

Article

A Comparative Study of Religious Images on Sogdian Burial Utensils in China and Central Asia

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Abstract: The comparison of Sogdian images in China and Central Asia has become a hot topic in academic circles in recent years. However, there is no specific comparison of Sogdian images on burial utensils in the existing studies. Accordingly, the author proposes to compare the images on burial utensils by collecting together the remaining materials as much as possible and making corresponding data tables. First and foremost, this paper focuses on the actual quantity of the remains and gives a table, “Statistics of the Sogdian Burial Utensils with Images”, to show this quantity for the first time: there are 30 remains of Sogdian burial utensils in China (26 sarcophagi and four ossuaries) and 23 Sogdian burial utensils in Central Asia (all are ossuaries). Secondly, there are several tables based on remaining materials in this paper, including “Distribution of the Shapes of Sogdian Sarcophagi in China”, “Historical Period and Shape of Sogdian Ossuaries in Central Asia”, “Religious Images Table of Sogdian Sarcophagi in China”, “Table of Religious Image Types of the Sogdian Ossuaries in Central Asia” and “Common Religious Images of the Burial Utensils in China and Central Asia”. Thirdly, further analysis shows that there are two image systems. Grounded in the above analysis, this paper comes to conclusions at three levels. Firstly, there are two shapes of burial utensils. Sarcophagi are widely seen in China whilst ossuaries are commonly discovered in Central Asia. As a result, the images on the sarcophagi in China are large in size and wide in narrative themes, whereas those on the ossuaries in Central Asia are small in size, emphasizing important content and narrative themes. All are rich in image representation. Secondly, there are three types of religious images on the burial utensils. The comparison results of image types show the common images in three categories: gods, funeral ceremonies and sacred fire sacrifice. Thirdly, the images on burial utensils have different characteristics regarding religious transmission. Zoroastrianism is dominant in Central Asia, while Zoroastrianism, Chinese mythology and Buddhist images are primary in China and images of tomb owners embodying secularity are also widespread in China.

Keywords: China; Central Asia; Sogdian burial utensils; religious images; comparison



Citation: Han, Jing, and Xiaoyang Wang. 2023. A Comparative Study of Religious Images on Sogdian Burial Utensils in China and Central Asia. *Religions* 14: 115. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010115>

Academic Editor: Xiaohuan Zhao

Received: 27 September 2022

Revised: 5 January 2023

Accepted: 6 January 2023

Published: 13 January 2023



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1. Introduction

As recorded in ancient Chinese books, Sogdiana was one of the old kingdoms in the Western Regions. In “Traditions of Western Regions”, *History of the Han Dynasty (Hanshu, Ban 1962, p. 3891)* records that “the king in the state of Kangju 康居 liked to live in Yuenidi in the winter. The city of Beitian was 2300 *li* from Chang’an, which was not under the jurisdiction of the protectorate”. Sogdians came from an Iranian tribe. Sogdiana, the homeland of the Sogdians, signified the areas that centered on the Zarafshon River and Qashqadaryo Valley in present-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. From the 4th to the 8th century, as an ethnic group, Sogdians played an active role in Central Asia and China. Sogdians who came to China not only served as officials and did business, but also integrated Chinese traditional and Sogdian cultures. Western scholars hold that “Sogdiana was an ancient culture of Iranian-speaking people who lived at the edge of the Persian Empire on the route to China. More specifically, it encompassed the provinces of Samarqand, Bukhara and Qarshi in the modern republic of Uzbekistan and the Sughd province of the republic

of Tajikistan" (Ashurov 2020, p. 2). Chinese scholars view that: "City states, big or small, dotted the oases in Sogdiana. Among them, the state of Kangju, with Samarkand as the center, was the largest and was regarded as the representative of the city-states in Sogdiana. Besides, An 安國, with Bukhara as the center, was large. There were Dongcao 東曹國 at Sutrūshana (Ushrūsana), Xian 霰國 at Kapūtānā, Xicao 西曹國 at Ishitikhān, Mi 米國 at Māymurgh, He 何國 at Kushānika, Shi 史國 at Kashāna and Shi 石國 at Chach. These states were split or unified in different periods. In Chinese historical records, they were collectively called 'Nine Tribes in Sogdiana 昭武九姓'. As a matter of fact, there were more than nine states." (Rong and Zhang 2004, p. 3).

Studies of Sogdian religion became popular in Western academia in the 1950s and arrived in China in the 21st century. Owing to inadequate literature, the existing research focuses on image materials. In particular, the comparative study of religious imagery arouses widespread attention and attains remarkable achievements. Noticeably, scholars have ignored the comparison of burial utensils in the comparison of religious images. Both sarcophagus and ossuaries are burial utensils, which can be compared in terms of the religious images on Sogdian burial utensils. The two have their own narrative characteristics. Therefore, two problems may arise.

Firstly, scholars ignore the difference between types of burial utensils in archeological findings.

"Burial utensils refer to the vessels used to hold the bodies or bones (cremated remains) of the dead, such as coffin, outer coffin and cinerary casket. Owing to the difference of natural environment, the limitation of scientific and technological level and the difference of beliefs and burial forms, burial utensils used by different nationalities and regions represent different tones of the times. Conversely, the materials, processing and shape of burial utensils also reflect the endemicity, epochal character and beliefs." (Yan 2010, p. 107) Ossuary and sarcophagus are the main types of Sogdian burial utensils.

In the view of the existing archaeological findings, the Sogdian burial utensil in China are mainly sarcophagi, including a stone house 石堂, stone bed 石床 and outer coffin 石棺. (Müller 2019, pp. 383–474)¹. As the main burial utensils of Sogdians in China, sarcophagi demonstrates strong Chinese characteristics. As a Chinese scholar confirms, "Stone burial utensils were traditional burial forms in ancient China. Stone bed (with portrait in particular) served as a luxurious utensil for high-class tomb. Stone bed originated from the bed used as a seat in real life. The bed-style stone bed meant a platform constructed with stone slabs. In shape, stone bed looked like the bed in the portrait and the mourning bed in the burial ceremony. Stone bed prevailed in the Pingcheng Period 平城時期 of the Northern Wei Dynasty 北魏. The setting was also modelled after a bed. The folding-screen-style stone bed swept in the period from the Northern Wei Dynasty choosing Luoyang as capital to the late Northern Dynasties 北朝. The-screen-style enclosure was added on three sides of the bed-style stone bed and the back screen and the left and right side screen were pieced together with stone slabs. This tallied with the combination of 'stone bed' with 'stone screen' recorded in ancient literature and followed the example of the interior construction in reality". (Li 2021, pp. 64–66).

Chinese scholars Rong Xinjiang and Luo Feng (Rong and Luo 2016, p. 290) explain in *The Sogdians in China: New Evidence of Archaeological Discoveries and Unearthed Documents* that "there are roughly two types of stone burial utensils. One is the outer coffin or the so-called "stone house", which is composed of a decorative base on the front, four walls with reliefs or paintings on the inside or outside and the top of the slope. The stone burial utensils found in the tombs of Shi Jun and Yu Hong belong to this category. The stone house in the tomb of Shi Jun consists of a base, four walls and a roof at 45 degrees, representing a palace hall style with a gabled roof, facing south, with a width of five rooms. In the tomb of Yu Hong, the white marble outer coffin adopted the palace hall style with a single-eave and gabled roof and with three standard widths and a wood like structure consists of a roof, wall, seat and colonnade. The other is the stone bed, which has a rectangular platform and

three sides are surrounded by a screen with reliefs. The stone burial utensils unearthed from the tombs of Kangye and Anjia and Tianshui Sarcophagus in the Northern Zhou Dynasty belong to this category. The screen stone bed in the tomb of Kangye is composed of screen, couch board and couch leg.” (Rong and Luo 2016, p. 290) Based on the literature of Chinese and Western scholars, this paper used such terms as sarcophagus, stone house, stone bed, outer coffin, etc.

The ossuary is the main sogdian burial utensil in Central Asia. “Ossuary is a burial utensil used to hold bones of the dead during the second burial. Although Jews also used ossuaries, ossuaries found in a vast area from Persia to Central Asia and Xinjiang in the pre-Islamic era were left by Zoroastrianism (“ 襖” or “ 火襖” in Chinese ancient books) believers. The doctrine of this religion claimed that the dead body was feculent and should be transported to a place far away from people or a height like Dakhma in order to avoid polluting the sacred fire, water and earth, so that the birds of prey could peck and eat the flesh quickly. When only clean bones without flesh were left, they were collected and stored in a special container. This kind of container is called ossuary. Ossuaries found in Central Asia were mainly left by the Sogdians who believed in Zoroastrianism”. (Rong and Luo 2016, p. 46). An ossuary is generally rectangular or oval, containing the remains of the dead, with its exterior painted with Zoroastrian sacrificial images, etc.

In all burial activities with burial utensils, these utensils boast of the tools closest to the tomb owner. How the tomb owner envisaged the afterlife (e.g., the path to the afterlife and the understanding of the afterlife) was projected onto the arrangement of burial utensils. Simultaneously, burial utensils served as a material form for the tomb owner to arrive in the afterlife with. The images on burial utensils intensively represented these ideas and aroused the particular attention of tomb owners, which constitute the subjects in the comparison of Sogdian burial utensils. For example, in the development of Sogdian society, the dissemination and representation of religion diversified very widely. Sogdians were traveling merchants in Eurasia, which enabled them to contact many cultures and provide more cultural elements. In the existing studies, scholars generally compare the sarcophagi in China with the mural images of the ground palace sites in Central Asia. Such comparison is meaningful, but problems in these studies are also obvious, as the state of existence of ground images and underground images is different. However, such a comparison is applicable to the ossuary. The ossuary in Central Asia and the sarcophagus in China are burial utensils with different existence modes that do not change the properties of their burial utensils. Therefore, it is logical to compare the ossuary and sarcophagus in term of the Sogdian images.

Secondly, scholars disregard the difference between religious narration and secular narration. The images of sarcophagi and ossuaries depict the afterlife and represent religious narration. The images of palaces describe the temporal world and represent secular narration. Presently, scholars have not drawn a clear distinction between religious narration and secular narration in the comparison of Sogdian images. Meanwhile, in the existing scholarship, Chinese and Western scholars display different academic interests in the studies of Sogdian images. Chinese scholars Jiang Boqin and Rong Xinjiang focus on the form of images. They earnestly analyze the shapes, ages, tomb-structures, epitaphs, murals, stone carvings and statues of the tombs unearthed in China and then proceed to unmask the burial customs and religious beliefs of Sogdians in China. The tombs are the Tomb of Shi Jun 史君墓, the Tomb of An Jia 安伽墓 and the Tomb of Yu Hong 虞弘墓, etc. (Jiang 2004a, pp. 1–298; Rong and Luo 2016, pp. 281–82) Western scholars Franz Gamet, M. Shenkar, Marschak, G. A. Pugachenkova and L. V. Pavchinskaia attach importance to the religious value of images. They highlight the religious and cultural characteristics of Zoroastrianism, interpret the meanings of gods and religious ceremonies and analyze the history of Sogdians, the murals on Sogdian palaces in Central Asian and unearthed coins and utensils (e.g., paintings at Penjikent discovered in present-day Tajikistan) (Gamet 2002, pp. 91–7; Marschak 2016, pp. 8–208; Pugachenkova 1994, pp. 227–43).

Admittedly, the above-stated problems count against the comparison of Sogdian religious images. This paper proposes to directly compare sarcophagi and ossuaries, with an aim to further relevant studies in two aspects. The first is to clarify the comparative relationship between burial utensils. Structurally, both sarcophagus and ossuary belong to the category of burial utensils, enabling scholars to directly compare them. Second is to determine the role of geographical elements in religious dissemination. Given the facts that sarcophagi mainly exist in China and that ossuaries mostly appear in Central Asia, this paper attempts to unveil how regional elements shape the dissemination of Sogdian religion.

With a comparative approach, this paper proceeds to analyze archeological remains, examine the shapes, and investigate diverse religions in the context of religious images. In this paper, burial utensils are confined to images and remains. For the former, burial utensils must be image-based. For the latter, burial utensils must be intact. To put this in another way, burial utensils without images or with incomplete or unrecognizable images will be ignored.

2. Quantity Calculation of the Remains of Sogdian Burial Utensils

As the current archaeological findings suggest, the remains of Sogdian burial utensils dot China and Central Asia. In shape, the Sogdian burial utensils in China are mainly sarcophagi, with very few ossuaries, while those in Central Asia are only ossuaries. The question is: how many remains of Sogdian burial utensils have images? Despite regional and phased statistical reports, complete images prove few and far between. Therefore, the data collected in this paper are calculated for the first time.

2.1. The Quantity of Remains of Sogdian Burial Utensils with Images in China

In type, Sogdian burial utensils include both sarcophagus and ossuary. In China, sarcophagi prevail, with a small number of ossuaries.

2.1.1. The Quantity of Sarcophagi

The quantity of the remains of Sogdian sarcophagi in China can be obtained from the materials as follows.

Firstly, there are monographs. The appendixes to some monographs generally provide relevant basic statistical data. However, the basic data are neither complete nor professional. *The History of Chinese Tomb Murals* (Wang 2018, pp. 391–491) records 11 remains of Sogdian sarcophagi in its chronology, i.e., the Tomb in Qingzhou 青州墓, Shandong Province; the Tomb of Kang Ye 康業墓 in the Northern Zhou Dynasty in Xi'an; the Tomb of An Jia 安伽墓 in the Northern Zhou Dynasty in Xi'an; the Tomb of Sartpau of Liangzhou Shi Jun 涼州薩保史君墓, the Tomb of Shi Wushe 史勿射墓 and the Tomb of Shi Suoyan 史索岩墓 in the Northern Zhou Dynasty in Xi'an; the Tomb of Yu Hong 虞弘墓 in the Sui Dynasty in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province; the Tomb of Shi Daode 史道德墓 in the Tang Dynasty; the Tomb of An Yuanshou 安元壽墓; the Tomb in Yanchi 鹽池墓, Ningxia; and the Tomb with Screen-style Stone bed 屏風石棺床墓 in the Sui and Tang Dynasties in Tianshui, Gansu Province. Wang's chronology boasts the first report on mural remains of tombs in China but, subject to the published archaeological reports, it tends to omit some information. In *The Turks, the Sogdians and Goddess Nana* (Marschak 2016, pp. 185–86), "A List of Main Stone Burial Utensils of the Sogdians and Xianbei People 鮮卑 in the Northern Dynasties" appears in the Appendix. The statistical data basically accord with those in *The History of Chinese Tomb Murals*, including Stone Bed in Anyang 安陽石榻, Stone Bed in Miho Miho 石榻, Stone Bed in Kang Ye 康業石榻, Stone Inscriptions in Fujia of Yidu 益都傅家石刻, Stone Bed in An Jia 安伽石榻, Stone House of Shi Jun 史君石堂, Stone Bed in Jimei 吉美石榻, Stone Bed in Tianshui 天水石榻 and Stone house in Yu Hong 虞弘石榻. With their complete systems, the two monographs have established a statistical foundation for further research.

Secondly, there are theses or dissertations. Yang Shuo and Sun Wujun have made systematic statistics in their theses. *The Research on the Art of Images of the Sogdian Tombs in China* by Yang Shuo includes “A Statistical Chart of the Sogdian Tombs in China from the Northern Qi Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty”, which mentions a total of 17 Sogdian sarcophagi, with a higher number. Ye Yang’s chart ends in 2006 and seems incomplete. (Yang 2019, p. 22) For instance, Sogdian tombs such as the Tomb of Kang Ye in the Northern Zhou Dynasty in Xi’an have been excavated since 2006, thus proving Yang’s statistics incomplete. In his doctoral dissertation *The Cultural and Aesthetic Research on the Images of the Sogdian Tombs in China in the Northern Dynasties, the Sui Dynasty and the Tang Dynasty*, Sun Wujun enumerates 28 Sogdian tombs in Appendix 1, “Table of the Sogdian Tombs in China in the Northern Dynasties, the Sui Dynasty and the Tang Dynasty”, of which “The Tomb in the Tang Dynasty in Yanchi, Ningxia” consists of six sub-tombs. Sun’s table serves as a relatively complete set of statistics for Sogdian burial utensils. (Sun 2012, p. 147).

Thirdly are academic papers. As fragmentary materials, papers provide the latest research findings and supplement the chronologies in monographs and dissertations. Bibliographically, two papers are cited: the paper by Rong Xinjiang and Luo Feng et al. supplements the section “Tomb of Zhai Caoming 翟曹明墓 in the Northern Zhou Dynasty in Jingbian” (Rong and Luo 2016, pp. 281–82); the paper by Ge Chengyong supplements the section “Stone House in the Northern Dynasties Collected in National Museum of China 中國國家博物館藏北朝石堂”. (Ge 2016, pp. 71–84).

Regrettably, in terms of the quantity of the remains of ossuaries in China, only relevant papers deal with statistical data, represented by those written by Jiang Boqin and Chen Ling. *Research on the Art History of Zoroastrianism in China* by Jiang Boqin records 3 ossuaries unearthed in Xinjiang (Jiang 2004a, pp. 185–92). *Research on the Burial Customs of Zoroastrians in the Medieval Times in China (I)* by Chen Ling also recounts three ossuaries unearthed in Xinjiang. (Chen 2018, pp. 324–41). With three ossuaries recorded respectively, two of them are mentioned repeatedly. There are actually four ossuaries in Xinjiang, i.e., one collected in the Palace Museum, one unearthed in Tuyuhun, one unearthed in Mazhafutang Site in the ancient town of Pilang, Kuche, Xinjiang, and one (with carved pattern) unearthed from Mazhafutang Site in the ancient town of Pilang, Kuche (collected in Xinjiang Museum).

2.1.2. The Temporal Distribution of Sarcophagi

The temporal distribution of sarcophagi with images in China extends from the Northern and Southern Dynasties to the Tang Dynasty. According to chronological materials, the oldest tomb lies in Anyang, Henan Province, in the Northern Qi Dynasty from 556 A.D. (Jiang 2004a, pp. 33–62; Jiang 1999). The latest tomb comes from the M3 Tomb of He’s Family 何氏家族M3 號墓 in the Tang Dynasty in Yinziliang, Yanchi, Ningxia, from 700 A.D., (The Museum of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region 1988, pp. 43–58). In brief, the burial utensils of the Sogdians in China date from 484 to 700 A.D., spanning from the Northern and Southern Dynasties to the Tang Dynasty.

2.1.3. The Geographical Distribution of Sarcophagi

Geographically, the distribution area of sarcophagi in China covers six provinces or three regions in line with contemporary administrative division, i.e., nine in the Central Plains (six in Sha’anxi, two in Henan and one in Shanxi), six in the western region (four in Ningxia and two in Gansu) and one in the eastern region (Shandong). The information on one sarcophagus remains unclear. In a nutshell, the remains of the Sogdian burial utensils in China are mainly distributed in the Central Plains and the western region. Historically, the Central Plains functioned as the political center of China and a large number of sarcophagi demonstrate the far-reaching influence of traditional Chinese culture. The western region, the traffic artery of the Silk Road, integrates diverse cultures along this road.

All the remains of the ossuaries in China exist in Xinjiang, the land on which the Sogdians set foot when they came to China for the first time, and are the original form of Sogdian burial utensils in China.

With regard to the distribution of sarcophagi in China, Shing Müller notes the small quantity of sarcophagi. He observes that: “Zoroastrianism does not seem to have spread among other ethnic groups and was not widely distributed across China. Besides, it is obvious that only a handful of the richest and highest ranking Central Asians could afford such funerals. Both explain the extremely small number of finds of such beds and houses.” (Müller 2019, p. 443).

2.2. The Quantity of Remains of Sogdian Burial Utensils with Images in Central Asia

As the existing archaeological findings confirm, due to the absence of sarcophagus remains in Central Asia, this paper only takes into account the remains of ossuaries.

2.2.1. The Quantity of Ossuaries

As stated above, no statistical reports have emerged on ossuaries in burial utensils with images in Central Asia. In this regard, three papers provide better data descriptions, based on which the quantity of ossuaries in Central Asia can be outlined.

Paper 1: *Sogdian Ossuaries* by L. V. Pavchinskaia, recording 34 remains of ossuaries. (Pavchinskaia 1994, pp. 209–25) Paper 2: *The Form and Style of Sogdian Ossuaries* by G. A. Pugachenkova, recording nine remains of ossuaries. (Pugachenkova 1994, pp. 227–43) Paper 3: *A New Discovery of Stamped Ossuaries near Shahri Sabz (Uzbekistan)* by Amriddin E. Berdimuradov, Gennadii Bogomolov, Margot Daepfen and Nabi Khushvaktov (Bulletin of the Asia Institute), recording one ossuary. (Berdimuradov et al. 2008, pp. 137–42)

On the basis of the above listed three papers, excluding repeatedly mentioned remains of ossuaries, removing burial utensils without images with incomplete and unrecognizable images. the number of Sogdian burial utensils with images in Central Asia totals 23.

2.2.2. The Temporal Distribution of Ossuaries

As the current archaeological findings suggest, the remains of ossuaries can be dated back to the period from the end of the 4th century to the middle of the 8th century. According to *Sogdian Ossuaries* by L. V. Pavchinskaia (1994, p. 219), “Among the earliest necropolises (Samarkand, Panjikent and Er-kurgan), the most reliably dated are three ossuary burials from Panjikent (excavated in 1975–1976). Ossuary burials in large clay jars discovered on the ridge of the Hellenistic wall can be dated by the type of urn and other ceramic objects to the late fourth and first half of the fifth centuries. There are also a large number of ossuary complexes from a later period, the mid-seventh century and the first half of the eighth century, e.g., the necropolises at Panjikent and Kafir-qa’la, nausts at Besh-qa’la and Sari-tepe, the cemetery at Ishtikhan, separate burials at Durmen and Sari-tepe and nausts in Paikend. They are dated stratigraphically by accompanying funerary pottery and, in a few cases, by coins.”

2.2.3. The Geographical Distribution of Ossuaries

Among the substantial academic findings, two papers are representative in this respect. *Sogdian Ossuaries* by L. V. Pavchinskaia divides the distribution of the ossuaries into three regions in line with the shape and evolution of the ossuaries, namely, Samarkand (central Sogdiana), Bukhara (western Sogdiana) and Kashka Darya Oasis (southern Sogdiana). (Pavchinskaia 1994, pp. 209–25).

The Form and Style of Sogdian Ossuaries by G. A. Pugachenkova divides the distribution of the ossuaries into three regions in line with form and style, namely, southern Sogdiana, central Sogdiana and northern Sogdiana. (Pugachenkova 1994, pp. 227–43).

Agreeing with L. V. Pavchinskaia and G. A. Pugachenkova, this paper categorizes 23 ossuaries in Central Asia into three regions, namely, central Sogdiana, southern Sog-

diana and northern Sogdiana. In particular, central Sogdiana has the largest number of ossuaries.

2.3. Preliminary Description of the Quantity of Remains of the Sogdian Burial Utensils

According to the statistics of existing burial utensils, the burial utensils amount to 30 in China (26 sarcophagi and four ossuaries) and 23 in Central Asia (all are ossuaries, without sarcophagi) (Table 1).

Table 1. Statistics of the Sogdian Burial Utensils with Images.

| | China | Central Asia |
|--------------------------|-------|--------------|
| Sarcophagi (With Images) | 26 | Unknown |
| Ossuaries (With Images) | 4 | 23 |

On the basis of the quantity of remains of Sogdian burial utensils, this paper makes a summary at three levels.

Firstly, the relatively large number of remains of Sogdian burial utensils can support the comparison of images on burial utensils. We collected sufficient samples of Sogdian burial utensils in China and Central Asia for comparison of religious images. So far, the large quantities of Sogdian burial utensils in China (30) and Central Asia (23) have laid a solid foundation for the comparative study of religious images.

Secondly, the remains of Sogdian burial utensils embody unique regional features, indicating differences in shape between the two regions. On the one hand, Sogdian burial utensils in Central Asia are ossuaries, which exist in ground buildings, and those in China are sarcophagi, which exist in catacombs. The two show completely different modes of existence. On the other hand, Sogdian burial utensils in China include sarcophagus and ossuary, while those in Central Asia only include ossuary. This demonstrates that styles of the former are more abundant.

Thirdly, the remains of Sogdian burial utensils in China represent the Sinicized development of Sogdian religion. As the existing archaeological findings disclose, sarcophagi are mainly discovered in China and a few ossuaries are discovered in Central Asia. The phenomenon evidences how traditional Chinese culture affects the choice and evolution of Sogdian burial utensils. Sogdians who came to China chose the sarcophagus and other burial utensils, representing the Sogdians' absorption and acceptance of Chinese culture.

As stated, Sogdian burial utensils are distributed in Central Asia and China's Central Plains, whose contemporary names differ from their counterparts in ancient times. Simultaneously, the everchanging names affected the design of the distribution map of Sogdian burial utensils. This will be further discussed in another paper.

3. The Comparison of the Shapes of Sogdian Burial Utensils

In shape, Sogdian burial utensils possess distinct regional and cultural elements. As argued, Sogdian burial utensils in China are basically sarcophagi and those in Central Asia are mostly ossuaries, which are totally different in type. This paper comprehensively collates the existing archaeological findings, firstly presenting their distribution in a table and preliminarily comparing them.

3.1. The Distribution of the Shapes of Sogdian Burial Utensils in China

As the existing archaeological achievements indicate, the sarcophagus constitutes a major part of Sogdian burial utensils in China and becomes the research subject in this paper. A sarcophagus denotes an object that contains the dead body of the tomb owner. As archaeological reports describe, there are three main types of sarcophagus in China: stone bed, stone house and outer coffin. Archaeologists have excavated a large number of stone beds, a small number of stone houses and outer coffins.

Note: For the characteristics of stone bed, stone house and outer coffin, see Zhu Guanru: *Research on Sarcophagus Burial in Xinjiang in the Early Times*. As a specific form of stone-structured burial, sarcophagus burial refers to a kind of tomb in which the house was constructed with a flat stone slab, a large stone and other stone materials. Stone-house tomb refers to a tomb in which the outer house was enclosed with stone materials. The outer house was often constructed with wooded or stone materials. A few stone-house tombs did not have houses. Therefore, the main difference between stone-house tomb and sarcophagus burial lies in the difference between the outer house and the house. The stone-chamber tomb was constructed with pebble or dressed stone of regular shape and size. The stone chamber was mostly square, rectangular or round, with fixed shape and size. Stone chambers can be used to place burial utensils such as house and bed, as well as funeral objects. Since the sarcophagus functioned as burial utensil, sarcophagus burial proved to be obviously different from that of the stone-chamber tomb. (Zhu 2015, p. 1)

Among these sarcophagus burial utensils, there are the remains of 23 stone beds (the largest number), two stone houses and one outer coffin. Grounded in relevant archaeological materials, Table 2 shows the distribution of the shapes of Sogdian sarcophagi in China.

Table 2. The Distribution of the Shapes of Sogdian sarcophagi in China.

| Shape | Quantity | Tomb Name | Historical Period |
|-----------------------|----------|---|--|
| 1 Stone Bed 石棺床 | 23 | 1-1. The Tomb in the Northern Qi Dynasty in Anyang, Henan 河南安陽北齊墓 | The Northern Qi Dynasty (550–577), The 2nd Year of Emperor Shaotai of the Liang Dynasty in the Southern Dynasties (420–589) 556 A.D. |
| | | 1-2. Sogdian Screen Collected in Miho Art Museum 美秀博物館藏粟特屏風 | The Northern Zhou Dynasty (557–581), the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420–589) The 3rd Year of Emperor Taijian of the Chen Dynasty in the Southern Dynasties (420–589) 550 A.D.–577 A.D. |
| | | 1-3. The Tomb of Kang Ye in the Northern Zhou Dynasty in Xi'an 西安北周康業墓 | The Northern Zhou Dynasty (557–581), the 3rd Year of Emperor Taijian of the Chen Dynasty in the Southern Dynasties (420–589) 571 A.D. |
| | | 1-4. Stone-Chamber Tomb in Qingzhou, Shandong 山東青州石室墓 | The 4th Year of Emperor Wuping in the Northern Qi Dynasty (550–577) 573 A.D. |
| | | 1-5. The Tomb of An Jia in the Northern Zhou Dynasty in Xi'an 西安北周安伽墓 | The 1st Year of Emperor Dacheng of the Northern Zhou Dynasty (557–581) 579 A.D. |
| | | 1-6. The Tomb of An Bei and His Wife 安備夫婦墓 | The 9th Year of Emperor Kaihuang in the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581–907) 589 A.D. |
| | | 1-7. Screen-Style Stone-house-Bed Tomb in the Sui and Tang Dynasties in Tianshui, Gansu 甘肅天水隋唐屏風石棺床墓 | The Sui and Tang Dynasties (581–907) |
| | | 1-8. The Tomb of Zhai Caoming in the Northern Zhou Dynasty in Jingbian 靖邊北周翟曹明墓 | The 1st Year of Emperor Dacheng in the Northern Zhou Dynasty (557–581) 579 A.D. |
| | | 1-9. The Tomb of An Pu and His Wife 安菩夫婦墓 | The 1st Year of Emperor Linde (Dahongxiao) in the Tang Dynasty (618–907) 664 A.D. |

Table 2. Cont.

| Shape | Quantity | Tomb Name | Historical Period |
|-------|----------|---|--|
| | 1-10. | The Tomb of She Kedan and His Wife in Guyuan, Ningxia (M1) 寧夏固原史可耽夫婦墓M1 | The 2nd Year of Emperor Zongzhang (Emperor Gaozong, Tianhuang Dasheng Dahongxiao) in the Tang Dynasty (618–907) 669 A.D. |
| | 1-11. | The Tomb of He's Family in the Tang Dynasty in Yinziliang, Yanchi, Ningxia (M2) 寧夏鹽池窰子梁唐代何氏家族墓M2 | The 1st Year of Empress Jiushi (Wuzhou) in the Tang Dynasty (618–907) 700 A.D. |
| | 1-12. | The Tomb of He's Family in the Tang | The 1st Year of Empress Jiushi (Wuzhou) in the Tang Dynasty (618–907) 700 A.D. |
| | 1-13. | Dynasty in Yinziliang, Yanchi, Ningxia (M3) 寧夏鹽池窰子梁唐代何氏家族墓M3 | |
| | 1-14. | The Tomb of He's Family in the Tang Dynasty in Yinziliang, Yanchi, Ningxia (M4) 寧夏鹽池窰子梁唐代何氏家族墓M4 | The 1st Year of Empress Jiushi (Wuzhou) in the Tang Dynasty (618–907) 700 A.D. |
| | 1-15. | The Tomb of He's Family in the Tang Dynasty in Yinziliang, Yanchi, Ningxia (M5) 寧夏鹽池窰子梁唐代何氏家族墓M5 | The 1st Year of Empress Jiushi (Wuzhou) in the Tang Dynasty (618–907) 700 A.D. |
| | 1-16. | The Tomb of He's Family in the Tang Dynasty in Yinziliang, Yanchi, Ningxia (M6) 寧夏鹽池窰子梁唐代何氏家族墓M6 | The 1st Year of Empress Jiushi (Wuzhou) in the Tang Dynasty (618–907) 700 A.D. |
| | 1-17. | The Tomb of Shi Shewu in the Sui Dynasty in Guyuan, Ningxia 寧夏固原隋史射勿墓 | The 6th Year of Emperor Daye in the Sui Dynasty (581–618) 610 A.D. |
| | 1-18. | The Tomb of Shi Tiebang in Guyuan, Ningxia 寧夏固原史鐵棒 | The 1st Year of Emperor Qianfeng (Gaozong) in the Tang Dynasty (618–907) 666 A.D. |
| | 1-19. | The Tomb of Shi Daode in Guyuan, Ningxia 寧夏固原史道德墓 | The 3rd Year of Emperor Yifeng (Gaozong) in the Tang Dynasty (618–907) 678 A.D. |
| | 1-20. | The Tomb of Shi Suoyan and His Wife in Guyuan, Ningxia 寧夏固原史索岩夫婦墓 | The 1st Year of Emperor Xianqing (Emperor Gaozong, Tianhuang Dasheng Dahongxiao) in the Tang Dynasty (618–907) 656 A.D. |
| | 1-21. | The Tomb of An Yuanshou and His Wife in the Tang Dynasty 唐安元壽夫婦墓 | The 1st Year of Empress Guangzhai (Empress Tianshun Shengwu, Wu Zetian) in the Tang Dynasty (618–907) 684 A.D. |
| | 1-22. | Sogdian Sarcophagus Collected in Guimet Museum of France 法國吉美博物館館藏粟特石棺 | The Sui and Tang Dynasties (581–907) |
| | 1-23. | The Tomb of Shi Siming 史思明墓 | The 1st Year of Emperor Yingbao in the Tang Dynasty (618–907) 762 A.D. |
| | 1-24. | The Tomb at Loulan 樓蘭墓 | The 4th Century |

Table 2. Cont.

| Shape | Quantity | Tomb Name | Historical Period |
|-------------------------|----------|--|--|
| 2 Stone House 石堂 | 2 | 2-1. The Tomb of Sartpau of Liangzhou Shi Jun in the Northern Zhou Dynasty in Xi'an 西安北周涼州薩保史君墓 | The 18th Year of Emperor Tianbao in the Western Liang in the Northern Zhou Dynasty (557–581) 579 A.D. |
| | | 2-2. Stone House in the Northern Dynasties Collected in National Museum of China 中國國家博物館藏北朝石堂 | The Northern Dynasties (386–581) |
| 3 Outer Coffin 石槨 | 1 | 3-1. The Tomb of Yuhong in the Sui Dynasty, in Taiyuan, Shanxi 山西太原隋代虞弘墓 | The Sui Dynasty (581–618), The 32nd Year of Emperor Yanchang in Gaochang (561–601) 592 A.D. |

According to the historical period of the shapes of Sogdian sarcophagi in China, this paper basically draws three conclusions.

Firstly, stone bed is the most popular type of Sogdian burial utensil in China, with the largest quantity of remains and the most diverse types, e.g., stone bed, earth bed, brick bed and stone double-layer bed. This paper categorizes earthen bed, brick bed and stone double-layer bed into the overall category of stone bed, because these burial utensils all embody a house-bed structure in shape and adopt materials such as earth and brick in line with local conditions. This reflects the high popularity of the house-bed structure. Simultaneously, the small number of stone houses and outer coffins proves their low popularity.

Secondly, the small number of outer coffins reflects the influence of the hierarchical system in China. Traditional Chinese society highlighted this hierarchical system. An outer coffin, as a high-level burial form, testified to the noble social status of the tomb owner, so social status restricted its popularity. There are differences in level between the outer coffin and the stone bed. Chinese scholars believe that “the people who used stone burial utensils in the Tang Dynasty had special status and were favored by the emperor. The owners of tombs with room shaped outer coffins were all kinsmen of the emperor or nobles. Among them, kinsmen of the emperor were in the majority, followed by nobles. Most of their tombs were double-chamber or single-chamber brick tombs with long slope passages and several patios and at least one stone gate. Funeral eulogy representing identity was also unearthed from a few tombs. The owners of tombs with only stone beds were relatively lower than those of tombs with room-shaped outer coffins in terms of official rank, but generally above the third grade. The tomb owners include kinsmen of the emperor and nobles. Tombs of most kinsmen of the emperor were double-chamber brick tombs with stone beds, while nobles usually used single-chamber brick tombs.” (Yuan 2017, p. 207) Both outer coffins and stone beds are high-level burial utensils, so it is reasonable to see a difference in rank and it is clear that the former is higher than the later. Archaeological results suggest that the owners of tombs with an outer coffin are of lofty status. For instance, Yu Hong’s stone house was discovered in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province, in 1991. The epitaph gives an account of his extraordinary experience. Prior to his arrival in China, he served as an envoy to Persia and Tuyuhun under the order of the king of the Rouran Khaganate. Around the middle of the 6th century, he undertook a diplomatic mission to the Northern Qi Dynasty. Shortly afterwards, he stayed in China and became an official of the Northern Qi, Northern Zhou and Sui Dynasties. Yu Hong died in 592 A.D. and his epitaph listed at least 14 official titles he held before his death (Wu and Zheng 2005, pp. 1–6).

Thirdly, the rarely-seen stone house evinces that foreign burial utensils were not well-received then.

In China, stone house was regarded as a special burial utensil, because it was introduced from an extra culture. Terminologically, Ge Chengyong describes the stone house of the Northern Dynasties collected in National Museum of China as follows: “This cul-

tural relic was named ‘house-shaped stone house 房屋形石槨’ by National Museum of China. It was originally constructed by the Sogdians who came to China in the Northern Dynasties and was used to bury the leaders of the Sogdian nobles. The stone inscriptions (in Chinese) of Shi Jun’s tomb in Xi’an assert that this kind of hall-style stone burial utensil was termed ‘stone house 石堂’, or ‘the tomb made of stone’ and ‘the house of the gods’, in Sogdian language . . . Therefore, we also call this burial utensil ‘stone house’ according to the inscriptions at that time.” (Ge 2016, pp. 71–84.) Another example is the inscription carved in Chinese and Sogdian language in the Tomb of Sartpau of Liangzhou Shijun in the Northern Zhou Dynasty. It records that a man from the Shijun family, who was a Sogdian nobleman, was awarded the position of Sartpau of Liangzhou by the emperor in China. The inscription carved in Chinese from the Tomb of Sartpau of Liangzhou Shijun called this kind of palace-style stone burial utensil “stone house”, which was also the “stone tomb (house of gods)” in Sogdian language.

Stone house was not popular in China. Some scholars argue that “the house-shaped house was not the traditional burial utensils used by the Han people living in the Central Plains and the South for generations from the 5th to the 6th century, yet was favored by Xianbei people and Sogdians as well as the Han people and other tribes who migrated from the Western Regions to the north of China.” (Wu and Zheng 2005, pp. 1–6) This paper embraces this view and emphasizes that although the owner of the stone-house tomb enjoyed a high social status, the burial utensil embodied no traditional Chinese color and was less likely to be popular. Stone houses are still rare. Archaeological results attested that since the Northern Wei Dynasty, the sarcophagi and stone halls of the Sogdian nobles in China had a relatively stable image structure, which showed the recognition of China’s hierarchy although this kind of burial utensils was not popular.

3.2. The Distribution of the Form of Sogdian Burial Utensils in Central Asia

In general, Sogdian ossuaries in Central Asia were stored in on-the-ground tombs in various regions. Produced in bulk to meet the funeral rites of urban residents who believed in Zoroastrianism, Sogdian ossuaries in Central Asia mirrored distinct regional features.

On the regional distribution of Sogdian burial utensils in Central Asia, three views are mainstream.

The paper *Sogdian Ossuaries* by L. V. Pavchinskaia classifies the sites of unearthed ossuaries into three regions: “Samarkand (central Sogdiana), Bukhara (western Sogdiana) and Kashka Darya Oasis (southern Sogdiana) and theorizes the shape and evolution of ossuaries in the same region in accordance with regional features.” (Pavchinskaia 1994, pp. 209–25).

G. A. Pugachenkova, in *The Form and Style of Sogdian Ossuaries*, states that: “In different cultural regions, the shapes of the ossuaries show distinctive local features. They are primarily variants of box or oval shapes. While it has been suggested that they imitate the composition of actual architectural structures, this is only partially true, for they are not accurate models of buildings but only approximate reproductions of their design and details.” (Pugachenkova 1994, pp. 227–43).

Chen Ling, a Chinese scholar, analyzes the shapes of the ossuaries in *Research on the Burial Customs of Zoroastrians in the Medieval Times in China (I)*, dividing the shapes into seven types: small-mouth square-box shape, open-mouth square-box shape, house-like shape, round shape, tent-like shape, side-mouth oval-like shape and herringbone-patterned shape. (Chen 2018, pp. 324–41).

In alignment with their classifications, this paper scrutinizes 23 ossuaries and reaches three conclusions. Firstly, the ossuaries are distributed in three regions. The 23 ossuaries originated from these three regions, the central Sogdiana, southern Sogdiana and northern Sogdiana. The central Sogdiana owns the largest number of ossuaries, with Samarkand as the center. Secondly, In the Central Sogdiana (Western Samarkand), the ossuaries cover three types in shape. Three are rectangular ossuaries with quadrilateral pyramidal lids, two are rectangular ossuaries with vaulted lids and one is a box-shaped ceramic ossuary of

rectangular shape. Thirdly, the other eight ossuaries come from the middle of Samarkand. Owing to their fragmentary form, scholars cannot clearly determine their shapes. The southern Sogdiana takes Kashka Darya Oasis as the boundary. There are three rectangular ossuary boxes with vaulted lids. In northern Sogdiana, there are two oval ossuaries with conical lids, similar to the yurt. There is also a four-legged house-like ossuary and a four-legged open-mouth ossuary. Three fragments cannot be identified in location and shape.

To sum up, Table 3 shows the historical period and shape of Sogdian ossuaries in Central Asia.

Table 3. The Historical Period and Shape of Sogdian Ossuaries in Central Asia.²

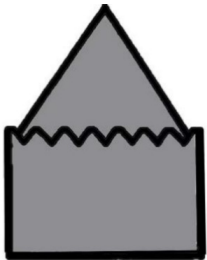
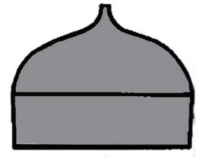

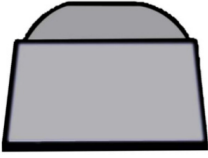
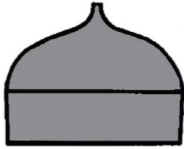
| Distribution and Form | Name | Site | Historical Period |
|---|--|--|--|
| 1. The Central Sogdiana (Western Samarkand) Rectangular ossuary with quadrilateral pyramidal lid  | 1-1. Mulla Kurgan ossuary (Samarkand, Zoroastrian ossuary in the 6 th –7 th century) | Samarkand (The Central Sogdiana, Mulla-kurgan, Near present-day Samarkand, Uzbekistan) | The 6 th –7 th century |
| | 1-2. Durman Tepe ossuary | Samarkand (The Central Sogdiana) Biya–Naiman, Durman Tepe (Suburbs of Samarkand, Uzbekistan) | The 7 th century to the early 8 th century |
| | 1-3. Alamedyn-Pishpek ossuary | Originally from Penjikent or Samarkand (one view), now located in Semirechye | From 40 BCE to 135 CE |
| Central Sogdiana (near Samarkand)  | 1-4. Ossuary from Sary–tepe, Uzbekistan | sary–tepe | Unknown |
| Box-shaped ceramic ossuaries of rectangular form  | 1-5. Biya-Nayman Ossuary | The Samarkand (central Sogdiana) Biya-Nayman (near Samarkand, Uzbekistan), | Around the 7 th century |
| Fragments near Samarkand | 1-6. Relief applied on a Samarkand terracotta ossuary | Samarkand | Around the 6 th century |
| | 1-7. Applied heads on ossuary fragments from Afrasiyab | Samarkand (The Central Sogdiana) Afrasiyab | Unknown |
| | 1-8. Winged female relief 翹勝女性浮雕 | Unknown | Unknown |
| | 1-9. Guards at the gates, ossuary from Afrasiyab | Samarkand (The Central Sogdiana) Afrasiyab Accidentally discovered in Kattasai reservoir in Farghana area | Unknown |
| | 1-10. Ossuary fragment from Afrasiyab | Samarkand (The Central Sogdiana) Tashkent Museum | The 6 th –7 th century |

Table 3. Cont.

| Distribution and Form | Name | Site | Historical Period |
|--|--|---|---|
| | 1-11. One Ossuary Fragments from Afrasiab | Afrasiab | At the end of the 7th century (Lamb) |
| | 1-12. Another Ossuary Fragments from Afrasiab | Afrasiab | The 6th–7th century (sun man) |
| | 1-13. ossuary fragments from Afrasiyab (a male’s head portraits) | Afrasiyab | Unknown |
| 2. Southern Sogdiana Kashka Darya Oasis Rectangular ossuary with vaulted lid | 2-1. Ossuaries from Aq-kurgan | South of Samarkand, Kashka Darya Oasis (The Southern Sogdiana) Aq-kurgan | Around the 7th century |
|  | 2-2. Ossuary from the Yakkabagh region | Yakkabagh region, Kashka Darya Oasis (The Southern Sogdiana) Uzbekistan | Around the 7th century |
| | 2-3. Yumalakatepa ossuaries from Shahr-i Sabz | rectangular boxes ossuary with vaulted lids | C.7th century CE |
| 3. Northern Sogdiana Oval ossuary with a conical lid | 3-1. Ossuary from the Krasnorechensk necropolis | The Northern Sogdiana (Chach and Semirechye) In Krasnorechensk (the medieval city of Nevakat) | Unknown |
|  | 3-2. Oval yurt-shaped ossuary | Samarkand | Unknown |
| Herringbone-patterned statue ossuary | 3-3. Koi-Krylgan-qal’a and Kalali-gir | Koykrilgankala Kamkalkpakstan Uz bekistan | Unknown |
| Four-legged ossuary with an open mouth | 3-4. Kalaligir ossuary | North Khwarazm | In the 8th century |
| Four-legged house-shaped ossuary collected in the Archaeological Institute of Samargan, Uzbekistan | 3-5. Four-legged house-shaped ossuary | Unknown | Unknown |
| 4. Others | 4-1. Stamped ossuary from a necropolis at Krasnorechensk | necropolis | The 7th or first half of the 8th century |
| | 4-2. Front wall of an ossuary from Samarkand | Samarkand | The 6th–7th century |
| | 4-3. Woman with lute, ossuary fragment, Kanka | Kanka, the largest town in Tashkent in the early Middle Ages | Unknown |

3.3. *The Comparison of the Shape and Distribution of Sogdian Burial Utensils*

Sogdian burial utensils cover various types of shapes in different regions, and one type of shape can cover various types. This paper will compare different types of shapes.

3.3.1. *As the Most Popular Sogdian Burial Utensil in China, Stone Bed Mirrors the Transformation caused by Local Chinese Culture*

The number of remains intuitively shows that the stone bed became the most popular Sogdian burial utensil. From the current remains of burial utensils, the Sogdians did not use sarcophagi in Central Asia. After the Sogdians entered China, they started to use pictorial sarcophagi rather than ossuaries. This is a huge change and should attract attention. The popularity of the stone bed brings two questions: why was there this change in replacing ossuaries with sarcophagi? Why did they choose the stone bed, which was not popular in China?

For the first question, this paper believes that this related to changes in Sogdian burial customs. Chinese scholars believe that “Sogdian burial customs underwent three stages in China. In the first stage, the dead body was treated with religious customs. After cremation, the ashes and residual bones were placed in the ossuary (mainly unearthed in Xinjiang). In the second stage, the tomb was constructed to bury the dead body, which accorded with the customs of the Han people. The stone bed was enclosed with a screen to form a burial utensil. Examples include: the Tomb of An Jia, where bones were laid in the tomb after the dead body was buried according to religious customs; the Tomb of Kang Ye, where the dead body was directly placed on the folding-screen stone bed; the folding-screen stone-bed tomb discovered in Tianshui, the folding-screen stone bed collected in Miho Art Museum; and stone-screen tombs unearthed in French and American museums. A thorough analysis of these tomb materials can reveal the Sinicization of Sogdians. In the third stage, tombs were constructed in accordance with the customs of the Han people and the stone house was used as burial utensil (e.g., the Tomb of Shi Jun and the Tomb of Yu Hong).” (Xing 2006, p. 141; Xing 2008, p. 485). This paper agrees with the view.

For the second question, the fact that the Sogdians chose the pictorial sarcophagus, a burial utensil that was not popular in China, is very prominent. However, there are no direct archaeological materials and forms of literature to explain this. This paper proposes a factor that can be considered: ossuaries in Central Asia were made of stone and pottery and sarcophagi among Chinese burial utensils were made of similar materials, so the Sogdians chose the pictorial sarcophagus as the shape of their burial utensils. The similarity of materials is the reason about which we speculate, but a full explanation needs to be given by new archaeological results and literature. This becomes an interesting question.

3.3.2. *As the Main Burial Utensil of Sogdians, the Ossuary Embodies the Outstanding Local Style*

Firstly, made with complicated skills, the ossuary demonstrated Sogdian’s pursuit of craftsmanship.

Most ossuaries were made of ceramics, except a few made of alabaster in Khwarezmia. G. A. Pugachenkova holds the view that: “Ossuaries were usually made of fired clay, although in Khwarazm, they were also made of alabaster. Skilled potters were required to model and fire them, particularly since most were extensively decorated, using various techniques: for example, bands of clay modeled by hand and applied to the surface; ornaments and pictorial motifs incised with sharp tools; stamped festoons and rosettes. Some hand-modeled images were shaped on the flat surface of the separate bands, while others were sculpted in the round on the crown of the lids. Finally, impressions from matrices, ranging from small heads to complete thematic scenes, were common.” (Pugachenkova 1994, pp. 227–43).

“In different cultural regions, the shapes of the ossuaries show distinctive local features. They are primarily variants of box or oval shapes. While it has been suggested that they imitate the composition of actual architectural structures, this is only partially true,

for they are not accurate models of buildings but only approximate reproductions of their design and details." (Pugachenkova 1994, pp. 227–43).

Secondly, there are traces of mass production, reflecting the merchants' pursuit of efficiency.

Currently, "more than 300 ossuaries (bone containers) are known from the neighboring areas of Sogdiana, Chorasmia and Chach and their different shapes and decorations vary from region to region." (The Sogdians: Influencers on the Silk Roads online exhibition n.d.) "The consistency of ceramic mass, form, manufacturing technique and decoration of ossuaries found in each of the known Sogdian cemeteries shows that in most cases ossuaries were produced locally. This fact leads to an important conclusion. We know that the majority of Sogdian potters were oriented toward the needs of settlements of a rather modest size. With the exception of the capital Samarkand and, possible, Bukhara, the known Sogdian cities had an area of between 10 and 25 hectares. Partial archaeological excavations and demographic extrapolations based on them have allowed scholars to suggest population figures between 3000 and 8000 for Sogdian cities of these sizes. Taking the average life expectancy in medieval society at 30 years, we may calculate that such a city needed 2 to 5 ossuaries per week, with the exception of such troubled times as when a town was devastated by an epidemic or warfare." (Naymark 2003).

The shape of the container and lid of the Sogdian cremation urn changed with time and space. A box-shaped room built into a strip with an arched lid made separately was a trend in Panjakent (Pavchinskaia 1994, pp. 209–25). A square ossuary with arched lid represents a unified style in Sogdiana, western Samarkand. (Naymark 2003).

3.3.3. Comparison of Images of Burial Utensils

Sarcophagus beds were popular in China, while ossuaries were popular in Central Asia. What impact does such popularity have on the images?

According to the relevant dimensions of the sarcophagus bed and the ossuary, the size of the burial utensils is very different, which also determines the size of the paintings. Therefore, the size of the burial utensils makes the burial utensils in China and Central Asia demonstrate different characteristics. Narrative in China, with its vast territorial area, is complex, while that in Central Asia's more limited area focuses on important content. Therefore, the regions formed their own narrative techniques.

The burial utensils in China are mainly stone beds and stone houses, which provide many images for paintings. Therefore, the themes are broad and complex plots such as the tomb owner's banquet, the story of filial piety and the ascension scene. For example, "The folding screen-styled sarcophagus bed was a popular burial utensil for the Sogdians in China. In addition to the front elevation of the bed and the decorative patterns of the legs of the bed, the folding screens on the three sides became the space for painting and thus more complex narrative images appeared, roughly centered on the tomb master's appearance on the back screen, with pommel horses, ox carts, food offerings, music and dance on the left and right" (Li 2021, p. 65). In addition, the brief report on the Discovery of Screen Sarcophagus Bed Tombs in Sui and Tang Dynasties in Tianshui City had a detailed introduction to the screen sarcophagus beds, saying, "The screen, bed base and bed board are composed of stone reliefs of 17-cubic-metre and 8-cubic-meter plain stone strips of different sizes. In particular, the screen is composed of 11-cubic-meter painted stone reliefs with an average height of 87 cm and a width of 30–46 cm. The left and right sides of the bed are 3 cubic meters and the front is 5 cubic meters. Each relief has a set of relatively independent picture contents, including hunting, banqueting, brewing, sacrifice, travel, boating, building bridges and culverts, pavilions, terraces, towers, mountains, rivers, the sun and the moon and figures, chariots and horses. The bed base is composed of 8-cubic-meter plain stone strips of varying lengths and with a height of 33 cm and 2-cubic-meter relief stone. The bed board is composed of four stone strips with a length ranging from 51.5–59 cm, a width of 115 cm and a thickness of 9 cm and the seams are connected with buckles with each other". (Jia 2021, pp. 70–73).

The burial utensils in Central Asia are mainly ossuaries, highlighting decoration and complex technological requirements. For instance, among the remains in central Sogdiana, “the northern group is typified by box-shaped ossuaries built up in applied strips and topped with a modeled vault and a lid cut from one side of the vault. The slip was rarely used. Almost all of the ossuaries are decorated on all four sides with incised, mainly vegetal designs such as simplified branches (the herringbone pattern), luxuriant bushes, twining stems and petaled rosettes.” (Pavchinskaia 1994, pp. 209–25).

“In the western group, box-shaped rectangular ossuaries with pyramidal lids sculpted separately are typical. Both ossuaries and lids were molded in separate slabs and here, too, the slip was not used. All four walls of the ossuaries and their lids are decorated with pictorial representations or designs stamped from a matrix (compositions combining arcades and human figures; palmettes)”. (Pavchinskaia 1994, pp. 209–25).

4. Comparison of Religious Images of Sogdian Burial Utensils

The Sogdian burial utensils are the carrier of religious images. After examining the number and shapes of the remains of Sogdian burial utensils, we made a targeted comparison of these religious images.

4.1. Religious Image Features of the Sogdian Burial Utensils in China

From the current archaeological findings, we compiled a “Religious Image Table of Sogdian Burial Utensils in China”, in which Zoroastrianism, Chinese mythology and Buddhism are the three kinds of religion reflected by the Sogdian burial utensils; these three religions have different belief systems, so we will analyze several related concepts before preparing the table.

Firstly, many Zoroastrian images were found in the images of Sogdian burial utensils (see Table 4). Among these images, we need to explain three concepts in Zoroastrian imagery. As these images appear on Chinese burial utensils, we mainly adopt the views of Chinese scholars. Firstly, are the Images of Seven Good Spirits. Shen Ruiwen, when analyzing the Tomb of Sartpau of Liangzhou Shi Jun in Xi’an, argues that: “A1 in Area A should be Ahura Mazda and A1 and a1~a6 represent seven gods, all of which are male images. Among the seven gods, A1 is obviously the center, while a2~a6 are subordinate. This composition reveals that these seven gods are the “seven gods” (namely, “Seven Good Spirits”) of Zoroastrianism. The so-called “seven gods” are the main creatures of Zoroaster, whose basic principle is the ancient creationism of the priests. According to Zoroaster, Ahura Mazda, with the help of the Holy Spirit (Spenta Mainyu), created six lower gods, namely the “Shining Gods” that Zoroaster first saw in his illusion. Together with Ahura Mazda, they were seven gods and engaged in seven creation activities, forming the world. Ahura Mazda was the father of the six gods created and these six gods gave birth to other good spirits, all of which were gods of ancient Iranian temples, such as Mithra, Apam Napat, Sraosha, Asci and Geus Urwan.” (Shen 2019b, pp. 179–81). The second is the God of War, Verethragna. After analyzing the “Tomb of Yu Hong in the Sui Dynasty, Taiyuan, Shanxi”, Shen Ruiwen believes that “the eighth, seventh, sixth and fourth stone relief of Yu Hong’s stone coffin was respectively carved with a stag, a goat, a sparrow hawk and a ram with curved cleats, which can be identified as the embodiment of the Zoroastrian God of War, Verethragna. In addition, the lower part of the fifth stone relief on the coffin wall is the embodiment of a warrior fighting with the lion or the God of War, Verethragna.” (Shen 2019b, pp. 179–81) The third is the picture of Zurvan drinking the alcohol. After analyzing the “Tomb of Yu Hong in the Sui Dynasty, Taiyuan, Shanxi”, Jiang Boqin holds a view that: “in the ninth image, the Zoroastrian god Zurvan, corresponding to the animal “goose”, sits on a chair and drinks alcohol under a horse chestnut and musicians play the Pipa music and waiters offer fruit for him, dogs sit down and auspicious birds fly high.” (Jiang 2004a, pp. 152–53).

Secondly, images of Chinese mythology were observed on some Sogdian burial utensils in China (see Table 4). These images include a four-deity pattern and 12 Chinese zodiac images. The four-deity pattern shows “the patterns of four images, namely, Azure

Dragon, White Tiger, Vermilion Bird and Black Tortoise, representing four directions of east, south, west and north.” (Editorial Committee of Cihai 1979, p. 760). The four-deity pattern appears on seven burial utensils: the Tomb of Shi Shewu, the Tomb of Shi Tiebang, the Tomb of Shi Suoyan and His Wife, the Tomb of An Yuanshou and His Wife, the Tomb of Shi Kedan and His Wife, the Tomb of Shi Suoyan and His Wife and the Stone House in the Northern Dynasties Collected in National Museum of China (Phoenix Pattern, black tortoise). The twelve Chinese zodiac image shows that “in ancient times, mathematicians used twelve animals to match the Twelve Earthly Branches, representing each year in turn in a 12-year circle. According to their order, the animals are the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog and boar.” (Editorial Committee of Cihai 1979, p. 115). The twelve Chinese zodiac images appear on four sarcophagi: the Tomb of An Pu and His Wife, the Tomb of He’s Family in the Tang Dynasty in Yinziliang, Yanchi, Ningxia, Tomb of Shi Tiebang and the Tomb of Shi Shewu.

Thirdly, Flying Apsaras and Heavenly Kings are seen on Sogdian burial utensils in China. There is an image of Flying Apsaras on the Tomb of An Jia in the Northern Zhou Dynasty in Xi’an and an image of Heavenly Kings on the Tomb of Zhai Caoming in the Northern Zhou Dynasty in Jingbian. As for these two images, we think they are Buddhist images (see Table 4). The concept of Flying Apsaras was first proposed by a Japanese scholar. In 1949, Nagahiro Toshio published the book entitled *The Art of Flying Apsaras*. Since then, the concept of Flying Apsaras has been well known by the academic community. Most Chinese scholars have used this concept, and the views put forward by scholars studying Dunhuang Grottoes have the greatest impact. Chang Shuhong thinks that “in India, Flying Apsaras is called as Gandharva in Sanskrit, also known as God of Fragrance. It is one of gods in Buddhist images.” (Chang and Chengxian 1980, pp. 8–11). Duan Wenjie also believes that “Flying Apsaras means two gods of the eight attendants of the Buddha in Buddhist art, namely, Gandharva and Kinnara in Buddhist sutras.” (Duan 1987, p. 1)

Zoroastrian images, Chinese mythological images and Buddhist images on Sogdian burial utensils in China represent a complex phenomenon of religious transmission. This paper puts forward this phenomenon and explains its current state with effective data, hoping to attract the attention of the academic community and make a preliminary analysis. As this is the first exploration of the distribution of three types of religious images, some views are from existing research results in order to avoid ambiguity. Based on this, we prepared the “Religious Images Table of Sogdian Burial Utensils in China” (Table 4).

Table 4. Religious Images Table of Sogdian Sarcophagi in China.

| Religious Type | Image Type | Image Name | Image Quantity | Image Source |
|---|---|-------------------------------|----------------|---|
| Zoroastrianism 38 (refers to the total number of all Zoroastrianism images in the Sogdian burial utensils in China) | Images of Deities 18 (refers to the total number of all zoroastrianism images of deities in the Sogdian burial utensils in China) | Ahura Mazda | 3 | 1-1. Tomb in the Northern Qi Dynasty, Anyang, Henan 1-2. Tomb of Sartpau of Liangzhou Shi Jun in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, Xi’an (Zhang 2010, pp. 185–89.) 1-3. Stone House in the Northern Dynasty, collected in National Museum of China |
| | | Tištrya | 1 | 1-4. Screen-styled Sarcophagus Bed Tomb in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, Tianshui, Gansu |
| | | Weshparkar the god of wind | 2 | 1-5. Tomb of Shi Jun, Sartpau of Liangzhou in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, Xi’an 1-6. Stone Heavy Bed in Guimet Museum, France (Shen 2019a, pp. 74–80) |

Table 4. Cont.

| Religious Type | Image Type | Image Name | Image Quantity | Image Source |
|----------------|--|---|----------------|---|
| | | Daena | 2 | 1-7. Tomb of Shi Jun, Sartpau of Liangzhou in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, Xi'an. (Shen 2019b, p. 75) 1-8. Tomb of An Jia in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, Xi'an |
| | | Mithras | 2 | 1-9. Tomb of Yu Hong in the Sui Dynasty, Taiyuan, Shanxi 1-10. Sarcophagus bed in Miho Museum |
| | | Goddess Nana | 1 | 1-11. Sarcophagus bed in Miho Museum |
| | | Seven Good Spirits (Ahura-Mazda and six Amesha Spentas) | 2 | 1-12. Tomb of Shi Jun, Sartpau of Liangzhou in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, Xi'an (The supreme god Ahura Mazda, surrounded by Zoroastrians including "Vohu Manah, Asha Vahishta, Spenta Armaiti, Khshathra Vairya, Haurvatat, Ameretat"). (Shen 2019b, pp. 177–81) 1-13. Tomb of Yu Hong in the Sui Dynasty, Taiyuan, Shanxi (Jiang 2004a, p. 141). The author thinks that four of the seven gods are Ameretat, Haurvatat, Khshathra Vairya and Spenta Armaiti) |
| | | The God of Warrior and the God of Water, Tistrya or Amu Darya | 1 | 1-14. Tomb of Yu Hong in the Sui Dynasty, Taiyuan, Shanxi (Shen 2019b, pp. 177–81) |
| | | God Zurvan drinking the alcohol | 1 | 1-15. Tomb of Yu Hong in the Sui Dynasty, Taiyuan, Shanxi. Jiang (2004a, pp. 152–53) believes that the eighth image is the God Zurvan drinking the alcohol, corresponding to the animal "goose") |
| | | Empty-saddle Horse: a sacrifice to the God of Rain Tir | 1 | 1-16. Sarcophagus bed in Miho Museum |
| | | Rooster (incarnation of Sraosha)—clearly indicated in archeological reports | 2 | 1-17. Tomb of Zhai Caoming in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, Jingjiang 1-18. Tomb of Shi Jun, Sartpau of Liangzhou in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, Xi'an (Shen 2019b, p. 74) |
| | Images of funerals 11 (refers to the total number of all funeral images in the Sogdian burial utensils in China) | 2. The Chinvat Bridge Trial | 2 | 2-1. Tomb of Shi Jun, Sartpau of Liangzhou in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, Xi'an 2-2. Sarcophagus bed in Miho Museum |
| | | Funeral mourning | 2 | 2-3. Sarcophagus bed in Miho Museum 2-4. Stone-chambered Tomb, Qingzhou, Shandong |

Table 4. Cont.

| Religious Type | Image Type | Image Name | Image Quantity | Image Source |
|---|--|--------------------------------|----------------|--|
| | | Heaven Scene | 2 | 2-5. Tomb of Yu Hong in the Sui Dynasty, Taiyuan, Shanxi The life scene and empty pommel horse of the male owner in another world 2-6. Tomb of Shi Jun, Sartpau of Liangzhou in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, Xi'an |
| | | Soul and Body | 2 | 2-7. Stone-chambered Tomb, Qingzhou, Shandong 2-8. Stone Heavy Bed collected in Guimet Museum, France |
| | | Gate Guard | 1 | 2-9. Stone House in the Northern Zhou Dynasty collected in the National Museum of China |
| | | Homo sacrifice | 2 | 2-10. Tomb of Yu Hong in the Sui Dynasty, Taiyuan, Shanxi 2-11. Stone House in the Northern Zhou Dynasty collected in the National Museum of China |
| | Images of Sacrifice 9(refers to the total number of all Sacrifice images in the Sogdian burial utensils in China) | 3. Sacred Fire and Priest | 9 | 3-1. Tomb in the Northern Qi Dynasty, Anyang, Henan 3-2. Tomb of An Pu and His Wife 3-3. Tomb of An Jia in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, Xi'an 3-4. Tomb of An Pu in the Sui Dynasty, Luoyang 3-5. Screen Sarcophagus Bed Tomb in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, Tianshui, Gansu 3-6. Tomb of Yu Hong in the Sui Dynasty, Taiyuan, Shanxi 3-7. Stone Heavy Bed collected in Guimet Museum, France 3-8. Stone House in the Northern Zhou Dynasty collected in the National Museum of China 3-9. Tomb of Shi Jun, Sartpau of Liangzhou in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, Xi'an (Shen Ruiwen) |
| Chinese mythology 11 (refers to the total number of all Chinese mythology images in the Sogdian burial utensils in China) | | 4. Four-deity pattern | 7 | 4-1. Tomb of Shi Shewu 4-2. Tomb of Shi Tiebang 4-3. Tomb of Shi Suoyan and His Wife 4-4. Tomb of An Yuanshou and His Wife 4-5. Tomb of Shi Kedan and His Wife 4-6. Tomb of Shi Suoyan and His Wife 4-7. Stone House Collected in the National Museum of China (Phoenix Pattern, black tortoise) |
| | | 5. Twelve Chinese Zodiac Image | 4 | 5-1. Tomb of An Pu and His Wife 5-2. He's Family Tomb in the Tang Dynasty, Yinziliang, Yanchi, Ningxia 5-3. Tomb of Shi Tiebang 5-4. Tomb of Shi Shewu |

Table 4. *Cont.*

| Religious Type | Image Type | Image Name | Image Quantity | Image Source |
|--|------------|-------------------|----------------|--|
| Buddhism 2 (refers to the total number of all Buddhism images in the Sogdian burial utensils in China) | | 6. Flying Apsaras | 1 | 6-1. Tomb of An Jia in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, Xi'an |
| | | 7. Heavenly Kings | 1 | 7-1. Tomb of Zhai Caoming in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, Jingbian |

From the information in the above table, we can make the following quantitative analyses:

4.1.1. Image Quantity Analysis

(a) The Sogdian burial utensils in China demonstrate a religious structure based on multiple religions. Among the Sogdian burial utensils in China, Zoroastrianism introduced from Central Asia, mythology introduced from China and Buddhism introduced from India all have images. This implies that, after entering China, the Sogdians still retained their original beliefs in their funeral activities and, at the same time, they absorbed the local religions in China. According to the data, there are 51 religious images among the images of the Sogdian burial utensils in China, including 38 Zoroastrian images, 11 Chinese mythology images and two Buddhist images. In this statistical data, the number of Zoroastrian images far exceeds that of Chinese mythological images and that of Buddhist images, which indicates that Zoroastrianism was still the most important religion of this nation after the Sogdians entered China.

(b) The Sogdian burial utensils in China demonstrate an image structure centered on the gods. Among the images of burial utensils, the number of images of gods is the largest. Among them, Zoroastrians have a large number of gods and many types, with 18 images in total, including three images of Ahura Mazda, one image of Tištrya, two images of God of Wind Weshparkar, two images of Daena, two images of Mithra, one image of Goddess Nana, one image of Seven Good Spirits (Ahura-Mazda and six Amesha Spentas), one image of God of War Verethraghna, one image of Zurvan Drinking the Alcohol and one image of Roosters, etc. Chinese mythological images include seven images of the four-deity pattern and four images of the Twelve Chinese Zodiac Images, and Buddhism has one image of Flying Apsaras and one image of Heavenly Kings. Images of gods are common in Zoroastrianism, Chinese mythology and Buddhism, therefore the images of burial utensils are centered around the gods and have formed a fixed image structure.

4.1.2. Narrative Image Analysis

(a) Zoroastrianism is the dominant source of narrative imagery in the Sogdian burial utensils in China and presents a large number of narrative images, while Chinese mythology and Buddhism lack narrative images, implying that Zoroastrianism was the narrative subject in Sogdian burial utensils. On the one hand, the religious images on the burial utensils describe the process of the tomb owners saying goodbye to the real world and entering another world after death, which is the main focus of the burial utensils. However, Chinese mythology and Buddhism were not involved, implying that Zoroastrians accepted the popular Chinese mythology and Buddhism in China, but such acceptance was limited. On the other hand, Chinese deity images and Buddhist images are also rare. Among the Sogdian tombs in China collected at this time, only 11 tombs have Chinese deity images and Buddhist images, that do not participate in the main narrative, but sometimes appear only as symbols. Most Sogdian tombs are still dominated by Zoroastrian images.

When discussing these Zoroastrian narrative images, we can consider both the localization and the influence of Sogdian images on Chinese tomb murals. Sogdian mural tombs are high-grade tombs. Zoroastrian gods appeared in large numbers and surpassed local gods, so many new images emerged, making important contributions to the development of Chinese tomb murals.

(b) There are many types of Zoroastrian narrative images in the Sogdian burial utensils in China, with numerous types, mainly including “images of funerals” and “images of sacrifice”. The images of funerals are the most complex, including six kinds of images: Chinvat Bridge Trial, funeral mourning, heaven scene, soul and body and gate guard, fully describing the funeral process of the Sogdians and implying that the Sogdians attached great importance to funeral activities and still kept their own funeral customs in foreign countries. The funeral is a religious act and has the attribute of a custom. Such customs were brought to China from Central Asia.

(c) Among the Sogdian burial utensils in China, the images of Chinese mythology and Buddhism are of more symbolic meaning. There are no narrative images of Chinese mythology and Buddhism in the Sogdian burial utensils in China, which indicates that, although the Sogdians noticed the local religions in China, they did not let these two religions participate in their funeral narrative. As there is no narrative content, the images of Chinese mythology and Buddhism appeared more as a religious symbol. For instance, the stone gates of the Tomb of Shi Suoyan and His Wife tomb are carved with a four-deity pattern. “The left and right gates share the same image composition and are divided into upper, middle and lower layers. The upper layer is painted with two vermilion birds. The vermilion bird on the left has a string of beads in its mouth, with open wings; the vermilion bird on the right has no object in its mouth and its forehead has a crown. The middle layer is painted with an azure dragon. The lower layer is painted with a monster with its mouth open to the sky and roaring, its sharp teeth exposed, its nose curled and its tail turned back. The background of the three layers is the same. The upper part is cirrus cloud and the lower part is mountains dotted with trees.” (Sun 2012, p. 81) The four-deity images on the stone gate are all described in detail, but they are only arranged in position, without description of plot, so form only a symbolic presentation.

4.2. Religious Image Characteristics of Sogdian Burial Utensils in Central Asia

From the current archaeological findings, prepared the “Table of Religious Images of the Sogdian Ossuaries in Central Asia”. In current archaeological results, the ossuaries in Central Asia only have Zoroastrian images. We first analyze the related concepts.

Firstly, we discuss the fragments of ossuaries. Many fragments of ossuaries were unearthed in the Central Plains. The images on these ossuaries were destroyed, which suggested that the research object had been lost. However it may have been of special significance for religious communication. The surface of the fragments is carved with different facial shapes of characters, which some scholars believe may represent the fragments of the dead soul. (Pugachenkova 1994, pp. 227–43).

“What is the significance of these heads? Perhaps they are mourners; or, they may be fra-vashis, souls of the deceased who, according to popular belief, fly to their native land during Fra-wardigan and for whom celebrants put out food and drink and lit lamps at night in order to drive away evil spirits. One of the fragments from Afrasiyab bears a relief bust of a winged female who is undoubtedly a fravashi”. (Pugachenkova 1994, pp. 227–43)

Secondly, we focus on the Sogdian images apart from those on ossuaries in Central Asia. In addition to ossuaries, other images have also been excavated. These images are not directly compared with the images on burial utensils, but can provide some useful background information.

Based on the relevant information, the images of the Sogdian gods in Central Asia mainly appear in some relics, palace murals, coins, metalwork, wooden friezes and terracotta statuettes. There are rich images of gods, such as the paintings at Penjikent found

in present-day Tajikistan. (Reference book: [Shenkar 2014](#), pp. 1–392). “The mural in paintings at Penjikent describes the hall with barn in the ancient city and is themed with harvest. The southern wall is painted with Enthroned divine couple and the northern wall is painted with “Nana on lion hell and heaven” and the “Grain God”, Nana on a marching lion, Chorasmian bowl from Bartym and the like.” ([Marschak 2016](#), pp. 36–40; [Shenkar 2014](#), pp. 116–28).

Based on this, we prepared the “Table of Religious Image Types of the Sogdian Ossuaries in Central Asia” (Table 5).

Table 5. Table of Religious Image Types for the Sogdian Ossuaries in Central Asia.

| Image Type | Image Name | Image Quantity | Image Source |
|-----------------------------|---|----------------|---|
| 1. Image of Deities 9 | God and goddess statue features (fragments) The reason for the large number is that there exist head portraits of gods and goddesses on the fragments (as for whether they are deities or not, they are said to be the incarnation of deities in some articles) | 5 | 1-1. Carved ossuary for male deities (ghost statue) 1-2. Carved ossuary for female deities (ghost statue) 1-3. Ossuary fragments from Afrasiyab (a male’s head portraits) 1-4. Ossuary fragment of a woman with lute 1-5. Applied heads on ossuary fragments from Afrasiyab Winged female relief fravashi guardian deity |
| | Goddess Nana | 1 | 1-6. Ossuary from the Yakkabagh region |
| | Six Immortals among the seven gods (three male and three female priests, patron saint of six immortal elements Amurdad, god of justice Ardavahisht, god of benevolence Vahman and god of guardian Hordad) Vahman, the god of animal world and moon, Ardavahisht, the god of fire, Shahrwvar, the god of sky, Amurdad, the god of plant, Hordad, the god of water and Spandarmad, the goddess of land | 1 | 1-7. Biya-Nayman Ossuary from the Ishtikhan |
| | Rashnu (Rashnu is the deity holding the scale to test the soul of the dead) | 1 | 1-8. Ossuary fragment from Afrasiyab |
| | Vohu Manah, one of six Amāša Spānta | 1 | 1-9. Yumalakatēpa ossuaries from Shahr-i Sabz |
| | Warrior God Verethraghna is incarnated as a Vareghna raven | 1 | 1-10. Four-legged house-style ossuary collected in Archeological Institute of Samarkand, Uzbekistan |
| 2. Images of funerals 11 | Soul image (Fragment) | 2 | 2-1. Ossuary from the Krasnorechensk necropoli 2-2. Yumalakatēpa ossuaries from Shahr-i Sabz |
| | Guard | 2 | 2-3. Guards at the gates, ossuary from Afrasiyab 2-4. Ossuary from the Krasnorechensk necropolis |
| | Heaven scene | 2 | 2-5. Yumalakatēpa ossuaries from Shahr-i Sabz 2-6. Mulla Kurgan ossuary |
| | The Chinvat Bridge Trial (no longer exists) (Frantz Grenet, Dawn of Samarkand 152) | 1 | 2-7. Ossuary fragment from Afrasiyab |
| | | | |

Table 5. Cont.

| Image Type | Image Name | Image Quantity | Image Source |
|-----------------------------|---|----------------|---|
| | Funeral mourning (Frantz Grenet, Dawn of Samarkand 152) | 1 | 2-8. Choresmia, Tok-kalakgir, ossuary |
| | Sacrifice offering | 1 | 2-9. Oval yurt, sary-tepe, Uzbekistan, now in Hermitage Museum, Russia |
| | Homo sacrifice | 2 | 2-10. Biya-Nayman Ossuary from the Ishtikhan 2-11. Yumalakatepa ossuaries from Shahr-i Sabz |
| 3. Images of Sacrifice 5 | Image of sacred fire and priest | 5 | 3-1 Mulla Kurgan ossuary 3-2. stamped ossuary from a necropolis at Krasnorechensk 3-3. Yumalakatepa ossuaries from Shar-i Sabz Sivaz 3-4. Relief applied on a Samarkand terracotta ossuary 3-5 Durman Tepe, ossuary |

From the statistical information in the above table, we can make the following analyses:

4.2.1. Spreading Characteristics of Sogdian Zoroastrianism and Quantitative Analysis of Zoroastrianism Images

(a) Spreading Characteristics of Zoroastrianism in Central Asia.

Zoroastrianism originated in Persia and then spread to Central Asia. Regarding the transmission characteristics of Zoroastrianism in Central Asia: “Zoroastrianism with a nature distinct from the Zoroastrianism practiced in Iran’s heartland. First, Sogdiana was located beyond the territory of the influence of the “orthodox” Zoroastrianism practiced in Iran proper (Central/Western Iran). This is particularly manifested in variations of Sogdian Zoroastrian practices developed around various local deities—distinctively lacking a chief deity such as Ahuramazda” (Barakatullo [Ashurov 2020](#), p. 2). With the frequent activities of Sassanid Persians in Eurasia, Zoroastrianism spread to Central Asia, in Sogdiana, Khwarezm, the Seven River Basin and other places, but with the spread of the religion to different cultural backgrounds, the original religion underwent a diversified change, different from the orthodox Zoroastrianism of Sassanian Persia. As polytheistic worship existed in the original Persian region, Sogdian Zoroastrianism retained the characteristics of the local ancient sacrifice, including the worship of ancestors and celestial bodies such as the sun and moon, embodying the characteristics of pluralistic worship. Among the ossuaries excavated in Central Asia, we found several images of gods, such as Nana Goddess, the Zoroastrian God of Wind, Weshparkar and the God of War, Verethragna. Nana Goddess is an image of a Zoroastrian god with characteristics of Central Asia and of a Mesopotamian deity adopted by Central Asian people. She was popular in the later religious art of Sogdiana. These images of gods also appeared in the murals of the 6th–8th centuries in the ancient city of Afrasiab in Samarkand and the ancient city of Panjikent in Central Asia. As Zoroastrianism in Central Asia sat at the intersection of the four major civilizations of China, India, Persia and Byzantium, there was a phenomenon of polytheistic worship in the interaction of different civilizations and religions.

(b) There are a few deity images on Sogdian burial utensils in Central Asia. Zoroastrianism in Central Asia has a complete system of gods and there are many gods, but most of them appear on other cultural relics, such as ruins, murals, coins, metalwork, wooden friezes and terracotta statuettes. There are only nine deity images on ossuaries in Central Asia, including Nana Goddess, Seven Gods, God of War and Rashnu, as well as five fragments of deity images. There are 11 funeral ceremony images on ossuaries, showing such subjects as the heaven scene, Chinvat bridge trial, funeral mourning, a guard image, image of the dead soul, Haoma sacrifice, sacred fire sacrifice, etc.

(c) The pottery materials affect our understanding of the deities in burial utensils in Central Asia. Most of the burial utensils in Central Asia were made of pottery, easy to be broken, thus there are many fragments in the archaeological findings. There are five deity statue fragments in the Table, obviously affecting our understanding of the deity images. The specific contents of the deity image fragments are not easy to distinguish, but the attributes of the deities are still clear, thus they are classified into the type of deity images.

4.2.2. Narrative Image Analysis

The ossuaries in Central Asia come from a small area, but the narrative images are wonderful. This benefited from the artists' choice of representative events to describe, as well as the choice of important contents. Specifically, the images of funeral scenes and sacrificial activities are prominent.

(a) Narrative Images of Funeral Scenes.

Among these images of funeral scenes, artists selected the heaven scene, the Chinvat bridge trial, funeral mourning, sacrifice and other representative events and described important stories in each event.

For example, the heaven scene is very beautiful. That on the Yumalakatepa ossuaries from Sivaz describes important plots of sacrifice and transcendence, the dead soul, the paradise of singing and dancing, etc. These plots visually depict the peaceful and happy life after the death of believers and their entry into heaven. Franz Gamet held a view that "it depicts a happy and peaceful scene in heaven: a god sitting on a small blanket in the upper left corner holds a small fire altar, surrounded by a group of musicians singing and dancing. The ossuary clearly regards the god of fire as the master of heaven. The ghost in the upper right corner is painted as a naked baby wrapped in cloth, floating in the air, and the god sitting is Vahman or Slesh holding a club hammer like a weapon, welcoming the ghost to heaven. In the middle of the lower part, there is a priest wearing a mask guarding the fire altar, accompanied by sacrificial animals, such as wild goats with long cleats and horses with a single cleat. The priest points to a square in front of him, which is similar to the square painted by the Parsis near the fireplace when making a fire during the celebration of the birth of the holy fire. The painting at the bottom once again shows the ritual of the priests' transcending souls by the fire altar and the animals to be sacrificed (two sheep and a horse with empty saddle) stand on both sides." (Gamet 2008, pp. 104–105)

For another example, the Chinvat bridge trial in the funeral ceremony depicts the scene: "According to the teachings of Zoroaster, the soul that has flown from the body must stand trial for the deeds that one performed in one's lifetime. The court is headed by Mithra, accompanied by Sraosha (the deity of obedience) and Rashnu, who holds the scales of justice that weigh the deeds that determine whether the soul is worthy of being called to paradise. This scene is depicted on a relief of one of the Afrasiyab ossuaries. A seated deity wearing a three-peaked crown and holding scales is obviously Rashnu. Another figure, who wears a crown and holds an object like a javelin, is apparently Sraosha. The right section of the ossuary, which has not been preserved, may have borne a depiction of Mithra and the soul of the deceased. This fragment is one of the few with images that appear to be directly related to scenes of life beyond the grave as it is conceived in Zoroastrianism." (Pugachenkova 1994, p. 238). These are remains of an ossuary that are important, with not only a complex plot, but comparable also with Chinese burial utensils.

The image of the Chinvat bridge trial is an important piece of narrative content in the Zoroastrian funeral ceremony image, which can be seen on the Sogdian burial utensils in China and Central Asia. The narrative perspective of these remains is centered on the trial gods, representing Sraosha (the God of Obedience) and Rashnu. The image of the Chinvat bridge trial on Chinese burial utensils is centered on the tomb owner, mainly representing the bridge and the tomb owner. The image of the Chinvat bridge trial in Central Asia features gods, while in China it features tomb owners. These complex contents are expressed through important narratives.

There is also the narrative of mourning. “The gypsum ossuary found at Tok-Kala site of Khwarezm in the middle of the 8th century is now collected in the Ermitage Art Museum in Russia, with a size of 49 × 55 × 31 cm.” (Gamet 2002, p. 92) This was a “painted ossuary depicting a stylized fire in a holder in the lower register. Above the fire is the deceased dressed in white garments, all appearing to indicate a Zoroastrian funeral. The upper register depicts scenes of grief, with mourners tearing their hair. The motifs of the sun, moon and winged symbol crown the ossuary. Choresmia, Tok-kala, necropolis dating from the time of the Arab conquest, mid-8th century”. (Gamet 2002, p. 92) There are such descriptions on murals in the ground palace. In the Panjikent Ancient City site of ancient Sogdians in Tajikistan, there is a large mural *Mourning Image* on the southern wall of the main hall of No. 2 Site. In this scene, Nana Goddess, six Sogdians and five Turks cry in front of the dead and several of them perform the ceremony of “cutting ears and scraping the face with a knife” at the ceremony site. When compared with the palace murals, the image narration of the ossuary is no less complicated.

After analyzing the funeral ceremony images, we can also make conclusions about the narrative characteristics of the ossuary images in Central Asia: first, about representative events and, second, important plots.

(b) Narrative Images of Sacrificial Activities.

In the Sogdian burial utensils in Central Asia, the themes of sacrificial activities were concentrated and the priests demonstrated the attributes of deities. Among the Sogdian burial utensils in Central Asia, the theme of sacrificial activities is “the sacred fire and the priest”, which appeared on five items, in a relatively large number, implying that sacrificial activities were very important. First, priests could replace deities. The priest was not a deity, but he presided over the sacrificial activities; or only his images appeared in the sacrificial activities, implying that he could ensure that the sacrificial activities were carried out normally in the absence of the deities. Such images appeared many times, indicating the Sogdians recognized the practice of priests replacing deities. Second, the sacred fire enabled the priest to have divinity. The Sogdians worshiped the sacred fire and the priests were with the sacred fire, implying that the priests had a certain divinity. Third, the sacred fire and the priest became burial customs. The image of “sacred fire and priest” appeared more frequently in Central Asia, totaling five times; it also seemed to appear many times in China, totaling nine times, implying that the sacrificial activities led by the priests had become a burial custom and spread in China and Central Asia.

(c) Comparison between Narrative Images of Funeral Scenes and Narrative Images of Sacrificial Activities.

Funeral scenes and sacrificial activities are both common religious activities, but their narrative images are different. The funeral scene is the last stop before the tomb owner enters another world, so the narration is very concentrated. All the contents are closely related to the tomb owner’s life and death and it is impossible to add other contents. At the same time, due to such limitations, the narrative images are described very carefully with clear details. However, sacrificial activities are not restricted to the transformation of life and death and they have evolved into secular activities with folk customs after links with the real world. This has not changed the nature of the religious activities, but the image contents have been added to greatly.

4.3. Overall Comparison of Religious Images in the Sogdian Burial Utensils

After understanding the specific characteristics of the Sogdian burial utensils in China and Central Asia, we made an overall comparison. First, we made a table of shared religious images in both regions to understand the consistency. Second, we collated some special phenomena to fully understand the important characteristics of the Sogdian religious images in China and Central Asia.

4.3.1. The Consistency of Sogdian Burial Utensils in China and Central Asia

In the comparison between the Sogdian burial utensils in China and Central Asia, we were most concerned about the existence of the same images. We used images of deities, funerals and sacrifices as indicators to organize the archaeological findings. Based on the information provided by the archaeological materials, we made the following table (Table 6).

Table 6. Common Religious Images of the Burial Utensils in China and Central Asia.

| Image Type | Image Name | Source of the Images in China | Source of the Images in Central Asia | |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Image of Deities 3 | Seven Good Spirits (Ahura-Mazda and six Amesha Spentas) | 1-1. Four immortals (two male and two female deities of heaven) in the Tomb of Yu Hong in the Sui Dynasty, Taiyuan, Shanxi | 1-1. Biya-Nayman Ossuary from the Ishtikhan "Six Immortals" Amurdad, god of justice Ardavahisht, god of benevolence Vahman, god of guardian Hordad 1-2. Yumalakatepa ossuaries from Shahr-i Sabz | |
| | | Ameretat, goddess of longevity and patron saint of plants; Hauvatat, goddess of health; Khshathra Vairya, patron saint of the sky; Spenta Armaiti, patron saint of the earth | | 2 |
| | | 1-2. The tomb of Sartpau Shi Jun (seven good spirits) in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, Xi'an, the Wise Lord Ahura Mazda, surrounded by Zoroastrians including Vohu Manah, Asha Vahishta, Spenta Armaiti, Khshathra Vairya, Haurvatat, Ameretat | | |
| | | | | |
| | Goddess Nana | 1-3. Sarcophagus bed collected in Miho Art Museum | 1-3. Ossuary from near Shakhrisabz Yakkabag Kirmantepa | |
| | God of war Verethraghna | 1-4. Tomb of Yu Hong in the Sui Dynasty in Taiyuan, Shanxi | 1-4. Four-legged house-style ossuary collected in Archeological Institute of Samarkand, Uzbekistan | |
| 2. Funerals 6 | The Chinwat Bridge Trial | 2-1. The tomb of Sartpau of Liangzhou Shi Jun in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, Xi'an | 2-1. Ossuary fragment from Afrasiyab | |
| | | 2-2. Sarcophagus bed of Mithra collected in Miho Art Museum | | |
| | Heaven Scene | 2-3. Tomb of Yu Hong in the Sui Dynasty in Taiyuan, Shanxi 2-4. Tomb of Sartpau of Liangzhou Shi Jun in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, Xi'an | 2-2. Yumalakatepa ossuaries from Shahr-i Sabz | |
| | Soul and Body | 2-5. Stone-chambered Tomb in Qingzhou, Shandong Province 2-6. Stone Heavy Bed Collected in Guimet Museum, France | 2-3. Applied heads on ossuary fragments from Afrasiyab 2-4. Ossuary from the Krasnorechensk necropoli 2-5. Yumalakatepa ossuaries from Shahr-i Sabz | |
| | Funeral Mourning | 2-7. Sarcophagus bed in Miho Art Museum 2-8. Tomb with Stone House in Qingzhou, Shandong Province | 2-6. Choresmia, Tok-kalakgir, ossuary | |

Table 6. *Cont.*

| Image Type | Image Name | Source of the Images in China | Source of the Images in Central Asia |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|---|--|
| | Gate Guard | 2-9. The Stone House in the Northern Dynasty in the National Museum of China | 1 2-7. Ossuary from the Krasnorechensk necropolis 2 |
| | Homo sacrifice | 2-10. Tomb of Yu Hong in the Sui Dynasty, Taiyuan, Shanxi 2-11. Stone House in the Northern Zhou Dynasty collected in the National Museum of China | 2 2-8. Biya-Nayman Ossuary from the Ishtikhan 2 2-9. Yumalakatepa ossuaries from Shahr-i Sabz |
| 3. Sacrifices 1 | Priests Guard the Sacred Fire | Image of Sacred Fire Sacrifice 3-1. Tomb in the Northern Qi Dynasty in Anyang, Henan Province 3-2. Tomb of An Pu and His Wife 3-3. Tomb of An Jia in the Northern Zhou Dynasty in Xi'an 3-4. Sarcophagus Bed Tomb of An Pu in the Sui Dynasty in Luoyang 3-5. Screen-styled Sarcophagus Bed Tomb in the Sui and Tang Dynasties in Tianshui, Gansu Province 3-6. Tomb of Yu Hong in the Sui Dynasty in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province 3-7. The Stone Heavy Bed in Guimet Museum, France 3-8. The Stone House in the Northern Dynasty in the National Museum of China 3-9. Tomb of Sartpau of Liangzhou Shijun in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, Xi'an | 3-1. Mulla Kurgan ossuary 3-2. Stamped ossuary from a necropolis at Krasnorechensk 3-3. Yumalakatepa ossuaries from Shar-i Sabz 5 3-4. Relief applied on a Samarkand terracotta ossuary 3-5. Durman Tepe ossuary |

According to the data in the table, we made the following analyses:

(a) Comparison and Analysis of Image Quantity

First, we performed a quantitative analysis of the images of deities.

Among the remains of the Sogdian burial utensils, there are some images of deities in China and Central Asia, which can be called common images; some appeared only in one place, which can be called unique images of deities. At present, there are 18 images of deities in the remains of burial utensils in China and nine images of deities in the remains of burial utensils in Central Asia, of which there are only three common images in both regions. In other words, 15 of the burial utensils in China are unique images of deities, accounting for about three quarters of the total; six of the burial utensils in Central Asian burial are unique images, accounting for about two-thirds of the total. The data imply that, in the Sogdian burial utensils, the unique images of deities respectively in China and Central Asia account for the majority, while the common images in both regions are few, implying that there are great differences in the presentation of deity images between China and Central Asia, that is, a lack of consistency between the two regions.

The common images of deities in China and Central Asia are the Seven Good Spirits (Ahura-Mazda and six Amesha Spentas), Nana Goddess and the God of War, all of which are supreme gods of Zoroastrianism. The appearance of the common images of deities indicates that their divine status is generally accepted and there is basically no change between the two regions. However, there are also some regional changes in the common images of deities. For example, only four of the Seven Good Spirits are painted on some burial utensils in China and six in Central Asia. This is a minor change and does not change the divine status.

Among these gods, Nana Goddess is special. She was the Mesopotamian god adopted by the people of Central Asia and she also appeared in China. These deities were involved in Sogdian Zoroastrianism, rather than the general Persian Zoroastrianism. “Nana is an example of the incredible longevity of divine images in the Iranian world. Originally a Mesopotamian/Elamite goddess, she was probably imported to Bactria in the Achaemenian period, gradually gaining unusual popularity with the local population. Eventually Nana became the head of the Kushan, Sogdian and probably also of the Chorasmian pantheon and was transformed into “The Great Goddess” of Eastern Iran.” (Shenkar 2014, pp. 116–28). At the same time, we have also found that “in late Sogdian religious art Nana surpasses all other divinities in popularity. She has been found at almost every place where Sogdian paintings have been uncovered, notably at Panjikent and Ustrushana, once again bringing to mind the “temple of Nani” in Samarkand from the Syriac version of the Alexander Romance. The visual representation of Nana became standardized and would have been easily recognized by all Sogdians. In late Sogdian art she is always depicted four-armed, seated on a prone or marching lion and holding personifications of the Sun and Moon. Nana was undoubtedly the most important divinity in the pan-Sogdian pantheon, although the veneration of Sogdian deities varied from one community to another. As the material from Panjikent clearly indicates, every family probably had its own patron god(s) or goddess(es).” (Shenkar 2014, pp. 124–25).

From the distribution of the remains, Nana Goddess has appeared on Sogdian burial utensils in China and Central Asia, indicating that these deity images in China are probably from Zoroastrianism in Central Asia, rather than directly from Zoroastrianism in Persia. The image of the Nana Goddess is widespread in Central Asia, including ossuaries, palace sites and temple relics, implying that Nana Goddess is an important god in Zoroastrianism in Central Asia. After the Sogdians entered China, they also brought this important god to the Sogdian burial utensils in China. This phenomenon also shows the close relationship between Zoroastrianism in China and Zoroastrianism in Central Asia.

It can be found from the table of common images that, among the unique deities in China, Ahura Mazda appeared three times and the God of Wind, Daena and Mithra appeared twice, implying that although there are new images of deities in the burial utensils in China, they still lack representativeness and the influence of deities cannot cover all burial utensils.

Among the unique deities in Central Asia, images of the deities appeared in the form of sculptures five times. As they are in the state of fragments, it is impossible to determine the specific deities, but this can reflect that the deities appeared more frequently. Are these deities universally representative? At present, there is no way to know. We need to wait for new archaeological findings.

In short, in the materials of the images of the deities in the two regions, the proportion of the images of the deities commonly appearing in both regions is very small, indicating that the images of the deities in the two regions lack consistency. In the materials of the unique images of the deities in the two regions, although there are many such images, each image of the deity only appears from one to two times, a scattered state in which the deities lack representativeness.

Second, Image Quantity Analysis of Funerals.

Among the remains of the Sogdian burial utensils, there are 11 funeral images in China and 11 in Central Asia. Among them, six funeral images commonly appear in the two regions, namely, the Chinvat Bridge Trial, the heaven scene, funeral process of the soul and body, and the gate guardian. Compared with the images of deities, the proportion of funeral images commonly appearing in the two regions is very high, almost 60%, implying that the images of the funerals of the Sogdian burial utensils may have more powerful communicative power than the images of the deities. Explicitly, the consistency between the two regions in the funerals is relatively high.

There is a special case in the funeral image, that is, the number of images of the “Chinvat Bridge Trial”. This image appears twice in the burial utensils in China, but only once

in the burial utensils in Central Asia. This may be related to the appearance of the tomb owner. In the burial utensils in Central Asia, the tomb owner was missing, whereas there was an image of the tomb owner in the burial utensils in China. For instance, the Shi Jun's family passed through the Chinvat Bridge and in the image "one end of the Chinvat Bridge is connected with the Mount Hara and the other end with the heaven. Mount Hara is the central peak of the universe in Persian mythology, directly below the North Star. Under this mountain, it is connected with the underground Castle Kuci, which is described by the myths of ancient Persia and Mesopotamia with the feature of 'gate of death'. The water at the bottom of the image may be the sea of hell." (Shen 2019b, p. 199) In the image of the Chinvat Bridge Trial in China, the bridge, as a symbolic image, is usually integrated into the realistic natural scenery or courtyard scenes, showing the picture of the tomb owner crossing the bridge and successfully passing the trial. The scene around the picture is a rich, generally natural scene or a picture of family mourning with strong features of secularity. The image of Chinvat Bridge Trial in Central Asia focuses on the trial scene of the gods. Rushnu plays with the balance, which is a metaphor for judging the lives of the dead. Therefore, they have different focuses. The image of the Chinvat Bridge Trial in China revolves around the tomb owner and is secular, while that in Central Asia revolves around the images of gods and is highly sacred.

Third, Quantitative Analysis of Sacrificial Images.

Among the remains of the Sogdian burial utensils, the images of sacrifices in China and Central Asia are the sacred fire and the priest. There are nine such images in China and five in Central Asia, a large number, and their contents are basically the same, implying that the Sogdians in China and Central Asia attached great importance to the sacrifices. Compared with the images of deities and funerals, the stability of the images of sacrifices is the best, that is, the consistency of the images of sacrifices is the highest. From the remains, the images of the sacred fire and the priests play an important role in Central Asia and China because of the Zoroastrian faith. Zoroastrianism was founded in Persia in the 6th century, taking the ancient scripture Aveste as the classic. In the sacrificial ceremony of Zoroastrianism, a sacred fire is set off on the outdoor altar to communicate with the God through its worship. From the perspective of belief characteristics, Zoroastrianism's doctrine is a unique dualism of good and evil, which believes that there are two absolutely opposite forces in the universe, namely, good gods and evil demons. The highest good god is Ahura Mazda and the highest evil god is Angra Mainyu, also known as Ahriman. After a long battle, Ahura Mazda finally won and created the material world, as well as the fire of "infinite light". Therefore, Zoroastrianism regards fire worship as its sacred duty. The large number of sacred fire and sacrificial images on Sogdian burial utensils in Central Asia and China shows that the Sogdians attach great importance to sacrificial activities and also shows the importance of sacred fire and sacrificial images in spreading doctrines. Zoroastrianism was once known as Mazdaism (fire-worship) in ancient China.

To sum up, from the statistical data, among the common images in China and Central Asia, there are three images of deities, six images of funerals and one image of sacrifice, indicating that the consistency of religious images in the two regions was not high. Specifically, the consistency of sacrificial images was the highest, that of funeral images was relatively low and that of deity images was the lowest. The images of deities in the two regions were not sufficiently representative, appearing at most two times, and most of which only appear once or twice. The lack of representativeness of the images of deities of Sogdiana left more room for the development of the religious images of the burial utensils in China. Even Ahura Mazda, the deity that appeared most in China, was not found in the Sogdian burial utensils in Central Asia; instead, it appeared more often in murals and temple sites in Central Asia and it did not appear directly on the ossuaries we have collected.

4.3.2. Comparison of Some Special Phenomena of the Sogdian Burial Utensils

After sorting out the specific data, we analyzed some special phenomena in Sogdian burial utensils in China and Central Asia.

First, there are not many gods shared by the two lands represented in the Sogdian burial utensils.

The central image of burial utensils is the image of deities, which should be paid special attention. From the archaeological findings of burial utensils in China and Central Asia, the number of deity images is not small, but there are not many deity images in common. There are 27 Zoroastrianism images of deities in the Sogdian burial utensils in China and Central Asia. Among them, there are 18 in China and 9 in Central Asia, reaching a certain scale in terms of quantity. However, a very prominent problem is that there are not many deity images in common. On the one hand, there are very few common deities in the burial utensils of the two regions. According to the images, there are only three common deities, indicating that most deities did not appear in the two regions at the same time. This phenomenon is very prominent, implying that the representation of the deities of Sogdiana is obviously insufficient. On the other hand, the number of deities appearing in the burial utensils of the two regions is very small. Among the burial utensils in China, Ahura Mazda appeared three times and the rest appeared once or twice. The number of deity images appearing in both regions is so low that the coverage is obviously not adequate.

Therefore, the images of deities in Sogdian burial utensils can reflect three features of Zoroastrianism. First, there are two image systems in China and Central Asia. Although the Sogdian burial utensils in China were formed under the influence of the Sogdian burial utensils in Central Asia, there are not many common deity images on burial utensils in China and in Central Asia and the different deities are far more in number than the same deities, reflecting the two different image systems. Second, the insufficient representation of deities promotes the localization of Chinese images. The lack of representativeness of the deities on the burial utensils inevitably affects the influential power of these deities, promoting the localization of Zoroastrianism after entering China. Third, the deity images on Chinese burial utensils show selectivity regarding the Sogdians. There are many gods in Chinese mythology and Buddhism, but their images are rare on Sogdian burial utensils in China. For example, Chinese mythology images only include the four-deity pattern and twelve Chinese zodiac image, representing a choice. Such a choice has many possibilities, but it can reflect the influence of belief propagation by images.

Second, the image of the tomb owner is prominent in the Sogdian burial utensils in China.

According to the current archaeological findings of Sogdian burial utensils, the Chinese divinities make a prominent secular performance, while the Central Asian deities emphasize sacredness. The most prominent presentation is the image of the tomb owner in the burial utensils in China. The owner of the tomb is a subject closely related to real life and it is bound to demonstrate the characteristics of secularization. Specifically, we have the following analyses.

On the one hand, in the burial utensils in China, the images of tomb owners frequently appeared, bringing about a strong secular flavor. The image of the owner of the tomb is missing on the Sogdian burial utensils in Central Asia and the image of the burial utensils is completely sacred. Because of the appearance of the tomb owner, secular images are inevitably brought into the burial utensils. Moreover, in the images of burial utensils, the tomb owner and the deities are described in parallel, indicating that the tomb owner and the deities have the same importance. For example, in the sarcophagus tomb of Yu Hong, the picture of the tomb owner and the deities feasting together is described and the tomb owner is in the center of the picture:

“There is also an image of deities feasting in the stone tomb of Yu Hong. Most of the figures except the tomb owner wear halos, indicating they are deities. The tomb owner Yu Hong and his wife drink in the hall. Around the two supreme gods, there stand four divine beings, who are four of the six immortals in the Zoroastrian Scripture, Avista; in the middle, there are musical instruments and dancers. The dancers are elegant in shape, like in a Sogdian whirl dance; at the bottom, there are two lions biting the rebels and two dogs running beside the lions. The image in the center of the house behind Yu Hong’s tomb

is the picture of the male and female owners of the tomb. On both sides of the picture are four of the six immortals. Amesha Spenta is the name of any of the six divine beings or archangels created by Ahura Mazda. The first on the left of the four gods is Goddess Ameretat, s aa plant.” (Jiang 2004b, pp. 295–98)

On the other hand, on the burial utensils in China, the life experience of the tomb owner is shown in detail. There is a tradition of describing the life of the tomb owner in Chinese burial activities. For example, the mural tomb of Horing in the Han Dynasty has more than 250 announcement topics, of about 700 words, which specifically describe the life of the tomb owner. This tomb has three chambers: the front, the middle and the rear. In the front chamber and the middle chamber, all images show the promotion process and official life of the deceased. According to the murals and announcement topics, the deceased was a “holder of second-degree scholarly title” when he was alive. He was once awarded as a “Lang” (an ancient official title) official. He had served as “Changshi in Xihe Prefecture”, “Duwei of Xingshang Prefecture”, “Fanyang County Magistrate” and “Shichijie Field Officer Protecting Wuhuan”. Various scenes, such as the travel scene by carriages and horses, the feudal official, the granary, the places he passed, banquets and awards, are painted on the images, fully reflecting official life at that time.

Sogdian burial utensils in China are also obviously influenced by Chinese traditional culture. The owners of the Sogdian tombs in China had rich life experiences, either in business or in politics. Such experiences were often well described on the burial utensils, but not found on the Sogdian burial utensils. For instance, the image of the stone House on Shi Jun’s tomb is described as follows:

“The relief images on the western, northern and eastern walls describe the different scenes of the tomb owner ranging from birth, growth, hunting, serving as a Sartpau, attending meetings to form alliances, conducting trade and entertaining banquets, up to rising to the heaven after the trial of deities upon his death, representing the major events in different periods of his life.” (Yang 2004, p. 202)

In the above materials, the tomb owners are described in detail. This implies that the image of the tomb owner has become an important part of the Sogdian burial utensils. Therefore, we see that, from the perspective of the special features of Sogdian burial utensils, it is undoubtedly the most special phenomenon that the tomb owners enter the scene. The tomb owners not only brought a secularized atmosphere, but also have a relatively large expression in the images of burial utensils. Such expression made the tomb owners obtain a high status. This change was due to localization after entering China, demonstrating that Chinese religious culture had significant influences on the images of Sogdian burial utensils and inevitably leading to two image systems of burial utensils. The images of deities in China have the expression of animalization, while those in Central Asia have anthropomorphic representation and there were several ossuaries carved with the images of deities in the early phase.

5. Conclusions

We hold that it is necessary to compare the burial utensils in China with those in Central Asia. First, from the perspective of religious communication, burial utensils are an important carrier. Moreover, the archaeological findings of Sogdian burial utensils are mainly distributed in China and Central Asia. Burial utensils can describe the distribution characteristics of the Sogdian religion. Second, from the perspective of burial utensils, those in China are mainly sarcophagi while those in Central Asia are mainly ossuaries and they are greatly different in shape. The comparison of burial utensils can explain the regional characteristics of the spread of Sogdian religion. Third, from the perspective of archaeological findings, the number of burial utensils is relatively large. There are 30 sarcophagi in China and 23 well-preserved ossuaries with relatively clear images in Central Asia, which are sufficient to support the comparison of burial utensils. Therefore, the comparison between Chinese burial utensils and those in Central Asia has significant academic value.

We choose religious images for comparison based on the following considerations. First, there is a lack of written data, but image materials are abundant. There are very few written records of Sogdiana, with almost no systematic materials and the written materials about burial utensils are also quite limited; accordingly, it is impossible to conduct a comprehensive study, but the remains of burial utensils can provide rich image materials. Second, image materials have systematic characteristics, forming different forms of communication and representing different ways of existence. The sarcophagi in China are large in size and have big carrier space; the ossuaries in Central Asia are small in size and have small carrier space. The carrier area and modes of existence of the two places are obviously different, which inevitably affect artistic expression. Third, different religious systems bring different artistic features. The images of burial utensils in Central Asia focus on Zoroastrianism and religious themes, while that in China include local religious contents and secular life outside Zoroastrianism.

In the history of human civilization, the question of life and death has always been an important issue. As a result, people have formed a belief in rebirth in another world and created images describing this belief. This belief in rebirth is widespread all over the world. What are the similarities and differences between different regions? This is a fascinating topic. Images on Sogdian burial utensils, albeit in a small quantity, are distributed in Central Asia and China, providing conditions for comparison between the two regions. Our pioneering comparison on the images of Sogdian burial utensils earnestly expects the further attention of the academic community.

Author Contributions: Investigation, J.H.; resources, X.W.; data curation, J.H.; writing—original draft preparation, X.W. and J.H.; writing—review and editing, J.H. and X.W.; project administration, X.W.; funding acquisition, X.W.; All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by Major Project of the National Social Science Foundation of China, “Multi-volume History of Chinese Religious Art”, (Grant No. 17ZDA237).

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to thank Xiaohuai Zhao of the University of Sydney, Qian Wang of Yangzhou University, and Shixiao Wang of Nanjing University for their generous help.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ The name of Sogdian burial utensil in China are mainly sarcophagi, (typically 石床 (Shi Chuang) stone bed, 石堂 (Shi Tang) stone house and 石槨 (Shi Guo) outer coffin). Shing Müller in the paper *Funerary Beds and Houses of the Northern Dynasties, Early Medieval and North China: Archaeological and Textual Evidence*. (Müller 2019, pp. 383–474) mentioned “stone house” and “stone bed”. Chinese scholars Rong Xinjiang, Luo Feng et al. “*The Sogdians in China: New Evidence of Archaeological Discoveries and Unearthed Documents*” (Rong and Luo 2016, p. 290) mentioned that “there are roughly two types of stone burial utensils. One is the outer coffin or the so-called “stone house”, which is composed of a decorative base on the front, four walls with reliefs or paintings on the inside or outside, and the top of the slope. The stone burial utensils found in the tombs of Shi Jun and Yu Hong belong to this category. The other one is the stone bed, which has a rectangular platform and three sides are surrounded by a screen with reliefs. The stone burial utensils unearthed from the tombs of Kangye and Anjia and Tianshui Sarcophagus in the Northern Zhou Dynasty belong to this category. The screen stone bed in the tomb of Kangye is composed of screen, couch board and couch leg.” Based on the literatures of Chinese and Western scholars, this paper mentioned such terms as sarcophagus, stone house, stone bed, and outer coffin, etc.
- ² Table 3 demonstrates the “The Historical Period and Shape of Sogdian Ossuaries in Central Asia. According to the paper *Sogdian Ossuaries* by L. V. Pavchinskaja (1994, pp. 209–25) and paper *The Form and Style of Sogdian Ossuaries* by G. A. Pugachenkova (1994, pp. 227–43), Table 3 combines the classifications of the two articles on the style and shape of the ossuaries, geographical distribution of the the ossuaries. images in Table 3 are Adapted and drawn from G. A. Pugachenkova’s article in *The Form and Style of Sogdian Ossuaries*, p. 228.

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