* 金銀作坊院) and the Office of Foundry (*zhang ye shu* 掌冶署), both the supervision of the Department of Palace Construction, were the two major institutions responsible of making gold and silver objects for the imperial court during the early and middle Tang Qi 1999a, 279.

⁴⁴⁶ ‘(Emperor Suzong) issued an edict requesting reduction of (the cost of) regular meals and clothing. (The edict also requests) the imperial workshop (*shang zuo fang* 尚作坊), established during the Wude period (618—626 AD), to stop production, except for that for gifting foreign guests and for foreign ceremonies.’ (詔減常膳服禦，武德中尚作坊非賜蕃客、戎祀所須者皆罷之。) See XTS 6.

decorative motifs was engaged in, if not a direct response to, conversations in multi-cultural context.

Chapter 7

Visual Hybridity of Gold and Silver

In the last chapter, I discussed the shared use of gold and silver objects in high-status interaction. In this chapter, I will focus down and look at the ornamentation of individual items. Tang gold and silver are characterised by rich, elaborate ornaments that often covers the entire object. Such a profusion of intricate patterns is an integral part of luxury gold and silver. Although ancient accounts rarely mention ornaments,⁴⁴⁷ given the fine craftsmanship invested in creating minute details, it is hard to imagine that ornaments were only of trivial importance to those who made and used the objects. It is also improbable that, given the important role of gold and silver in high-status interaction, the iconography and style were not carefully chosen. It is more likely that the visual aspect of gold and silver belongs to the realm of non-verbal communication, which cannot, and need not, be pinned down by ancient writers. This chapter, therefore, explores the role of ornaments in relation to the role of gold and silver

⁴⁴⁷ Usually it is the materiality, quantity and the quality of workmanship that ancient writers tend to pay attention to. There are a few exceptions. For example, in *An Lushan Shi Ji* (The Life of An Lushan), composed in the ninth century, the author listed a silver-inlaid octagonal panel-screen decorated with ‘flowers and birds’ and six panel-screens decorated with ‘flowers and birds, children, standing horses, roosters, female attendants wearing male caftans, respectively’. See Des Rotours 1962, 58. For more about *An Lushan Shi Ji*, see note 455.

in high-status interaction. I will explore these ‘unspoken’ issues regarding the visual features of Tang gold and silver: what is the nature of the ‘foreignness’ of Tang gold and silver that has fascinated generations of scholars? Why did the Tang choose, among the wealth of stylistic traditions, these exotic forms for luxury items? And how might such foreign characters have been related to the objects’ potential roles in multi-cultural, high-status interactions?

I propose that the visual features of Tang gold and silver, as the objects themselves, must also be examined in the multi-polar network of Eastern Eurasia. We will then realise the significance of these ornaments lies not solely in China’s individual connection with the West because China was not the only area where such ornaments prevailed. I argue that, rather than the result of agentless transmission and random combination of motifs, the ornamentation of Tang gold and silver is a visual expression of the Eurasian common aristocratic culture. The appropriation of such a visual language is also a part of the Tang’s attempt to participate in the Eurasian elite network.

7.1. The role of visual hybridity

A major feature of the ornamentation on Tang gold and silver is its foreignness. Like the shape, the ornaments also evoke distant sources. Taking a silver stem cup from Hejiacun as an example: the running scrolls on the lip and the foot, adorned with palmette leaves, flower heads, and vine leaves, are common ornaments that we will come back to later in the chapter. As has been

observed by previous scholars, such scrolls originated in West Asia and the Mediterranean world.⁴⁴⁸ The lively scene of mounted hunters pursuing fleeing animals can be attributed to the hunting scenes popular in Western Asia.⁴⁴⁹ The hunters wear riding attires of the typical steppe fashion—caftan, fastened with a belt, trousers and boots. The landscape in the background, consisting of stylised vegetation and mountains, often appears on Sasanian royal silver. Some even argue that these might have been the origin of Chinese landscape painting, which just started from this period. Finally, the string of beads—known in literature as a ‘pearl-roundel’—that adorns the nodule on the foot is yet another popular motif of Persian origin that appears mostly on textiles.

Previous studies thus focus on separating the multiple foreign elements and assigning them to distinct visual paradigms of different geo-cultural regions. Such an approach is based on an implicit linear model: with China as the centre, these foreign elements stand as testimony to, as well as the result of, interactions. For example, the Persian elements are attributed to the exiled Sasanian king Peroz III and his court in Chang’an. Similarly, the Roman elements give rise to speculation

⁴⁴⁸ Gyllensvärd, Qi, Rawson.

⁴⁴⁹ The theme of hunting, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, is a western one. It was adopted by Chinese artists from the Warring States, as we can see from the bronze tube depicting a mounted hunter doing a Parthian shot.

of Tang's diplomatic and commercial links with Rome.⁴⁵⁰ There are several drawbacks with this presumption. First, immediate links with these remote regions would have been limited, if not implausible. Also, it does not explain why these areas exacted such a huge influence on the aesthetic preference of the Tang elite. De-contextualised appreciation of exotics would certainly have been one of the explanations: exotics are attractive as luxury, prestigious goods, and such attraction may have led to local imitation of the foreign prototypes. But we might still ask, among all the outside influences Tang were exposed to, why some ornaments, such as the palmette scroll, the pearl-roundel, and hunt scenes, seem to have been received with particular enthusiasm. Last but not least, in this approach, motifs are often studied in isolation from the physicality of the object and the social context of use.

Instead of 'foreign' or 'exotic', I would like to refer to the style as 'hybrid'. The term 'hybridity' is originally used in biology to describe the offspring of crossbreeding but in recent years has become popular in cultural studies. In post-colonial discourse, it is employed to study the unique culture and society mixed with colonists and aboriginal people. The Tang diplomatic ritual, as discussed in the last chapter, shows many traces of hybridity in terms of blending elements from the Chinese and other Eurasian traditions. The same can be said about Tang

⁴⁵⁰ Qi 1999a, 315.

gold and silver. The ‘foreign’ character of Tang gold and silver is indeed the juxtaposition of various elements—material, technique, shape, imagery—from multiple sources.

Tang gold and silver are hybrid also in the sense that these disparate elements are not simply copied; rather, they underwent considerable transformation in accord with the local taste. If we look again at the British Museum hunting cup, there is no direct parallel we can find in Western Asia, but elements that could have been an inspiration. The hunting scene, for instance, depicted on the cup exhibits conspicuous differences from those found on Sasanian royal silver. The latter always depicts a specific monarch, recognisable from the figure’s unique headdress. The imagery focuses on rendering the monarch’s majesty, valour and physical strength in his confrontation with a wild beast. Special attention is given to the fine details of the costume and headdresses that signify the figure’s royal identity.⁴⁵¹ Technically, the visual effect is further enhanced through rendering the figure in high relief. By contrast, the hunters on

⁴⁵¹ Persian silversmiths cut away the background in order to show the figures in relief on their plates and bowls, or the figure and relief area are formed by the addition of separate pieces. See Harper 1981 plate 12 for fragments of such separate pieces. For more discussion on the Sasanian royal hunting plates, see Harper 1978. The same stress on narrative for hunting scenes is also common in Roman art. For example, the Caledonian boar hunting and the hunting of Meleager, both from the Greek mythology, are popular subjects for Roman sarcophagi. See Brilliant 1986, Ewald 2011, Lorenz 2011.

the Tang silver cup are small and almost indistinguishable from each other. Elements of violence and tension, so key to the Persian hunting narrative, are subdued; instead, the hunters, like the fleeing animals, are scattered amid a peaceful nature landscape. The high-relief technique is not adopted by the Tang. The imagery of Tang gold and silver is, as a rule, rendered with engraved lines and traced details. To make the engraved imagery stand out, Tang artisans developed a unique technique of covering the background with little punched circles (or ring-matted background; also known as ‘fish-roe pattern’ in Chinese and Japanese literature) that subdue light reflection (fig. 7.5). In addition, the cup features a double-shelled body—an outer layer with the decoration and an inner layer soldered together on the lip—a technique not used by Roman and Sasanian silversmiths.

I must emphasise that hybridisation does not go only one way. Techniques, such as the ring-matted background, were also adopted by Sogdian silversmiths. In the eighth and ninth centuries, the Sogdians produced metalwork that exhibits influences from the Tang in both technique and imagery. A silver handled-cup, for example, is embossed with lotus petals in repousse, engraved image of birds and intertwined palmette scrolls, against a ring-matted background⁴⁵²—not unlike a gilt silver cup from the Hejiacun Hoard. The result is a ‘hybrid style’, in which

⁴⁵² Smirnov 1909, cat. no. 113. See also *ibid*, cat. nos. 110, 112.

elements derived from multiple artistic traditions intermix and form a harmonious entity. It is important to identify such a hybrid style in its own right, because it is a dominant characteristic of not only Tang gold and silver, but also, as we shall see, that of gold and silver across Eastern Eurasia.

Another noteworthy aspect of visual hybridity is the combination of the most prestigious materials from different cultures. We already had the example of the jade dagger with a fine openwork gold sheath from the late Western Zhou tomb of Liangdaicun. The combination of jade and gold was also employed to represent supreme values from Chinese and Western Eurasian cultures. According to the Tang sumptuary laws, the jade and gold official belt was exclusively for the highest-rank members of the court. An extant example of such luxury belt ornaments was excavated from Xi'an. It features gold plaques mounted with coloured gemstone and pearls against a granulation background; the gold plaques are, in turn, mounted on jade frames (fig. 7.7).⁴⁵³ The Hejiacun Hoard also yielded a pair of gold-jade armlets.⁴⁵⁴ Another technique, known by contemporaries as *pingtuo* 平脱, combines lacquer, the age-old prestigious material in the Chinese tradition, with gold and silver (Figure 5.18). In this case,

⁴⁵³ The belt ornaments were excavated from the tomb of Tang Doujiao near Xi'an, now in the collection of Shaanxi Institute of Archaeology. Liu 1999.

⁴⁵⁴ Qi and Shen 2003, cat. 53.

the surface of the lacquer is lightly hollowed; gold and silver ornaments cut out of a thin sheet are then fixed in lacquer. This novel material that accommodates traditional and new tastes must have been immensely popular among elites as it is extensively recorded in the ninth-century account *The History of An Lushan* (*An Lushan Shiji*). The book was composed not long after the An Lushan Rebellion—so neither high feelings against the Rebellion nor glittering memories of the High Tang had completely died out. The book records in detail the gifts exchanged between An Lushan and Emperor Xuanzong as well as his favourite concubine Yang Guifei. These include gold- and silver-inlaid items, such as panel-screen, bowls, boxes, cups, plates, couches, pillows, and padlocks.⁴⁵⁵ Gold-inlaid agate plate is also mentioned,⁴⁵⁶ but for extant examples we have in the Shōsō-in the magnificent silver-inlaid lacquer ewer, gold and silver inlaid mirror, gold and silver-inlaid Chinese zither (*gu qin*) and a gold- and silver-inlaid sword.⁴⁵⁷ The combination of contrasting colour and texture—the gentle glow

⁴⁵⁵ Des Rotours 1962, 52, 73, 75, 83, 94-6. *An Lushan Shiji* was composed between the year 805 and 907. It is a collection of source materials—memorials, imperial proclamations, dubious anecdotes, and poems, without discriminating as to their relative reliability. Therefore, contradictory accounts of the same incidents are included. However, it is helpful in revealing at least what ninth-century people thought were precious in the eighth-century court.

⁴⁵⁶ Des Rotours 1962, 94.

⁴⁵⁷ For a comparison of the Shōsō-in collection and items described in *An Lushan Shiji*, see Harada 1947.

and subdued colour of jade and lacquer confronted with the glittering gold and silver—created a stunning visual effect that very much represents the hybrid aesthetic taste of Tang elites.

In the traditional approach, the importance of visual hybridity has been overlooked. Local appropriations of foreign forms and motifs are considered ‘mistakes’ or ‘distortion’ by artisans unfamiliar with the original models. A gilt silver ewer found in the sixth-century tomb of Li Xian in Guyuan, Ningxia, is such an example (Figure 5.15): at first glance, it resembles a typical Sasanian ewer, but it depicts the story of the Judgement of Paris from Greek mythology. Marshak and others point out that it could not have been made by someone familiar with Greek mythology, as there are several ‘errors’ in the iconography: the artisan gives Paris two apples instead of one; also, in the last scene, the ship, which Paris is supposed to embark on, is missing in the narrative.⁴⁵⁸ However, in the hybridity discourse, such deviations from the prototype are seen as innovative constructions. Scholars like Bonnie Cheng stress the active agency of local artisans in creating hybrid objects that express their own experience and identity,

⁴⁵⁸ For iconographic studies of Li Xian’s ewer, see Watt 2004, 256-57, Juliano and Lerner 2002, 99-100, particularly fig. 31c for the missing ship and Luo 2004, 77-99. For excavation report of the tomb, see *WW* (1985:11), 1-20.

rather than passively receiving and imitating foreign models.⁴⁵⁹ With the vocabulary of hybridity discourse, we will be able to look into the selective adoption, transformation, and appropriation of foreign motifs, which are essential for us to understand the latter's social meaning and significance in a culturally different context.

7.2. Shared motifs of Eastern Eurasian gold and silver

Visual hybridity is a feature shared by Tang gold and silver as well as gold and silver from other areas of Eastern Eurasia. Indeed, it became, to a great extent, an emblem of aristocratic taste. What is shared is not only the practice of creating a hybrid style by blending elements from disparate artistic traditions, but more importantly, a seemingly shared repertoire of composition, motifs, and subject matters. Generally, gold and silver from different areas of Eastern Eurasia shared the rich, elaborate ornamental style. Unlike their Roman and Sasanian counterparts, the imagery is essentially non-narrative. Naturalistic or fantastical animal motifs are combined with exuberant, well-balanced floral and foliage patterns. When in rare cases in which human figures are represented, the figures tend to be anonymous or small, as those of the hunting cup described earlier.

⁴⁵⁹ Cheng 2010.

Although there are infinite variations of ornaments, they are based on a limited body of motifs, most of which derived from Western Eurasia. I will thus divide the most reoccurring motifs into the following categories:

7.2.1. Animals

Animals are one of the popular subject matters of gold and silver across Eastern Eurasia. The animal is often central to the composition of ornamentation: in early works, it is often represented in the centre of a plate within a well-delineated roundel—a composition inherited from Sasanian and, more probably, Sogdian silver. In later works, the once-subordinate vegetal borders became dominant; whereas animals became smaller and assimilated into the lush vegetal scrolls. But in either case, the animal is an indispensable part of the ornaments. Such a fascination with animals is undoubtedly an influence from Western Asia and the steppe, where animals played a central role in people's lives. Early appropriation of animals, as can be seen from late Western Zhou bronze vessels and weapons, also appears to have been inspired by the steppe.

During the early Middle Ages, a repertoire of animal subjects from naturalistic animals to fantastical creatures, was shared across Eastern Eurasia. The naturalistic animals, such as the horse, deer, lion, rhinoceros, and parrots, often give an exotic, or rather fanciful, impression. Horses, rams, elk, deer, and gazelle—native to the steppe and symbolically important to the steppe culture—

are widely represented by the Turks, the Tibetans and the Chinese alike.⁴⁶⁰ We have, for example, a pair of fantastic gilt silver sculptures of deer excavated from the burial complex Bilga Qaghan (fig. 7.9). Deer with a specific type of antler that resembles a mushroom are depicted in both Chinese and Tibetan contexts.

The line between naturalistic and fantastical animals is very thin. The deer with mushroom-shaped antler, for example, cannot be identified with any existing species of deer (figs. 7.10, 11). Horses, rams, deer and gazelles are depicted in a fantastical manner, with wings emerging from palmette leaves and they sometimes have leafy sprays in the mouth, as we can see on the Mengdiexuan horse fittings (figs. 7.11-12) and a silver box from the Hejiacun Hoard (figs. 7.14).⁴⁶¹ No wonder the unfamiliar, exotic animals captured people's imagination in the same way as the fabled animals. Some of the latter, such as the *senmurv* and the *makara*,⁴⁶² have foreign origins, while local mythical creatures also

⁴⁶⁰ These steppe animals are widely represented in the group of horse fittings in the Mengdie Xuan collection in Hong Kong. See Su 2013, cat. Nos. 1, 3, 7, 9, 10.

⁴⁶¹ See note 460.

⁴⁶² *Senmurv* is an ancient, benevolent creature from Iranian mythology. It stands for the *khavarnah* (or divine glory, the most important attribute of kingship in *Avesta* and *Shahnama*, for it enabled rulers to govern and command obedience) of the Khayanids, the legendary ancestors of the Sasanians. *Senmurv*'s association with the royal *khavarnah* and the Sasanian sovereign is confirmed by its presence on Sasanian royal silver and on the king's robe on the rock relief at Taq-i Bustan. Marshak 1998. *Makara* is originally from Hindu mythology. It was probably introduced to China as a part of Buddhist iconography, and is often portrayed

joined the repertoire. Phoenix, emerging from the sixth century as a tomb decoration, became popular.⁴⁶³ These fantastical animals are themselves hybrid creatures: the *senmurv* appears as a peacock with the head of a dog and the claws of a lion; the *Makara*, half terrestrial animal in the frontal part, in animal forms of an elephant, crocodile, stag, or deer, and in the hind part as an aquatic animal, in the form of a fish or seal tail (fig. 7. 13). A Tibetan gilt-silver vase at the Cleveland Museum represents three unusual composite creatures: each having the head of a horse, a feline and a dragon, respectively; they are bipedal with wings, paws or hoofs, though these creatures' identities largely remain unknown (fig. 7.15).⁴⁶⁴

The phoenix, or *feng huang*, seems to have assumed the role that *senmurv* played in Western and Central Asia, standing for imperial magnificence. It may

protecting entryways of Buddhist temples. But the Buddhist connotation of the *makara* became less pronounced and appeared solely as an ornament on a variety of media, such as architectural and gold and silver vessels. For *makara* motifs on Tang gold and silver, see Qi, 1999: 318-9.

⁴⁶³ Zhongguo and Hebei 2003. For the development the phoenix motif, see Rawson, 1984b: 93-107.

⁴⁶⁴ Heller associates these creatures with the mythological ancestors of the early Tibetan kings. Among them are hybrid humans with horns of the *khyung* (eagle deity), webbed fingers and toes, who travelled on winged bulls. Heller 2003a, 63. However, the creatures represented on the silver vase by no means resemble the mythical hybrid humans described above. On the other hand, a gold plaque from the Mengdiexuan collection represents half-human-half-eagle creature that sticks more closely to the description. Su, 2013: cat. no. 43.

have derived from the Red Bird (*zhu que* 朱雀), a pheasant-like, auspicious bird depicted in tomb murals from the Han and Six Dynasties. In a sixth-century Northern Qi tomb in Hebei, it suddenly acquired long, flowing peacock tail, which was probably inspired by *senmurv* (fig. 7.16). The female phoenix *huang* often holds a cluster of grapes, a flower, or a leaf in its beak, reminiscent of similar birds holding a knot or a string of beads on Persian and Sogdian textiles (fig. 7.17).⁴⁶⁵ Only during the Sui and Tang did the *feng huang* finally take the shape of the magnificent bird with which we are familiar today, with its large, flame-like tail, proud head, strong feet with claws and large wings (fig. 7.18). It was also during this period that this bird was identified with the fantastical *feng huang* described in Confucian classics.⁴⁶⁶

For the contemporary, the *feng huang* can probably be seen as the ultimate embodiment of visual hybridity, looking Chinese and foreign, familiar and otherworldly at the same time. The cultural ambiguity of the phoenix probably makes it easily accepted as a regal motif in different geo-cultural areas of Eastern

⁴⁶⁵ See Gyllensvard 1957, fig. 57-f, k. q.

⁴⁶⁶ In popular beliefs, *feng huang* is a symbol of happy augury, especially in marriage. However, we do not know whether such beliefs already existed during the Tang. For the Confucians, *feng huang* stands for Five Virtues, namely Good Conduct, Propriety, Righteousness, Benevolence, and Sincerity. It was also thought to be an omen of a good government. Gyllensvärd 1957, 100f.

Eurasia—each more or less differentiated from the others but still recognisable. In the Turkic Empire, the frontal image of a phoenix-like bird with spreading wings adorns the gold diadem found at Bilga Qaghan's burial complex (fig. 7.19). For the Turks, a winged diadem probably had different cultural associations. Chen Ling argues that, on the one hand, it might symbolise the Zoroastrian war god Verethraghna—this is why winged diadems are often depicted as the headdress for Ahura Mazda and Sasanian kings (fig. 7.20); on the other hand, it might have been influenced by the crown of the Buddhist heavenly king Vaisravana.⁴⁶⁷ Although, at the moment, we are not able to pin down the exact meaning of the bird Turkic winged diadem, there is no doubt that that magnificent bird's universal association with sovereign power in different cultural contexts was known to the Turks. Finally, the phoenix is also a popular motif with the Tibetans, as can be seen on a silver vase at the Ashmolean (Figure 7.20) and a group of gilt iron openwork plaques from the Dulan cemetery (Figure 7.21). The power and majesty of the pairs of whirling phoenix on the Ashmolean vase is most extraordinary and is never seen on their Chinese counterparts.⁴⁶⁸

It is therefore clear that the Tang not only shared a repertoire of animal motifs with other areas of Eastern Eurasia but also the symbolic significance of

⁴⁶⁷ Chen 2013, 160ff.

⁴⁶⁸ For discussion of the Ashmolean silver vase, see Heller 2008, 74.

certain motifs. In different areas, certain motifs, such as the phoenix, could have different cultural meanings and were executed in different manners. But they seem to be universally recognised as a regal symbol, or at least received in positive light.

7.2.2. Ornamental borders

7.2.2.1. Vegetal scrolls

The intricate, lush floral and foliage scrolls and sprays that cover the whole object is a major characteristic of Tang gold and silver. Rawson has done a comprehensive survey on the development of these ornaments.⁴⁶⁹ Despite numerous variations, the basic structure of these scrolls consists of palmette and half palmette leaves grown out of an undulating stem, as we just saw on the British Museum hunting cup. Flower or foliate heads sprouting from the stem are suggested by a variety of highly stylised motifs—individual petals of palmette fused together, spiraling piles of petals, and in later periods, more life-like flowers (fig. 7.22). In some cases, in the place of the flower heads are bunches of grapes or pomegranates, while the leaves derived from half-palmette are exchanged with vine leaves (fig. 7.23). The wavy scrolls, originally devised for horizontal border, were also adapted into a circular symmetrical structure (Rawson refers to them as a ‘rosette’) (fig. 7.24). The last stage of the development of palmette, according

⁴⁶⁹ Rawson 1982, 8ff., 1984, 63ff.

to Rawson, are large sprays of more naturalistic-looking flowers, appearing around the mid-eighth century.

From the later part of early Tang, probably when the Chinese craftsmen started to get more involved in experimenting the foreign techniques and motifs, these seemingly trivial ornamental borders gradually took over and became the dominant body of the ornamentation for Tang gold and silver, while other subject matters—animals and human figures—retreated into these flourishing scrolls and multiplies with the rhythmic repetition of the scrolls.

This trend is in stark contrast with the figure-centred luxury silver of Iran and Central Asia, but it gained great popularity in Eastern Eurasia. Palmette scrolls with flower heads are the most widely employed decorative device for Tibetan gold and silver. A gilt silver cup at the Metropolitan Museum, for example, has interlacing vegetal scrolls decorating the entire body (Figure 5.13). The scrolls, though not completely identical to those on the hunting cup at the British Museum, also represent a popular variation developed from palmette scrolls, with individual petals of palmette leaves fused together to form a foliate head. In China, similar motifs can be found on not only gold and silver but also on architectural decoration and stone epitaph covers.⁴⁷⁰ On the Ashmolean vase,

⁴⁷⁰ Rawson 1982, 11-12, fig. 38-a, b, Gyllensvärd 1957, 129-30.

a standard palmette scroll adorns the foot, whereas phoenixes have wings and tails spreading out in the form of lush palmettes; on the shoulder, palmettes form a ribbon-like border with a heart-shaped centre (fig. 7.20). Finally, palmette scrolls also adorn Bilga Qaghan's diadem described earlier, as well as the group of vessels excavated from Kopeni in the form of both scrolls and rosettes (fig. 7.19).

7.2.2.2. Pearl-roundels

The string of beads, or the pearl-roundel, is another common decorative device of gold and silver, usually serving as a border—to line the lip and the foot of the vessel, or to divide the imagery into sections. The pearl-roundel is executed in many ways: on the nodule of the British Museum hunting cup, it is embossed (fig. 5.1); on a gilt handled cup from Hejiacun, the beads that line the foot and the ring-handle appear to be cast as a part of the cup (fig. 7.26); on another gilt handled-cup from Hejiacun, the lip appears to be incised at regular intervals to create a beaded effect (fig. 5.12); and finally, the most technically difficult way—to line the border with granules—more commonly employed by Tibetan craftsmen, as we can observe from the gold stem cup and the gilt silver cup at Metropolitan (fig. 5.13), as well as the group of gilt silver drinking vessels at the Cleveland (fig. 7.15). We have few extant examples from the Turks, but the handled-jugs from Kopeni, Tuyakta and Pereshchepina have ring-handles consisting of little beads (figs. 5.10-11). Such beaded handles are also found on

several cups from Hejiacun.⁴⁷¹ Craftsmen from different technical systems employed the method they were most at home with, but apparently they all strived to create the visual effect of beaded border and use this decorative device effectively in the composition.

7.2.3. Human figures

7.2.3.1. Hunting scene

Although human figures are relatively rare as ornaments for Tang gold and silver, there are several themes that are shared across Eastern Eurasia. One of them is the hunting scene. Hunting scenes like the one depicted on the British Museum silver cup is apparently popular in early Tang (figs. 7.2, 3), as several almost identical cups have been found.⁴⁷² Moreover, the same hunting scenes were reproduced on the pair of silver jars in Shōsō-in. Again, imagery of mounted hunters closely resembling the Shōsō-in example is found on horse fittings and plaques from Tibetan and Turk contexts (figs. 7.27-f28). As I have only access to the drawings of the Turkic material, I am not able to examine the visual details and the execution; but in the general they both reproduce, in minute detail, the hunters and their horses, including their facial features, costumes, quiver, and especially the horse harnesses.

⁴⁷¹ Qi and Shen 2003, cat. nos. 3, 4.

⁴⁷² One in the Sackler Museum of Beijing University, one from the Hejiacun hoard.

7.2.3.2. Foreigners--‘they make one’s room look so picturesque...’

The other shared figurative theme worth mentioning is the foreigner. The theme could have been inspired by the figurative Sasanian silver. Anthropoid images also appear on Sogdian silver as minor decoration. For example, the top of the handle of a silver ewer found in Mongolia, attributed to a Sogdian hand of the seventh century, bears the image of a human head (fig. 5.16). The figure’s features—his moustache, spare beard and hairdo with shaven temples—are ‘unmistakably Sogdian’, according to Marshak.⁴⁷³ In addition, on Sogdian funerary couches and sarcophagi, the Sogdians portray themselves as trusted intermediaries between the sedentary and nomadic peoples, who also pursue kingly activities, such as hunting and banqueting with luxury tableware.⁴⁷⁴

However, the images of foreigners on Tang and other Eastern Eurasian gold and silver are distinct from these examples and seem rather a local invention. Unlike the Sogdian’s self-portraits, foreigners, in the eyes of the Tang, are

⁴⁷³ Watt 2004, 316f. There are also a number of 8th-to-9th-century Sogdian handled cups in the Russian collection with thumb-pieces depicting human figures. See, for example, Smirnov 1909, cat. nos. 108, 109, 110. However, these figures, with their grotesque features, seem more in line with the Eastern Eurasian examples in the following discussion than with the young man represented on the ewer. Also their dates are much later. So I would rather consider these Sogdian cups as a part of the shared style in the eighth and ninth century, rather than an inspiration for their Eastern Eurasian counterparts.

⁴⁷⁴ Grenet 2005.

typically associated with low social class and occupations such as traders, entertainers, horse grooms and falconers.⁴⁷⁵ Images of foreigners on gold and silver are consistent with this impression. Two octagonal handled cups from the Hejiacun hoard represent a group of ten foreign musicians arranged horizontally (Figure 5.26).⁴⁷⁶ Each musician has a different hairstyle and costume, and plays a different Central Asian instrument. Here the individual identity of the musician is irrelevant; instead, the artisan(s) paid close attention to reproduce the figures' ethnic attributes: their foreign physiognomy, hairstyles, costumes and instruments, in order to convey the 'foreignness'. The Tibetans seem to share this attitude in their pictorial treatment of foreigners. Exemplified by a silver jug in Jokhang Monastery, Lhasa, the Tibetan craftsman seems to focus on reproducing the same range of details that suggest the figures' foreign identity (fig. 5.26) .

On the lower part of the jug, two scenes show a man performing a dance known in China as 'the Sogdian whirl', while playing a *pipa* (an instrument similar to the lute and the Arabian oud), with arms folded back, above his shoulder (Figure 7.29). The Dance and the instrument are both associated with Central Asia. The open-lapelled caftan, belt, trousers and boots they wear are not different from the Central Asian-style attire popular at the time among Eurasian elites, including the

⁴⁷⁵ Abramson 2008.

⁴⁷⁶ Qi and Shen, 2003: cat. nos. 4, 5.

Tibetans; but their round eyes, thick, curly hair and, full beards suggest their identity as ethnic others. Last but not least, they both wear headgear consisting of a flower, a sun and crescent moon motif, all these iconographic elements having Zoroastrian connotation and having been a part of the headdresses of Sasanian kings. They were also appropriated by other Central Asian rulers under Iranian influence, namely the Sogdians, the Hephthalite and the Turks, as royal symbols. Amy Heller is mistaken in asserting that such a headdress was made up as a kind of imaginary foreign element.⁴⁷⁷ In fact, a very similar gold diadem (or head band), consisting of a sun, a crescent moon, and a pair of wings, was excavated in recently years from a Sogdian tomb in Ningxia.⁴⁷⁸

In the case of images of the foreigner, it is not a particular motif of the foreigner that was shared, but the idea of portraying foreigners in a similar manner. Such an idea seems to have been invented in Eastern Eurasia to deliberately create an impression of exoticness. In fact, the image of the foreigner is not the only case of invented foreignness. Jessica Rawson suggests the famous Tang *sancai* (three-coloured) ware—a kind of low-fired, lead-glazed ceramic—as another example. With their vivid colours and images of foreigners and mythical creatures, *sancai* ware seems foreign, but in fact they were locally designed and

⁴⁷⁷ Heller 2003b.

⁴⁷⁸ *WW* 2012 (10), 58-65, figs. 18-19.

made.⁴⁷⁹ Judging from the image of the foreigner, it appears that the interest in invented foreignness was shared across Eastern Eurasia.

Summary

The combination and transformation of western-inspired themes and motifs seem a common feature of gold and silver across Eastern Eurasia, rather than an isolated phenomenon taking place only in China. But I must also stress that, despite the shared imagery, there is considerable variety in the way a similar image, such as a phoenix, is executed, indicating production centres across the area. This is because, though motifs can be easily transmitted and copied, craftsmen from different traditions of training can shed unconscious traits that reveal a special way of making.

Visual hybridity across Eastern Eurasia challenges the view that the foreign elements in Tang gold and silver were the result of direct contact with remote areas in Western Eurasia. Otherwise, the Tang would not have shared with the Turks and the Tibetans, who had their own contact with those remote areas, a closely related repertoire of motifs and themes. Therefore, I would argue that imitation and competition with each other played a more central role in the creation and prevalence of such a shared hybrid style. By integrating forms,

⁴⁷⁹ Rawson 2012.

technique and imagery from multiple artistic traditions, the Eastern Eurasian elites even seem to have aimed at creating a visual style that deliberately obscures threads that may lead back to particular origins. The baffling provenance of many hybrid objects for modern scholars may have also been the impression the ancients wanted to make for their intended audience. The shared hybrid style in ornamentation is an indispensable part of the shared forms, types of object and the practice of using them: together they served as material bonds that constituted the Eastern Eurasian elite network.

7.3. The hybrid Eurasian aristocratic culture

It is understandable that elites from culturally diverse regions of Eastern Eurasia, namely China, Tibet and the Steppe, in their close-knit community, had similar taste and thus shared a repertoire of themes and motifs in ornamentation. But why western-inspired themes and motifs? Why these particular motifs? And why do they appear in a hybrid state? Given the expensive material and fine craftsmanship invested, the hybrid objects certainly could not have been the result of agentless transmission or random combination of motifs. I argue that such a ‘hybrid style’ was a universally recognised aristocratic style during the period under discussion. Certain motifs were preferred because they belong to the common aristocratic visual culture deriving from Western Eurasia, especially that of the Byzantine-Sasanian Empires, as discussed in previous chapters.

7.3.1. The Byzantine-Sasanian common culture

Apart from a few local motifs, most of the popular motifs I described in the last section, though having undergone considerable transformation, would have been recognised as high-status in a wider Eurasian context. Previous scholars attributed these motifs to distinct visual paradigms of different geo-cultural regions, but they have not discussed the social context and significance of these motifs, which might have been an important factor in their transmission to other regions. I would like to argue that, apart from motifs, such as the phoenix and the foreigner, which were invented locally with meanings more specific to the local context, most of the reoccurring motifs, before they arrived in China, were already a part of the Eurasian aristocratic common culture.

7.3.1.1. The Palmette

The palmette motif is such an example. By the Late Bronze Age, palmette was already a truly international motif associated with high status. On the embossed gold sheath of Tutankhamun's dagger, for example, is a large elaborate voluted palmette at the bottom, and at the top, a small voluted palmette and a band of running spirals—in between are four groups of animal attack scenes. The origin of palmette, however, is most ambiguous. It has been the focus of numerous studies, leading to several speculations: the paired papyrus and lily/lotus that symbolise Upper and Lower Egypt; the 'sacred date palm' in Mesopotamia; the Minoan lily; or spiral motifs found in the Aegean and Anatolia. As Marian Feldman argues, such cultural ambiguity, 'with many areas and

sources contributing to their distinct forms’, made a truly international motif that appears on prestigious objects across the Mediterranean and the Near East.⁴⁸⁰ But in all these different areas, the voluted palmette would, ‘it appears, be related to the symbols of royal strength and legitimation, best evident in the Egyptian lily and papyrus unification image and the Mesopotamia date palm of abundance’. In Greece and Rome, the palmette motif was also related to high-status, as we can see, on Ara Pacis, how a profusion of palmette scrolls, combined with acanthus leaves, accompany the image of gods, the Roman senate and the imperial family (fig. 7.30).⁴⁸¹ Given its long tradition and prestige in Rome and the Near East, it is not surprising that palmette flourished again in the aristocratic visual culture of the Roman and Sasanian Empires. Palmette ornaments abound on the spandrels and column capitals at Hagia Sophia (Figure 7.31), the pinnacle of Byzantine power and glory in the sixth century,⁴⁸² as well at Taq-i Kisra (Throne of

⁴⁸⁰ Marian Feldman identifies voluted palmette as a staple ornament of the ‘international style’ of the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean world. Examples include ornaments of the gold dagger sheath from the tomb of Tutankhamun and an incised ivory lid from Lachish in Levant. Feldman 2006, 11, 67, 83-85.

⁴⁸¹ For descriptions and discussion on Ara Pacis, see Castriota 1995, Conlin 1997, Holliday 1990, Sieveking 1907, Zanker and Schneider 1987.

⁴⁸² For ornaments at Sophia Hagia, see Hamlin 1916, 211.

Khusraw), the royal palace built by the Sasanian king Khusrau I (r. 531–79) at Ctesiphon.⁴⁸³

In these examples, we also find the undulated, wavy stem that supports palmette leaves in the Eastern Eurasian palmette scrolls (Figures 7.32-b, c), although Rawson suggests that the latter might have been inspired by Han-Dynasty scrolls.⁴⁸⁴ Very often these running scrolls are combined with vine leaves and clusters of grapes. Motifs such as vine leaves, grapes maenads, and feline drinking from a cup originated from the cult of Dionysius in the Greek and Roman world. A popular subject of Roman imperial art, it was later depicted over a wide area of the Byzantine Empire in textiles, gemstones, and metalwork. But again, in the early Middle Ages, they became ‘international’ motifs that transcend the origin. Towards the sixth century, Dionysian themes became popular in Sasanian court silver⁴⁸⁵ as well as architectural decoration at Shapur I’s palace in Bishapur and Taq-i Kisra at Ctesiphon.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸³ For the excavation of Taq-i Kisra, see Breck 1931, Fino 2010, Upton 1932.

⁴⁸⁴ Rawson 1982, 9.

⁴⁸⁵ Ettinghausen discusses the transmission, transformation and appropriation of the Dionysian motifs in Sasanian art. See Ettinghausen 1972, 5ff.

⁴⁸⁶ For the Roman mosaics Ghirshman and Salles 1956-71, vol.1, 21-25. For the use of palmette and vine scrolls as architectural ornaments in a wider context, such as Egypt, see catalogue of

Sasanian motifs also contributed to the shared visual culture of the two empires. Again, the imperial churches Hagios Polyeuktos (*ca.* 523-527) and Hagia Sophia provide the bulk of evidence. One of the variation of the Tang palmette scroll, vine scrolls with pomegranate, perhaps derived from this context as well.⁴⁸⁷ Pomegranate is generally considered a Persian motif, but on the pilasters of Hagios Polyeuktos, a profusion of Sasanian motifs, such as symmetrical and semi-vegetal geometric and pomegranate, appear alongside the traditional Roman motifs such as the grapevines and acanthus leaves.⁴⁸⁸

7.3.1.2. Pearl-roundels

The pearl-round is another shared motif in the Roman-Sasanian aristocratic visual culture. Its origin probably also lies in Iran. But like the palmette, its origin is irrelevant to the subsequent significance. Towards the sixth century, the pearl-roundel was still important in Sasanian art. It is a constituent pattern of the luxury textile, in which the main subject—single or confronted animals and mounted

the exhibition ‘Pattern, Color, Light: Architectural Ornament in the Near East (500–1000)’ at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

⁴⁸⁷ For examples of vine scrolls with pomegranates on Tang gold and silver, and their parallels among Sasanian silver, see Gyllensvärd 1957, 128, fig.76.

⁴⁸⁸ Riegl 1893, quoted by Canepa 2009, 211-13, note 82.

hunter—are encircled by beaded borders (figs. 7.17, 38). It is also extensively used as an ornamental border on court silver and on the brick panels at the royal palace of Taq-i Kisra at Ctesiphon (figs. 7.31, 32). At the same time, the pearl-roundel also became an integral part in the Roman visual culture.⁴⁸⁹ The Romans not only reproduced luxury textiles with similar medallion design,⁴⁹⁰ but also adapted the basic idea of enclosing figural imagery in a circular shape to a variety of motifs and media stemming from their own cultural realm. For example, the pearl border was used to adorn Roman official insignia, such as the belt and brochure. A late-fourth-century Rome gold belt plaque with lion hunting image—hunting being another shared theme—is bordered with a hollow beaded wire (fig. 7.36). Another fourth-century buckle or brochure, also in the British Museum, has in the centre a small nielloed medallion with a heavy pearled border containing the bust of a beardless male wearing a chlamys within a wreath (fig. 7.37).

The palmette and vine scrolls, as well as the pearl-roundel, are, therefore, typical motifs of the shared Byzantine-Sasanian aristocratic visual culture existing at least from the fourth century. Although they have different origins and

⁴⁸⁹ The shared significance of medallion design in Roman and Sasanian visual culture is discussed by Trilling 1985. See also Canepa 2009, note 74 on p.239.

⁴⁹⁰ For the influence of Sasanian patterns in Byzantine textile weaving, see Martiniani-Reber 1986, Muthesius 1997.

histories of development, their significance in the early Middle Ages seems to lie primarily in their role in this common culture rather than in their remote past. Such a visual culture, gradually taking shape throughout the mutual history of the two empires, is by nature hybrid. Such is the inevitable outcome in a period of heightened interaction, and such a ‘supra-regional’ visual language, as Feldman puts it, must have ‘played a key role in the high-status interaction between rulers from different cultural background.’⁴⁹¹

7.3.2. The introduction of the Eurasian common culture

The Byzantine-Sasanian common aristocratic culture must have been known in the peripheral areas of two empires. The Sogdians and the Hephthalites, as we have discussed in chapter 3, appropriated the Sasanian royal iconography in their self-image. So they must have also been familiar with the elite connotation of motifs such as palmette and pearl roundels, which they also appropriated with great enthusiasm. For example, a silk textile of presumable Central Asian provenance (7th—8th century) at the Victoria and Albert Museum shows a *senmurv*, the fabulous creatures embodying the royal *khavarnah* of the Sasanian kings, enclosed in a roundel of pearls (fig. 7.38);⁴⁹² in the space between the medallions are vegetal patterns with palmette leaves and other elements. These

⁴⁹¹ Feldman 2006.

⁴⁹² See note 462.

ornaments were also used by the Sogdians in China to decorate their funerary couches and sarcophagi. For example, on the funerary couch of An Jia are rows of beaded medallions, encircling heads of animals such as lions, eagles, bulls, pigs, chicken, elephants, horses and rhinoceros,⁴⁹³ a decorative device we have also seen at Ctesiphon (Figure 7.39).

When they introduced such a hybrid style to China, the Sogdians may not have necessarily introduced the context of Roman-Sasanian aristocratic common culture as well. However, the use of these ornament was confined to very specific contexts, that is, those which involved multi-cultural audience and exclusive, elite-only activities. This is because the means by which the Chinese had access to these foreign material were rather limited, and the media which carried the ornaments were only circulated within the upper echelon of the society. These include imported luxury textiles. The tomb mural of Xu Xianxiu', a Northern Qi general who died in 571, depicts a female attendant wearing textile with beaded medallion design (fig. 7.40).⁴⁹⁴ As for the palmette, Rawson noticed their initial introduction to China in the fifth century at Yunguang and Longmen—Buddhist

⁴⁹³ Shaanxi 2003, 76ff., colour plates 78-110.

⁴⁹⁴ For the excavation report of Xu Xianxiu's tomb, see Taiyuanshi 2005.

caves commissioned by the Northern Wei rulers—and in the tombs of Northern Wei elites.⁴⁹⁵

Therefore, the so-called western, or foreign, style that the Chinese were exposed to through Central Asian intermediaries, such as the Sogdians, were indeed an offshoot of the Roman-Sasanian aristocratic style. Through their extensive diplomatic network across Eurasia, this Central Asian version of the Roman-Sasanian style seems to have become the common aristocratic style in the truly ‘Eurasian’ sense.

In short, the so-called ‘foreign’ elements in Eastern Eurasian gold and silver are not completely de-contextualised. The ornamental language still retained, at least in some part, its high-status association in the western context, which the Eastern Eurasian elites understood and appreciated. And when the Tang elites adopted such a style, their prestige would be universally recognised in their interaction with elites from culturally diverse regions of Eurasia.

⁴⁹⁵ See, for example, the tomb of Sima Jinglong, the carved stone column base in whose tomb represents early examples of palmette scrolls in China in the fifth century. *WW* 1972 (3), 20-33.

Summary

As we have seen from the examples in this chapter, the ornaments of gold and silver are not confined to these specific materials; they are also transferrable in other portable arts, such as luxury, polychrome textiles, as well as in monumental architecture. I would rather say that these art forms seem to have shared the same ornamental system. In other words, the hybrid ornamental language discussed in this chapter was created exclusively for a cross-cultural, elite context. When dignitaries from different geo-cultural backgrounds wore the same type of textiles, drinking and feasting from the same type of gold and silver vessels in a building decorated with a recognisable visual language, they would have felt a sense of belonging to the same community.

Admittedly, the meaning of ornaments is by definition ‘evolving, mutable, and multi-valent, without essential properties.’⁴⁹⁶ As for the visual language of Tang gold and silver, its reference to a wider context, namely the Eurasian common aristocratic culture, is only one aspect. I would argue it is a key aspect, because without the incentive of participating in the high-status interaction with Eurasian elites, the Tang would only have internal audiences for display of identity and networking. Then their appropriation of gold and silver would not have been so necessary. The appropriation of visual hybridity, which is an innate

⁴⁹⁶ Conkey 2006, 361.

feature of the Eurasian aristocratic visual culture of the time, would further confirmed the Tang's membership in an exclusive, cross-cultural elite community.

Conclusion

This thesis tackles a major change in the elite material culture of early medieval China: the surge of gold and silver as prestigious materials. Although gold and silver were considered precious in early China, they were not as important as other prestigious materials, such as jade and bronze. As the procurement, production, and use of prestigious materials were central to the ancient society, I argue that such a change indicates major social and political transformation in the period under discussion.

This transformation had to do with heightened interaction with Western Eurasia and the Eurasian Steppes, where gold and silver were valued as symbols of wealth and prestige. But instead of simply saying that the increased use of gold and silver was the result of interaction, I look into what might have *motivated* the Chinese elite to make such a change. My conclusion is that the Chinese elite were motivated by high-status interactions with the gold- and silver-using powers of Eastern Eurasia, such as the Türks and the Tibetans, which was high on the Sui-Tang Empires's political agenda. To participate in this Eurasian elite network, the Chinese adopted many shared Eurasian practices, including the appreciation and use of gold and silver. Inherently linked to the precious metals was the visual display of power, such as feasts and pageantry. By using gold and silver, the Chinese were able to manifest their power and prestige in a language their Eurasian counterparts could understand.

I must point out the limited scope of this study. First of all, this enthusiasm for gold and silver, along with all the shared Eurasian aristocratic taste and practices, was very much limited to the highest-ranking elite, or the ruling class. This attitude did not necessarily extend to other levels of the society. Even within the elite class, the Confucius literati, for example, might have had different points of view on these matters. An eight-century treatise on tea, for example, remarks on the white-ware produced at the *xing* kiln 邢窯 in Hebei and the green-ware produced at the *yue* kiln 越窯 in Zhejiang, both high-fired porcelain highly prized at the time, ‘*xing* ware resembles silver, *yue* ware resembles jade. This is one reason why *yue* ware is superior to *xing* ware.’⁴⁹⁷ Here, in the contest between jade and silver, it was still the traditional aesthetic, represented by jade, that won over the literati.

Also, the Tang elite’s attitude towards the Eurasian influences might have also been fluid multivalent, depending on the audience. I described the grand drinking party in the Inner Asian style in chapter 5, as well as other Eurasian elements in their diplomatic rituals. However, this stance might have been mainly targeted at a multi-cultural, external audience; whereas in front of the internal

⁴⁹⁷ 「若邢瓷類銀，越瓷類玉，邢不如越一也。」 Lu Yu 陸羽 (733-804 AD): A Treatise on Tea.

audience, the Tang emperors are also known to have conducted Confucian rituals, such as sacrifices to the Heaven and the ancestors in the orthodox fashion.

Finally, although I touched upon a number of ninth-century materials, such as the Famen Si collection, the body of the material in this thesis is from the sixth to the eighth centuries, the most outward-looking period of the Tang history. From the ninth century onwards, the use of gold and silver seem to have become dispersed into the lower classes of the societies. With the production centre being moved to the Lower Yangtze region, the association of gold and silver with high-status interactions with other Eurasian powers was weakened.⁴⁹⁸ It is also the period when, as Gyllensvärd and Qi have noticed, gold and silver of the so-called ‘Chinese innovative style’, which is further removed from the western prototypes, predominated. With the decline of the Silk Road and the burgeoning of sea trade, which connected China to Southeast Asia, Indonesian archipelago, the Indian Subcontinent, and the Arabia, gold and silver must have also played key roles in these trades, but probably in different forms and through different hands. The gold and silver vessels from the ninth century shipwreck at Beilitung and the

⁴⁹⁸ See, for example, a ninth-century hoard excavated in Dantu, Jiangsu Province, which contained nearly a thousand silver objects. Qi Dongfang argues that the hoard might have been associated with a local production centre run by the prefecture government. Qi 1999a, 286. For excavation report of the hoard, see *WW* (1981, 11), 28-33.

recent excavation of a late Tang seaport in Shanghai⁴⁹⁹ provide us huge room for exploration in the future.

I hope this study will leave the readers wondering how archaeological material could illuminate on ancient interactions—not just that interactions did take place, but more importantly, why they happened in these particular ways, and what they meant for the ancients. Some of these basic principles may still be valid today. This thesis is written over a period, in which the collision between the West and what the West considers ‘the cultural others’ seems to be ever escalating. But looking at the past, we realise that our ancestors had gone through much more difficult times with much less means than what we possess today, but they had come up with constructive solutions and managed to carry the human civilisations through till this day. And I hope this will happen again, with what we have learnt from the past.

⁴⁹⁹ See catalogue of the Qinglong Zhen (a seaport town in Shanghai) exhibition in Shanghai Museum, 2017.

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Figures