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Gucci for Grandma's Ghost:

Tracing Recent Changes in Ancestral Offering Practices in China through a Comparative Study of Tang Dynasty Grave Goods and Contemporary Paper Offerings

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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by

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1. Introduction

> Gleaming gold watches and smartphones are piled high in a ramshackle Chinese farmhouse – all replicas made of paper and designed to be incinerated, as 21st-century consumerism transforms the age-old market in offerings to ancestors. (Hancock 2015)

Every year around the time of the Qingming festival, traditionally a day for people of Chinese descent to pay their respects and make offerings to the dead, statements like the one above flood media outlets. The elaborate paper effigies of worldly goods burnt to be sent to the afterlife where they can be used by the ancestors are under fire for allegedly deviating from tradition. In the focus of the allegations are paper replicas of luxury and brand items like those of the widely reported on *Gucci* handbags, which are portrayed as the result of infiltrating consumerism and on-setting commodification (see Ap 2013; Hancock 2015; Rayner 2016). Substantiated by hard evidence are these media claims however not and excavations of large quantities of often sumptuous burial goods from dynastic tombs in China, which serve the same purpose as to be used by the dead in the hereafter, raise further questions about the validity of the statements. Does the usage of paper simulations of modern luxuries really constitute a break with long-standing ancestral offering traditions? This thesis is set out to find answers to precisely this question and to once and for all clarify whether there is truth to the media-spread claim that consumerism and commodification have transformed the age-old tradition of providing for the dead.

The offering paper custom has already received a fair share of attention in the scholarly field. From the first academic descriptions of Western sinologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century like those of De Groot (1969, orig. pub. 1892) to research works of local scholars like Hou (1975), to the more recent interpretative and theorizing essays on the subject matter by anthropologist like Seaman (1982) and Gates (1987), plenty of highly valuable materials on the practice have been published throughout the years. Yet, did my study of the currently existing literature on the paper burning practice not allow me to pass judgement on whether the above outlined media claims hold true or not. The reason is that the focus of these previous studies largely centers on the ritual in the context of the last 50 years, with only very few works going as far back as the last 120 years from when the first Western scholars started taking notice of the practice and even less taking into account the time before that. Considering the ancient origin of the custom, however, it appears presumptuous to judge whether significant deviations from prior traditions have occurred based solely on the evaluation of the past couple of decades. Arguably, fairly little is known about what the paper burn-

ing custom used to be like before scholars began documenting it, as paper offerings due to their inherently perishable nature and due to the fact that they are usually burned, leave little to no archeological traces to be evaluated. Based on the few written historical accounts, it is hard to draw a full picture of what the custom looked like across historical space. However, did the Chinese not always provide for their dead through burning paper effigies. The previously mentioned burial goods used to fulfill this purpose long before the invention of paper. Only in the mid-ninth century, so archeological and written historical sources suggest, were burial goods made from durable materials, which were interred with the dead in their tombs, replaced by goods made from perishable materials like paper, which came to be burned in ritual ceremonies (see chapter 2 for an in-depth thematization of this shift). Burial goods made from durable materials have unlike the paper effigies largely survived the centuries to the present day and have on top of that been exceptionally well studied, allowing a unique insight into past offering practices. This link between burial goods and paper offerings is oftentimes implied in scholarly works on the paper burning custom, like in the one written by Teygeler (1998: 228, 230) for instance, but as far as I am aware has not been extensively explored yet. I believe however, that investigating this connection is the key to answering the in this thesis proposed central research question. By taking into consideration the burial goods as direct predecessors to the present-day paper effigies instead of isolating the paper goods from this larger context, new sources of information and hence new perspectives on long-term developments arise that may allow to determine whether modern luxury goods as offerings constitute a break with tradition and are indeed reflective of the recently transformed nature of the custom or not. Re-connecting the contemporary paper offerings and ancient burial goods and putting them side by side in a comparative study is thus the methodology I chose for this thesis.

Before diving into this re-contextualization and comparison part, I will first in chapter two give a short account on the religious believes on which the paper burning custom, or rather the custom of providing for the dead in general, is founded. Understanding these spiritual foundations is essential for making sense of and interpreting later developments in the offering practice. In chapter three, I will then re-contextualize the paper burning practice and elucidate the connection between paper effigies and burial goods by outlining the historical developments of ancestral offerings, starting with the earliest known offerings in form of burial goods excavated from Neolithic tombs up to the present-day paper effigies. I will focus on discussing major milestones in the development process since going into detail about all the different trends there were throughout the millennia would not only go far beyond the con-

straints of this thesis but does also not seem necessary in order to identify deep-rooted and long-established conventions and patterns within the practice. Chapters four and five finally will be part of the comparative study that puts side to side offerings from two distinct periods of time, namely the contemporary period and the Tang dynasty. The reason I chose goods from the Tang dynasty to be assessed against the contemporary offerings is that the Tang period is the last era in Chinese history in which burial goods were still largely made from durable materials and not as towards the end of this period became and ever since has been fashion from perishable materials that decompose with time. In order to allow comparison, I have worked out and will present the ten most sold paper offerings from the Chinese e-commerce website *Taobaowang* in chapter three and the ten most frequently excavated burial goods from the Tang dynasty tombs of the Yanshi Xingyuan graveyard in China's Henan province in chapter four. For reasons that will be explained in detail in the respective chapters, I consider the findings from both these places highly representative of their respective time periods and thus suitable to given an impression about what generally characterizes offerings of both times. The two chapters will follow the same basic structure of four sub-chapters. They will be initiated by an introduction of the source from which the offerings to be analyzed stem, namely the online shopping website *Taobaowang* and the Yanshi Xingyuan graveyard, and a clarification on why I deem the goods coming from these sources representative for their respective periods, followed by an explanation of the methodologies used in order to compile the lists of the ten most common offerings, then the listings themselves, which include short descriptions and explanations for each item, and ending with an analysis of the list in regards to what characterizes the item selection. In chapter six, the information attained in the previous two chapters will be assessed against each other with the aim of locating differences and similarities between the offerings and seeing just how different present and past offerings really are. In the seventh and final chapter of the thesis, I will based on the throughout the thesis gathered information first outline what constitutes a traditional ancestral offering in the Chinese context and second provide commentary on whether modern luxury goods replicated in paper indeed essentially or significantly differ from these traditional offerings, through that confirming or refuting the by the media popularized claim that paper effigies of modern luxuries break with tradition.

2. Origins of Providing for the Dead: Ancestor Worship and the Folk-religious Afterlife

Burning paper offerings for the dead is a common practice in China today. It is aimed at circulating worldly goods, replicated in paper, to deceased family members and ancestors in the

afterlife to provend and avail them. Followers of all kinds of religious and philosophical backgrounds perform the ceremonial burning (Blake 2011: 1, 9–10, 15), something that may be explained through to China's "melting-pot" nature (Koch 1996). In different spiritual contexts, the custom is differently understood and interpreted. In the case of Buddhism for instance, where the idea of burning goods to be received by the dead in an eternal afterlife fundamentally contradicts the central Buddhist ideas of rebirth and nirvana, replicas of coins and bank notes are burned in order to help a recently deceased purchase a body for reincarnation and a favourable fate in the next life (Gates 1987: 267– 268). Such alterations made to match prevailing notions in different spiritual contexts have not only led the paper burning custom to take on a highly complex and multi-facetted nature, but also to obfuscate its true origin. The initial foundation of the custom, or rather the foundation of the practice of providing for the dead in general, was laid long before the emergence or arrival of spiritual systems like Buddhism in China and goes back to notions of Chinese folk religion and ancestor worship. At the very bottom of the custom lies the folk-religious concept of the afterlife (Williams 1995).

In Chinese folk religion, the netherworld and the mortal world are believed to be two co-existing realms, with the former being a mirror image of the latter. Mundane structures, like the social hierarchy of Chinese society for instance, find reflection on the other side. With the afterlife being so similar to earthly life, similar requirements for sustaining an existence apply. Basic necessities like food, drink and clothing are needed just as much by the spirits as they are needed by the living. Since the deceased come to the netherworld without any personal means however, they have to be supplied with all these things through offerings. Besides necessities that cover the most basic needs, the departed further long for all the things they possessed in life, as they search to continue their existence in the familiar-seeming environment of the afterlife in the same way they were used to prior to death. The higher the living standard of a departed before passing, the more abundant, valuable and reflective of status the offering have to be in order to recreate this accustomed lifestyle and to satisfy the departed (Williams 1995).

Providing a deceased with all these things is usually the task of the surviving family members, especially of the direct offspring. Underlying this unspoken rule is the concept of filial piety, the central pillar of Chinese ancestor worship. Children are thought to be in their parent's debt as those have given to them the gift of life and have provided for them during infant- and childhood. A filial son or daughter will therefore strive to repay this debt by conversely caring for their parents in old age and beyond that. A saying ascribed to Confucius recorded in the *Xiaojing* 孝经, the Classic of Filial Piety, illustrates the notion that a child's

responsibility towards their parents is not dismissed simply because of their parent's passing (Williams 1995):

> A filial son serves his parents in the following ways: When his parents are simply residing at home, he then carries his respect to the utmost; when they are being nourished, he then offers his joyfulness to the utmost; when they become ill, he then carries his concern for them to the utmost; when they are being mourned for at the time of their death, he then carries his grief to the utmost; and when they are spirits he sacrifices to them with strictest reverence. (Williams 1995)

While caring for a deceased is seen primarily as the task of the direct offspring, following generations are expected to take over the duty since filial piety also includes caring for the well-being of one's ancestors who are the origin of the own bloodline (Williams 1995).

If the descendants maintain a good relationship with their ancestors by securing their existence in the afterlife through appropriate offerings or maybe even raise the ancestor's living standards and social position through especially generous ones, they may in return gain profit from this connection. In the early days, ancestors were primarily seen as mediators between this world and the hereafter through whom humans could obtain contact with the gods and ask for help and favours (Schlombs 2000: 15). In later times, the ancestors themselves were attributed greater powers. They were and still are thought to have control over the fate of their descendants, acting as protectors of wealth and well-being for instance, having a positive influence on conceiving and delivering children and even being able to manipulate natural forces to facilitate bountiful harvests (Williams 1995). On the other hand, if the ancestor's needs and desires are not satisfied, they may also bring misfortune to those who neglect them (Asim 1993: 211) and come to haunt them in the form of a "revengeful ghost" (*gui* 鬼) (Eckfeld 2005: 70).

These folk religious notions of a continued existence after death as well as the responsibility of descendants to care for their elders even beyond their passing derived from the central concept of filial piety are the foundations on which the practice of providing for the dead is based. The idea that family bonds and obligations persist throughout time and planes of existence as well as the faith in the influential powers of the deceased on the living may further be seen as driving forces in the development of the lavish offering rituals and elaborate offerings goods that followed since the dawn of the tradition.

3. Providing for the Dead throughout the Ages: From Burial Goods to Paper Offerings

The custom of providing for the dead can be traced as far back as the Neolithic period. In excavations of burials sites belonging to two of the most ancient civilizations in China, the Yangshao 仰韶 (ca. 5000–3800 BCE) and the Longshan 龙山 (ca. 3000 to 1900 BCE) cultures, burial goods like food containers and personal possession have been unearthed, which have been classified by scholars as supplies for the afterlife (National Gallery of Australia 2019). By the time of the Shang 商 dynasty (ca. 1600–1046 BCE), it had already become common practice to entomb with the dead a multitude of different offering goods. The food containers and personal possession of earlier times were complemented by such things as clothing, daily utensils, weapons, as well as in increasing numbers precious items such as elaborately decorated ritual bronze vessels. These vessels have received particularly close attention by archeologists as differences in their type, size and numbers have been observed to correspond with differences in social ranks of tomb owners, thus indicating the existence of an organized and hierarchically structured system of burial practices at the time (Asim 1993: 212). Another striking addition to the repertoire of offerings were human and animal sacrifices, often found in large numbers in the tombs of members belonging to elite class of society. While it remains largely unclear who the people accompanying the deceased were, it is speculated that they were oftentimes close kin, since family members were considered property of the head of the family and especially women were thought to be interminably bound to their husbands through their marital bond. Ebner von Eschenbach (2003: 167–171) assumes that burying family members along with the head of the family was seen as a way to transfer the ownership relations from the mundane life to the afterlife. Human sacrifices of this kind were ultimately abolished only under the reign of the Qing 清 (1644–1911 CE) emperors. However, a sharp decline can already be noticed in the fifth century BCE. Responsible for the decline, so the general consensus among China scholars, are the teachings of Confucius (*kongzi* 孔子, 551–479 BCE), which promote humanity as a moral virtue and are thus incompatible with practices such as sacrificial killings. The in China highly influential Confucian doctrine lead to the almost complete cessation of human sacrifices by the year 400 BCE. With the belief that the deceased require to be provided with everything they were used to in their mortal life being so firmly anchored in Chinese minds however, an alternative to human sacrifices had to be found. Instead of interring living beings with the dead, it thus became common custom to entomb with them figurative replicas (The National Gallery of Australia 2019). The range of replicative substitutes made from materials like bronze, clay or precious stones soon also started encompassing those of earthly possessions since Confucius further recommended, as

recorded in the *Liji* 礼记, The Book of Rites, the usage of the so-called *mingqi* 明器, or spirit wares, which are goods exclusively made for the purpose of being entombed with the dead (Pang 2011):

> He who made the vessels which are so (only) in imagination, knew the principles underlying the mourning rites. They were complete (to all appearance), and yet could not be used. Alas! if [sic] for the dead they had used the vessels of the living, would there not have been a danger of this leading to the interment of the living with the dead? (Legge 2019b)

These spirit wares, which were unfit to serve any purpose for the living but were thought to work perfectly fine in the hereafter, were intended to signify a new phase of existence for the deceased and through that create distance between the living and the dead (Linck 2003: 197–198). The same effect could however also be achieved by making daily goods unusable, so Confucius further elaborated:

> In dealing with the dead, if we treat them as if they were entirely dead, that would show a want of affection, and should not be done; or, if we treat them as if they were entirely alive, that would show a want of wisdom, and should not be done. On this account the vessels of bamboo (used in connexion with the burial of the dead) are not fit for actual use; those of earthenware cannot be used to wash in; those of wood are incapable of being carved; the lutes are strung, but not evenly; the pandean pipes are complete, but not in tune; the bells and musical stones are there, but they have no stands. (Legge 2019a)

In spite of Confucius's pleas do archaeological findings show that functioning utensils and tools were never entirely abandoned and were kept being used alongside the non-functioning spirit wares throughout time (Asim 1993: 212).

The regular trade with foreign powers such as with the Greeks, the Kushans and the Turkic peoples of Central Asia that commenced during the Han 汉 dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), introduced exotic new goods and animals to the Chinese lifeworld, which also found their way into funerary practices (The National Gallery of Australia 2019). An example are the figurines of lions, animals non-native to China that had been brought to the country as tributes from Persia, which now entered the spheres of Chinese burial goods (Paludan 1981: 25). Despite these new additions did interest in older indigenous types of grave goods not cease however. On the contrary were the bronze vessels known since the Shang dynasty so highly sought-after, that demand soon exceeded supply, causing a major increase in price. In search for cheaper options, earthenware moved into the focus and gradually started replacing

bronze as the preferred medium for mass-produced funerary goods (The National Gallery of Australia 2019).

The collapse of the Han dynasty marked the beginning of a 400-year long period of disunion in China with a number of rivaling kingdoms and short-lived dynasties struggling for power. The disintegration of political and social order caused major changes in almost all fields of life, but especially so in the spiritual one. Daoism, an indigenous school of thought that previously played a minor role in Chinese spiritual life, was revived and saw major growth in popularity. Buddhism, reaching China from India and Tibet, quickly found followers in the war-torn country as well. Not only had these two belief systems a considerable impact on the daily lives of people at the time, but also on their deaths. Daoist and Buddhist imagery and symbolism entered the design repertoire of funerary goods, expanding it considerably (The National Gallery of Australia 2019). Interestingly enough, were these new influences incorporated into existing burial traditions founded on folk-religious believes in spite of the fact that notions concerning death and the afterlife in Daoism and Buddhism in many respects contradict those of folk religion (Eckfeld 2005: 70, 72).

Under Tang 唐 rule (618–907 CE), burial culture reached its zenith. Neither before nor after this period were tomb structures so grand and burial goods so numerous and sumptuous (Koch 1996). The flourishing burial activities reflect a general trend of the time as the Tang dynasty is considered the "golden age" of Chinese history. During the Tang era, the empire reached a territorial extension like never seen again. The Chinese dominion reached from what is today Mongolia in the North, Korea in the East, Vietnam in the South and up to the borders of present-day Iran in the West (Kuhn 1993: 28). There was frequent contact and trade between the Tang and the surrounding countries and many foreign diplomats, envoys, merchants and travelers entered the empire that was known for being politically and culturally open-minded. The exchange with these foreign countries and cultures brought along all kinds of new impressions that fueled Chinese imagination and stimulated new developments, especially in the arts (Koch 1996). One innovation was the so-called *sancai* 三彩 or "three-colour" glaze technique, which these days is considered the epitome of Tang aesthetic. Traceable back to the mid-seventh century, it was probably inspired by batik textiles and batik dying methods that reached China via the Silk Road around the time (Schlombs 2000: 59, 61). The glazing, which was applied in a haphazard manner that leaves drip and run marks, was quick and easy to employ and thus especially suitable for the mass-series production of burial goods that thrived during the Tang. The diverse forms of the figurines and other ceramics to which the glazing technique was applied attest for the fact that craftsmen were allowed to develop and

deploy their own individual designs and were not controlled by rules regarding particular styles (The National Gallery of Australia 2019). What was under control however were the numbers and types of pottery and other burial goods a deceased was allowed to receive. During the Tang period, the funerary industry stood under direct control of the state, with three government departments overseeing and being in charge of burial activities. Their tasks were to determine the social status of a deceased, which decided upon the scope of burial goods they were entitled to, supervising funerals and supplying those buried with imperial order with burial goods from stately production sites. All of this happened in accordance with regulations recorded in an official code of law (Qi 2006: 171–173). Such measures had become necessary due to the excessive dimensions burial activities reached during and in the time leading up to the Tang dynasty. Overly lavish funerals had not only financially ruined many families (Asim 1993: 177), but were also seen as threatening social order by blurring the borders of the social hierarchy. The sumptuous regulations were an attempt of the elite to maintain and consolidate social distinction and thereby set themselves visibly apart from lower classes. However, does the majority of Tang tombs reflect no clear pattern indicating social status or official rank, proving that the regulations were in actuality broken more often than followed. Ye (2005: 35, 282–284, 293) points out that the funerary goods through which the government attempted to specify social rank, were the same means through which mourners would give expression to their feelings and filial piety. In the conflict of law and emotion, emotion would ultimately take the upper hand and lead mourners to disregard official orders. Moreover was the wrath of the spirits, which could be triggered by inappropriate offerings, feared more than the punishment by law (The National Gallery of Australia 2019). Numerous imperial edicts urging citizens to refrain from excessive funeral activities issues during the Tang dynasty underline just how lavish burials and offerings were at the time. One such edict issued by emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 627–649 CE) in the year 643 reads:

> Although the ancient precedents are specified I detail in [our] rites and regulations and the prohibitions against violation of these rites is written in law, some honored and eminent families related by marriage have surrendered themselves to the common practice, and some commoners indulge in lavish spending and [act] immorally. They send off their parents in excessive funerals and show their filial piety through grand tumuli. As a result, clothes and bedding, inner and outer coffins are most elaborately decorated; funerary figurines and *mingqi* are as expensive and wasteful as gold and jade. The rich exceed the regulations in competition for eminence, the poor bankrupt their families so that they do not appear remiss. This only harms our teachings and principles, and brings no benefit to the deceased. (Ye 2005: 284–285)

Despite imperial injunctions like this one and despite increasingly harsh measures of punishment, are changes in funerary practice observable only as late as the mid-eights century. Falling into this period is the An Lushan 安禄山 rebellion (755–763 CE), a revolt started by general An Lushan against the Tang imperial household, which not only marks a turning point in Tang history, but seemingly also in the development of burial culture and funerary practice. While tombs before the rebellion were grand and equipped with an abundance of grave goods, were tombs after this period smaller and only few objects were recovered from them. For years, the conventional interpretation of the through the archeological findings suggested impression that burials became more frugal after this decisive historical event was that the weakening of the empire and its institutions as well as the downswing of the economy were to blame for these changes. In more recent years have scholars like Ye (2005: 28, 300–301, 305, 307) and Qi (2006: 173–176) however objected to this theory, pointing towards written sources of the time that paint another picture of what happened. These seem to document that the loss of imperial authority caused by the rebellion enticed even more mourners to break the law, ultimately leading to a relaxation of sumptuary regulations and even more luxurious funerals. Qi argues, that the discrepancy between archeological observations and historical accounts is the result of a shift in focus from material goods interred with the deceased to aboveground public sacrificial activities, which had only now become possible that the laws were loosened. In comparison to burial goods made from durable materials, did these rituals and ceremonies not leave behind many archeological traces. Written sources Qi as well as Ye have consulted for their research further record the growing usage of perishable materials like wood, textiles and paper in the making of *mingqi* and other ceremonial objects.

No matter what the reasons behind these developments may have been, whether it were economic motives, a rethinking of prevailing funerary traditions or a combination of several factors, what is for certain is that the departure from burial goods made from durable materials marks the dawn of the rise of paper offerings as a mean to provide for the dead. Burial goods made from durable materials were never entirely abandoned, but since the Tang dynasty the volume and scale of grave goods has been constantly decreasing. During the on the Tang following Song 宋 dynasty (960–1279 CE), the burial goods production had already been cut back significantly. During the Ming 明 (1368–1644 CE) era, massive government run kilns for the manufacturing of *mingqi* ceased to exist entirely. While funerary wares still accompanied the deceased of elite rank, only the emperor and his family were accompanied by vast numbers. Providing the dead with large quantities of grave goods had become a rare practice among the masses (The National Gallery of Australia 2019). Today, as Ye (2005: 365,

374–376, 388) has ascertained through a number of interviews and observations, are the dead, if at all provided with burial goods, usually accompanied by small personal belongings meaningful to them in life and in some cases with apotropaic items like coins, real of fake ones, and mirrors.

While the evolution of burial goods throughout the centuries can be tracked almost seamlessly thanks to the plentiful archeological evidence, is the reconstruction of the developments of the paper offerings since their dawn and since their rise to popularity during the Tang because of the severe lack of sources of information largely impossible. Most of the limited knowledge on the history of paper offerings there is today was pieced together from written historical accounts. According to those did the idea of making *mingqi* from paper develop almost simultaneously with the advent of paper itself. The *Hou Hanshu* 后汉书, the Chronicles of the Later Han, contain the probably first indication of usage of paper for mortuary obligations. Described is how paper replicas of metallic coins were placed in tombs to substitute for real ones during the reign of emperor Hedi 和帝 (r. 89–106 CE), the same period during which paper was supposedly invented (Blake 2011: 54, 65). The paper money made for funerary purposes thus pre-dates the creation of real paper currency in China, which was only introduced during the reign of emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 650–683 CE) of Tang (Teygeler 1998: 230). The widespread adoption of paper as a material for the making of burial goods hence followed shortly after the introduction of real paper currency. Blake (2011: 63, 67, 72) sees a direct connection between the two, proposing the hypothesis that the paper goods, in particular paper money replicas, rose to popularity due to being ideological counterparts to the newly introduced fiduciary papers. He adds that the advent of printing on paper, also coinciding with these developments, as well as the possibility to economize on offerings through using the paper medium may have been contributing factors as well. The paper medium, being comparatively cheap and easy to bring into different forms, offers sheer endless possibilities for simulating all kinds of desired objects in large quantities, which to make from materials like ceramic or metals may have quickly exhausted a family's financial means, thus not only being economic for the bereaved but also profitable for the deceased.

In the following centuries, the production of paper goods for funerary purposes grew to be a significant enterprise as a memorial written in 1139 CE by a scholar-official to emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 1127 –1162 CE) of Song attests. In the memorial the scholar-official expresses his concern about the labour power wasted in the production of paper goods, which are made only to be burned down to ashes (Blake 2011: 70–71):

> I have been surprised at how people perforate [with metal punch] paper to replicate strung cash (*mínqián*) and then they burn it to receive fortune from spirits (*guǐshén*). There is no rationality behind it. It is based on nothing but the preposterous talk and hear-say of ignorant people. Suppose that the spirits have a fully formed human consciousness, then they know that people are cheating them. Even worse is that this custom has been handed down for such a long time, for the purpose of burying, caring for, and memorializing the dead; the people do this to fulfill their filial piety and to show their sincerity in order to receive a blessing. Accordingly, the result is that four or five out of ten southern people have changed their occupation to become paper workers. This custom is particularly popular among people in Southeast China. It is due to the lucrative benefits and the peasants' laziness. Of course, it is the lazy tillers who go about this business. They expend their energy by day and night to accumulate huge stores of paper money, only to be incinerated in a matter of moments. Such a waste. (Blake 2011: 70–71)

The paper sheets the scholar-official mentions, which have perforations that in their shape are reminiscent of the shape of ancient copper coins, have stood the test of time and remain one of the most popular offerings to this day (Blake 2011: 29, 55). Likewise has the negative attitude he as a state representative expresses towards the custom persisted throughout the centuries. Stately opposition reached its peak following the communist takeover of China in 1949. Driven by the idea coined by Karl Marx that "religion is the opium of the people," the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, *zhongguo gongchangdang* 中国共产党) proceeded against all kinds of spiritual and "superstitious" activities (Teygeler 1998: 248). Funeral ceremonies in particular were a thorn in the eye of the party as lavish burials were considered a colossal waste of resources, both in terms of money as well as in terms of raw materials such as paper. Funerary reforms imposed in the late 1950s thus stipulated among several other innovations the usage of fresh flowers and artificial fruits in place of paper offerings. During the Cultural Revolution (*wuchanjieji wenhua dageming* 无产阶级文化大革命, 1966–1976 CE) initiated by Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (r. 1949–1976 CE), the opposition towards the custom grew even stronger as the the country's youth was encouraged to eradicate the "Four Olds (*si jiu* 四旧)", referring to old customs, old culture, old habits and old ideas, from Chinese minds and lives (Aveline-Dubach 2012: 76–78). Religious expressions of all kinds were met with violence and destruction (Teygeler 1998: 248), the offering paper custom in particular was set under official interdiction (Blake 2011: 112). And yet, did/many people continued ancestral offerings in the safe spaces within their own four walls, allowing the paper burning practice to survive the highly hostile period. With Deng Xiaoping's 邓小平 (r. 1978–1992) assumption to office as the paramount leader of the People's Republic in 1978 came repression to an end and restoration started. The production of paper effigies was taken up again in its traditional

locations, now however already using the help of machines (Teygeler 1998: 248). Since then, the custom has regained its position in public life and is enjoying steadily growing popularity. Increasing demands for paper offerings in recent years have led to the foundation of small and medium-scale industrial firms specializing in the production of the ceremonial papers that rival the formerly prevalent family-based workshops. The inventory of paper replicas is constantly broadened and updated, encompassing besides the well-established traditional ones like perforated paper sheets also simulations of modern commodities replicated with great attention to realistic detail and sometimes even brand labels and logos (Blake 2011: 2, 9, 27, 178, 189). In 2016, the *BBC* (2016) reported that Italian luxury goods maker *Gucci* had sent warning letters to sellers of paper offerings, who had replicated the brand's famous handbags to such detail that the paper copies were considered cases of patent infringement. According to Blake (2011: 2, 15, 23, 27, 46, 147, 170, 178–180, 189) is the increasing realism a distinctively new trend in the paper burning custom and so is the replication of, as he calls it, "exotic" goods like handbags, which cannot be classified as belonging to any of the four categories of human needs, namely clothing, comestibles, accommodation and transportation, into which traditional offerings could be sorted. He has observed a continuously intensifying degree of exoticism, with the first exotic goods to appear being replicas of modern appliances like computers and cell phones, followed by replicas of symbolic capital like credit cards, then big-ticket luxuries like villas and yachts, then games and gambling devices, weapons, cigarettes, wines, watches, mannequins of servants, mistresses and famous actresses to most recently paper replicas of sex supplies. Exotic offerings like the latter do not sit well with Chinese authorities and after the discovery of paper offerings of Viagra and mistresses being burned in 2006, the government issued an edict prohibiting extravagant and vulgar offerings (Ap 2013). The "degradation" of the custom, the patent infringements and the use of resources and labour power in the making of paper effigies, which continue to be seen as wasteful, are however not the only reasons the government has again started proceeding against the custom in recent years. Into the focus of attention have moved environmental concerns as the burning of large amounts of paper across the entire country on festive occasions like the Qingming 清明 festival, or Tomb-Sweeping Day in English, is believed to contribute to air and water pollution as well as bearing the risk of wildfires (Blake 2011: 2, 179). According to the China Consumer Association are more than 1,000 metric tons of paper products burned every year during the Qingming festival period (Zheng 2012). In 2017, the municipal government of Harbin 哈尔滨, the capital of China's Heilongjiang 黑龙江 province, was thus the first to entirely ban the custom for the 9.6 million people living in and around the city (Jie 2017). The central gov-

ernment is meanwhile trying to inspire enthusiasm about alternatives to the paper burning, promoting for instance through its media outlet *China Daily* (2011) more convenient, economical and environmental-friendly ways to pay tribute to the departed. One such alternative is the online memorial website *Babaoshan* 八宝山, launched by the Beijing Funeral Administration in 2005, that allows registered users to make virtual offerings with the click of a mouse.[1]

The virtual offerings constitute the latest innovation in the since the Neolithic times continuously evolving custom of providing for the dead. While the offerings have taken many different forms throughout the millennia, starting with worldly goods and living beings buried with the dead, to imitations of commodities and beings made from durable materials, to imitations made from perishable materials to imitations entirely made from paper to be burned in ceremonies to now virtual imitations without material substance at all, the custom has maintained its key idea of supplying the deceased with things believed to be needed and useful in the afterlife.. The following two chapters will give a detailed account of what type of offerings in particular were thought of as important in two distinguished periods of time, the contemporary period and the ancient Tang era.

4. Contemporary Paper Offerings: Findings from the Chinese E-Commerce Website *Taobaowang*

4.1. The E-Commerce Website *Taobaowang*

The Chinese online shopping website *Taobaowang* 淘宝网, translating to "searching for treasure (internet)", was launched in May 2003 by the Alibaba 阿里巴巴 Group Holding Ltd.[2] Similar to the online auction website *Ebay*, does the *Taobaowang* marketplace facilitate consumer-to-consumer retail by providing a platform for mainly individual entrepreneurs and small businesses to sell their goods.[3] Apart from small individual sellers has *Taobaowang* also lined up some major vendors and retailers like *Lenovo*, *Philips* and *Sony*. As of today, it is China's largest online auction company in market transaction value (So 2010: 93, 96–97, 105), with a revenue of 102,843 million RMB or 13,351 million Euros in 2018 (Alibaba Group 2019: 1). According to the web analytics service *Alexa* (2019) is *Taobaowang* currently the third most visited website in China. 93.5 % of the visitors to the site, which is available Chinese language only, are from the Chinese mainland (status as of June 2019). In 2018, the an-

[1] http://www.babaoshan.com.cn/
[2] https://www.taobao.com/
[3] https://www.ebay.com/

nual active user number reached 636 million (Alibaba Group 2019: 2), the product listings exceeded one billion in 2016 (Brennan 2016).

Being the biggest e-commerce website in China, *Taobaowang* is a good starting point from which to investigate what offering papers are most commonly sold and thus most commonly used by present-day Chinese consumers. While ethnical and social backgrounds of the users are unknown, it is to assume that since the website is in Chinese language only and a majority of visitors are based on the Chinese mainland, they are for the largest part of Chinese descent and further that among so many users, members of all demographic groups are represented. Taken together, these factors make the website a suitable source of information on which funerary offerings are currently popular among the Chinese masses.

4.2. Methodology for Data Collection

In order to gain an insight into which paper offerings are commonly used by present-day Chinese consumers, I have compiled a list of the ten best-selling paper offerings on *Taobaowang*. In the following, I will outline the procedures followed to create it.

Using the search bar in the upper-middle half of the *Taobaowang* start page, I made a search using the keyword "*shaozhi* 烧纸," or burning paper.[4] The search brought 100 pages of results, which is the maximum number of pages displayed on *Taobaowang*. How many items exactly are listed under this key word is unclear. To determine which items are the most popular ones among this broad range of goods, I used the filter function in the upper left corner. By clicking on *xiaoliang* 销量, meaning quantity (of goods) sold, the search results are being sorted according to sales numbers from highest to lowest (*xiaoliang cong gao dao di* 销量从高到低), allowing an easy determination of the most popular items on the site. Some items of the same type appeared several times among the first ten listings. On my final list, I have however included each item type only once and have skipped duplications, as the goal of the survey was to gain an insight into the different types of popular offerings there are. Further did I also not take into account pre-packaged sets of offerings that include a variety of diverse items, as these say little about which offerings in particular are sought-after by consumers. As a last remark is to mention that I only included those paper items that are actually intended to be used by deceased in the afterlife and did not consider such things as paper boxes which are

[4] In Chinese, a variety of terms is used to refer to paper offerings, with all of them carrying slightly different connotations. I decided to use the term *shaozhi* as one the one hand it is general enough to include all types of paper offerings (one-dimensional, three-dimensional, simulations of different types of worldly goods) as well as specific enough to not bring too many unrelated results like for instance the very general term "paper (*zhi* 纸)."

meant to hold a variety of smaller offerings during the burning process as those are for the convenience of the living and not of the dead.

4.3. The Ten Most Commonly Sold Paper Offerings on *Taobaowang*

First Treasures. The by far most popular paper offerings sold on *Taobaowang* are the so-called *yuanbao* 元宝, or First Treasures (see Figure 1) (Taobaowang 2019a). In fact were the first eleven search results generated all some variation of *yuanbao*. Ostensibly derived from Yuan 元 dynasty (1279–1368 CE) ingots used in real-world transactions, they are a type of ancient currency. What characterizes them is their distinct basin-like shape that has been associated with a variety of auspicious vessels like for instance the hull of a ship that delivers a fortune in cargo, a shoe carrying the good fortune of fertility or a crown signifying power and command. Due to these associations, *yuanbao* are beyond their function as carriers of monetary value, which a deceased can make use of in the afterlife, also seen as a bringers of good fortune (Blake 2011: 137). The most popular *yuanbao* on *Taobaowang* come in a golden colour (Taobaowang 2019a), which not only stands for a high concentration of monetary value, but also ritual one. Gold was never a common currency in China, but was mostly used in ritual contexts such as in the making of divine figurines (Seaman 1982: 82). Golden paper offerings are thus considered appropriate only for high-ranking spirits such as distant ancestors (Blake 2011: 28).

Occidental-Style Bank Notes. The second most sold item on *Taobaowang* are the so-called "hell bank notes (*mingbi* 冥币)," which in shape and format mimic occidental bank notes. The stack of notes sold includes ones that are easily identifiable as spirit money due to the otherworldly content and auspicious symbols printed on them as well as ones that are rather exact copies of the American national currency Dollar (see Figure 2) (Taobaowang 2019b). The earliest report of ghost bills simulating Western-style bank notes in China stems from the early 19th century. Since then, they have become an integral part of the corpus of monetary forms of paper offerings, where they have taken the form of a general all-purpose currency suitable for offerings made to any type of otherworldly being (Blake 2011: 51, 145, 168).

Perforated Paper Money. Third place in the ranking of best-selling offering papers on *Taobaowang* are simple sheets of yellow coarse paper perforated with squares and semi-circles (*dakong tongqian zhiqian* 打孔铜钱纸钱) (Taobaowang 2019c), which are reminiscent of the square-holed copper coins of dynastic China (see Figure 3). Bearing this symbol of monetary value, the papers are intended to serve as means of payment in the afterlife. Howev-

er, they also carry a sense of auspiciousness. Since times of ancient, copper coins have been used as talismans and lucky charms. With their round shape and central square hole, they mirror the structures of the universe, which according to ancient believes consists of a square earth encircled by the rim of the dome of heaven. The perforated paper money is popular across all of China, although different methods for replicating the design of the ancient coins exist locally. Instead of perforating the paper, designs may be incised, impressed, embossed or imprinted (Blake 2011: 29, 35, 50).

Gold Bars. Shiny paper gold bars (*jintiao* 金条) are another popular offering for the dead (see Figure 4) (Taobaowang 2019d). Bars of gold, but much more often bars of silver, were used in the monetary system of dynastic China for long-distance trade, tax remissions and other large expenses for which payment by coins with their comparatively low value would have been inconvenient (Seaman 1982: 80–81).

Mobile Phones. Featuring high on the list of best-selling paper offering to be burned for the departed are mobile phones (*shouji* 手机), specifically the *Iphone* model by the American brand *Apple*, known in Chinese as *pingguo* 苹果. The three-dimensional *Iphone* paper simulations are in size and overall appearance exact copies of the real phones as a side-to-side comparison photo posted by the seller shows (see Figure 5). The brand name *pingguo* as well as the model, *pingguo 8plus*, are explicitly mentioned in the title and description (Taobaowang 2019e). In 2013, *NBC News* reported on the crack down of paper *Apple* counterfeits like this in Beijing 北京, quoting an interviewed spokesperson of the Beijing City Police as saying that items like this are overstepping the boundaries of legality and are cases of patent infringement (Wong 2013). For sellers, it seems however, are replicas imitating the designs of real life products and bearing famous brand names or logos more lucrative than non-branded offerings with original designs, as the former are sold at higher prices, so Blake (2011: 189) observed.

Villas. Luxurious housing (*bieshu* 别墅) replicated in paper is another popular offering for the dead. The best-selling residence on *Taobaowang* is a miniature Western-style two-story building, fully furnished and with garden and pool. Included is also service staff, seemingly a maid and a driver, as well as means of transportation in form of a car and a motorcycle parked in front of the building (see Figure 6) (Taobaowang 2019f). The idea of a netherworldly residence, so Blake (2011: 181), is nothing new, but began with the furnished tomb chamber itself.

Gold and Silver Mountains. Listed under the title "gold and silver mountains (*jinshan yinshan* 金山银山)" are two pyramidal constructions made from paper, one in golden, the other in silver colour, which are sold together as a set. The paper mountains have relief-like embossing that takes the shape of dynastic coins, *yuanbao* and other not clearly identifiable objects, giving the impression that they are piles of amassed treasures. Each mountain comes with a colouful paper pedestal bearing the depiction of a child having a feast while surrounded by heaps of gold. The depiction bursts of auspicious symbols like copper coins and *yuanbao* which are associated with wealth and good luck, but also the peach blossoms in the upper right corner as well as the peaches and the pomegranates in front of the child (see Figure 7) (Taobaowang 2019g). Peach blossoms and peaches are symbols of longevity in Chinese culture. According to folk legend is there a divine peach tree that blooms once every 3000 years and produces the fruit of eternal life, which takes the same amount of years to ripen. The pomegranate, associated with numerous offspring due to its many seeds (Teygeler 1998: 236, 246), is also a symbol of longevity as progeny means the continuation of the family bloodline (Blake 2011: 184). Symbols of longevity are traditional to the funerary context due to their associative link to the concept of immortality (Blake 2011: 184).

Clothing. The range of commonly sold paper offerings on *Taobaowang* also includes clothing items (*yifu* 衣服), with the most popular being a set consisting of a polo shirt (*duanxu T-xu* 短袖 T 恤) and matching trousers (*kuzi* 裤子) for men. The paper clothes are true to scale and just like clothes intended to be worn by the living come in different designs to match different tastes. Although brand names are not explicitly mentioned in the title or description of the item listing, do all of the shirts bear familiar-looking logos on their chest pockets like for instance an alligator reminiscent of the *Lacoste* logo or a polo player on a horse similar to the *Ralph Lauren* badge (see Figure 8) (Taobaowang 2019h). Offerings of paper clothing are made especially at change of season. On the day of the Double Ninth Festival (*chongyangjie* 重阳节) for instance, celebrated on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month that usually falls in October in the Gregorian calendar, paper winter clothes are burnt to keep the ancestors warm during the soon to arrive winter (Teygeler 1998: 232).

Cars. Featured on the list of the ten most popular offering papers sold on *Taobaowang* are also miniature cars (*qiche* 汽车) with personal drivers sitting behind the steering wheels. The main bodies of the cars are made from paper while the wheels are made from plastic in order to allow them to actually turn. Different colour variations are available; the models of the cars are all the same however. They are rather exact simulation of the "Panamera GTS"

model by the popular car manufacturer *Porsche*. The *Porsche* logo is visibly printed on the engine bonnet of the paper replicas. On the trunk lid, the brand's name is spelled out in words, with the car model "Panamer gt S [sic]" written just below it (see Figure 9) (Taobaowang 2019i).

Cigarettes. Last on the top-ten list of best-selling paper offering on *Taobaowang* is a set consisting of an assortment of cigarettes (*xiangyan taohe* 香烟套盒). The set includes several cigarette packages, all of them in design exact copies of real cigarette packaging of well-known brands, including those of local premium brands like *Chungwha* 中华 as well as foreign brands like the British-American *555* (see Figure 10) (Taobaowang 2019j).

4.4. Analysis

The compilation of the best-selling offering papers on the Chinese e-commerce website Taobaowang has brought to light the wide and diverse range of paper goods to be circulated to the afterlife there are in contemporary China. The list contains traditional offerings which's histories can be traced back to dynastic origins like the yuanbao, gold ingots and the perforated paper money as well as distinctively modern goods like mobile phones and cars. Their numbers are rather balanced with four traditional items and six modern ones, while the place of the most popular item is occupied by the traditional yuanbao.

Among the top ten most popular products are items that cover three out of the four categories of human needs Blake has mentioned as the underlying classifications into which offerings can traditionally be sorted. Clothing is provided, accommodation in form of villas as well as transportation in form of cars. Paper replicas of comestibles are not on the list, which however may be explained by the fact that real food offerings often accompany offering rituals to this day (McCreery 1990: 21).

Striking is the prevalence of financial means. Half of the paper offerings are a type of currency, with four of them, the yuanbao, the hell bank notes, the perforated paper money and the gold bars taking up the first four places in the ranking. As money is a medium for exchange and can be transformed into any kind of commodity through the act of purchase, its popularity may be explained though the fact that it allows a deceased to acquire all things they may need or desire, thus being a safe bet as an offering. However, it is to point out that besides these practical functions as a means of payment, most of the monetary items also have symbolic power. The yuanbao for instance is itself a symbol of good fortune while the hell bank notes, papers with the ancient coin resembling perforations as well as the gold and silver mountains bear auspicious motives, all of which promise good luck. Through offering these

valuables, the descendants thus not only secure the financial and through that material well-being of the departed in the afterlife, but at the same time also their fortunate destiny.

This thought can extending to the non-traditional items as well. While the modern goods do not carry auspicious motifs directly associated with bringing good fortune, they also have through their designs copying well-known and popular goods, through the brand names and through the logos strong symbolic power from which a deceased may profit. Branded items usually belong to a higher price range than non-branded goods, attested by Blake's observation that even paper goods with brand names sell for higher prices. Marked through their branding as expensive items that require a certain degree of wealth to be purchased, these paper effigies qualify as status symbols. Reminiscing the fact that precious items are thought to improve the social standing of a deceased in the afterlife, the deceased has a direct profit from the branded items as they help them to move up the social ladder of the netherworldly hierarchy. Thus while a branded and a non-branded item of the same type may both be able to fulfill a certain practical function, a deceased will profit more from the branded offering with its aura of prestige. Noteworthy in this context is also the appearance of cigarettes on the list, which do not have a practical function at all but are simply for pleasure. Through signaling a lifestyle that allows spending on things that are not immediately necessary and through further carrying a brand label as well, they however are also reflective of a well-off lifestyle and thus rank.

5. Ancient Grave Goods: Archeological Findings from the Tang Tombs in Yanshi Xingyuan

5.1. The Yanshi Xingyuan Graveyard

The ancient cemetery known today as the Yanshi Xingyuan graveyard (*yanshi xingyuan mudi* 偃师杏园墓地) was named after the nearby Xingyuan 杏园 Village, located in Yanshi 偃师 County in China's Henan 河南 Province. It lies at the foot of the Beimang 北邙 Mountains, which form a natural barrier to the graveyard's North. Southward of the cemetery flows the Luo 洛 River (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 1). Since at least the Han period has the location, considered to be especially auspicious due its position in-between the sheltering mountains and the flowing river, been used as a gravesite, with the latest tombs dating to the modern period. The large-scale archeological excavation of the site began in 1983 when the area was chosen as the location for the Luoyang Shouyangshan 洛阳首阳山 Power Plant. Authorities permitted the partial destruction of the age-old cemetery, but

allowed extensive archeological excavations to be conducted first. Over the course of around ten years, the Second Henan Team of the Institute of Archeology from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (*zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo henan di'er gongzuo dui* 中国社会科学院考古研究所河南第二工作队) excavated a total of 162 tombs, all of which date to from before the tenth century CE. Among them are the 69 Tang dynasty tombs with which this chapter is concerned. They belong, as ascertained through the epitaph tablet texts, to seven families, the Li 李, Cui 崔, Zheng 郑, Lu 卢, Song 宋, Mu 穆 and Dou 窦, and to occupants of different genders, ages and social ranks (Ye 2005: 1, 42, 55–56, 60–61, 65, 69–70). Unlike most ancient tombs, have these ones never been disturbed by grave robbers and have further survived the centuries largely intact, facilitating the recovery of an unusually large and complete inventory of burial goods (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 3–4).

The Tang tombs at Yanshi Xingyuan are an especially suitable source for gaining an insight into what goods were commonly offered to the dead in pre-modern times. Dating to the Tang dynasty, they stem from an era when grave goods were still mostly made from durable materials and not as towards the end of the dynasty became and ever since has been fashion from materials like paper, wood and cloth that decompose over the centuries. Having further been left untouched by grave robbers and having remained in good condition, they still contain all goods that have not been destroyed by natural forces, allowing to draw a comparatively full picture of the spectrum of goods originally left behind for the dead. Since the tombs belong to several families from a range of social classes, the goods excavated from them are not only representative of a limited societal group, but of a broader spectrum of society. Lastly, have all the findings from the Tang tombs at Yanshi Xingyuan been fully documented in detailed reports that have been published by the Institute of Archeology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (2001) in form of a monograph with the title "Yanshi Xingyuan Tangmu 偃师杏园唐墓 (The Tang Tombs in Yanshi Xingyuan)." Together with Ye's (2005) study of the Xingyuan Tang cemetery for which he was permitted access to the site, the excavated goods and unpublished records, an extraordinary large amount of information about the site and the excavated goods is available, allowing a comprehensive analysis.

5.2. Methodology for Data Collection

In order to gain an insight into what offerings were commonly made to the dead during the Tang dynasty, I have evaluated the archeological data stemming from this excavation of the Tang tombs in Yanshi Xingyuan. In total, around 2,200 burial goods were excavated from the

69 Tang graves. Besides a couple of severely damaged or heavily corroded objects, all of them were listed in detail in the above mentioned monograph. For each grave, a full inventory of grave goods is provided (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 5, 15, 93–95, 166–167, 250–252). To identify which grave goods were the most commonly used ones, I studied the 69 inventories and determined which types of grave good were provided excavated from most graves and thus provided to most tomb occupants, It is to mention, that in my final list of the most common items, I do only include those objects that serve an actual functional purpose for the deceased in the afterlife. Items identified as having been used in corpse preparation like copper water basins for instance, which were left behind inside the tomb after having prepared the body for the burial, are not considered as they were not intended to be used by deceased in the afterlife. The same goes for apotropaic artifacts that were thought to protect the grave from natural and supernatural harm, unless these items have a double-purpose like in the case of mirrors, which were thought to have protecting powers, but were also common grooming utensils used in daily (Ye 2005: 154–155, 309). Based on this method, I have determined the ten most common items provided to the dead at the Yanshi Xingyuan graveyard, which I have listed down below.

5.3. The Ten Most Common Grave Goods from the Yanshi Xingyuan Tang Tombs

Jars. The most common burial good found among the assortment of objects provided to be used by the dead in the afterlife are jars (*guan* 罐). Out of 69 tombs, 55 contained some variation of the vessel. The jars from the Yanshi Xingyuan cemetery exhibit a broad variety of shapes and styles. They are made from materials ranging from stone and clay to fine porcelain. To some of them lacquer or *sancai* glazing has been applied (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 5, 15, 93–95, 166–167, 250–252). Simple jars of gray or red clay, with or without handles are the prevailing ones, however (see Figure 11). According to Ye (2005: 263, 271) is the function of these jars in Tang funeral ritual clear. They were used to store food and liquid from which the deceased could nourish themselves. Jars similar to those found at Xingyuan dating to the earlier Han period even bear written or carved characters like "water (*shui* 水)," "drink (*yin* 饮)" and "salt (*yan* 盐)", which disambiguate their function as food and drink containers.

Coins. The second most common burial good excavated from the Tang tombs at Yanshi Xingyuan are coins of the type *kaiyuan tongbao* 开元通宝. More than 700 such coins in the typical dynastic design were collected from 51 tombs (see Figure 12) (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 5, 15, 93–95, 166–167, 250–252). The *kaiyuan*

tongboa, issued in 621 CE, had a fairly long period of circulation and was the principle coin throughout the Tang dynasty. Both authentic as well as counterfeit Kaiyuan coins were used in the Yanshi Xinyuan burials. However, with the number of authentic ones outweighing the number of counterfeits in every grave, Ye (2005: 161, 163) speculates that using the official and thus more valuable currency was a conscious decision. As an essential part of daily life during the Tang, these coins were interred with the dead to be circulated to the afterlife, where they could be used for transactions just like in this life (Teygeler 1998: 228). Their location inside the grave, usually very close to the body of the deceased, however, also indicates that at least some of them were used in corpse preparation and further that they may have been used for their symbolic power as a sign of longevity (Ye 2005: 159, 161).

Mirrors. Mirrors take the third place in the ranking of the most common burial goods from the Yanshi Xingyuan graveyard. 59 bronze mirrors (*tongjing* 铜镜) as well as two iron mirrors (*tiejing* 铁镜) were recovered from 40 tombs (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 5, 15, 93–95, 166–167, 250–252). Some of these mirrors were found inside lacquered boxes in which they had been placed together with cosmetic items, making their purpose as to function as an aid to personal grooming in the afterlife quite clear. Beyond this practical function, are mirrors further carriers of a variety of meanings. As precious items, they are reflections of financial well-being. To bury a mirror made from expensive and sturdy metal that could theoretically be passed on to following generations, is something only well-off families could allow themselves to do. The metal medium with its long durability was also associated with longevity and immortality. The backside patterns of mirrors, usually including auspicious motifs like in the case of the ones excavated at the Yanshi Xingyuan most frequently birds, grapes, vines, flowers and animals, promise to bring good luck and repel evil (see Figure 13). A deceased could thus benefit from a mirror in many different ways (Ye 2005: 179, 181–183, 185).

Servant Figurines. Among the variety of pottery figurines excavated from the Tang tombs as Yanshi Xingyuan, those of servants (*shipu* 侍仆) were the prevalent ones. 23 vaults contained either sculptures of male servants (*nanshi* 男侍), female servants (*nüshi* 女侍), or a mix of both (see Figure 14) (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 5, 15, 93–95, 166–167, 250–252). Single ceramic heads, pairs of shoes and other small accessories suggest that some figurines were partially made from perishable materials, which decomposed between the time of their burial and the time of their unearthing. The heads and shoes were originally likely fitted on bamboo or wooden body frames and the figurines dressed in miniature textiles. The sculptures of servants were often found neatly arranged along the coffins of

the tomb occupants, which according to Ye (2005: 230–231) indicates that their purpose was to attend and serve the deceased in the next stage of life.

Ink Stones. Ink stones made from either ceramic (*taoyan* 陶砚) or stone (*shiyan* 石砚) were found in 21 Tang dynasty tombs as the Yanshi Xingyuan burial site (see Figure 15) (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 5, 15, 93–95, 166–167, 250–252). In times of ancient, they were essential utensils in the daily lives of the literati. A scholarly book under the title "Four Treasures of a Literati's Study (*wenfang sibao* 文房四宝)" written in 986 CE even names them, together with the three other treasures, namely brush, paper and ink, as items one cannot live without. Being associated with the literati class, the ink stone was beyond an object of utility also a symbol of knowledge, education and hence social rank (Ye 2005: 166, 175–177).

Hairpins. Brought to light through the excavation works at the Yanshi Xingyuan graveyard was also a selection of various types of jewelry. Hairpins (*chai* 钗) were the most common such type, left behind in a total of 14 tombs belonging to female as well as male occupants. The hairpins come in a variety of materials ranging from antler to copper, silver and gold (see Figure 16) (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 5, 15, 93–95, 166–167, 250–252). In addition to their practical use of holding together the wearer's hair, which in ancient China was worn long by both genders, the hairpins also functioned as adornment objects (Ye 2005: 165).

Horse Figurines. Just like the hairpins, horse figurines (*mayong* 马俑) were located in 14 of the Tang tombs at Yanshi Xingyuan cemetery (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 5, 15, 93–95, 166–167, 250–252). They were depicted with and without saddles, some of them guided by grooms, others carrying male or female riders on their backs. Most of the human figurines accompanying the horses exhibit, as typical for the Tang era, foreign features. Their sunken eyes, tall noses and costumes as well as the beards and heavy sideburns of the male figurines make them identifiable as of Central Asian origin (see Figure 17) (Ye 2005: 226, 228–229). Horses in general were considered a sign of material well-being and prestige, but especially so those that had been imported from abroad (Schlombs 2005: 56, 64). Besides being status symbols, they could further practically serve the departed in the afterlife as riding and pack animals (Paludan 1981: 25).

Camel Figurines. Represented in 14 tombs as well were pottery sculptures of camels (*luotuoyong* 骆驼俑) (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 5, 15, 93–95, 166–167, 250–252). Similar to the horse figurines, were camels frequently accompanied by

non-Chinese grooms (Ye 2005: 228) and associated with foreign luxurious (see Figure 18). With their strength, stamina and ability to locate water sources, which they regularly demonstrated on the caravan routes of the Silk Road, they were further seen as especially helpful animals to own (Schlombs 2005: 56).

Chicken Figurines. Small chicken sculptures (*jiyong* 鸡俑) made from ceramic were yet another common burial good replicating living beings (see Figure 19). Chicken figurines were discovered in 14 Tang tombs at the Yanshi Xinyuan site (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 5, 15, 93–95, 166–167, 250–252). The purpose of domestic models of animals but also of all kinds of daily goods was likely to simply recreate the familiar environment the deceased was used to during their lifetime. The ceramic effigies in the grave substitute for real-life livestock the deceased has kept in life (Ye 2005: 21–22, 233).

Dog Figurines. Last on the list of the ten most common burial goods excavated from the Tang tombs at Yanshi Xingyuan cemetery are figurines of dogs (*gouyong* 狗俑) (see Figure 20). Dog effigies were placed in a total of 13 tombs (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 5, 15, 93–95, 166–167, 250–252). Just like the chicken figurines, was their purpose presumably to substitute for living beings the departed was surrounded by in life (Ye 2005: 21–22, 233).

5.4. Analysis

The compilation of those burial goods left behind most frequently in the Tang tombs at Yanshi Xingyuan has provided an insight into the colourful repertoire of offerings ancient people thought of as needed in the afterlife. Among the ten most common goods are items that cover two out of the four categories of human needs Blake has named as the basis on which provisions for life after death are traditionally made. The category of comestibles is covered by the originally food-filled jars and the category of transportation by figurines of riding animals such as horses and camels. Accommodation is not provided in miniature form, but considering that as Blake mentioned that the furnished tomb chamber itself was seen as a residence, this need can be regarded as satisfied as well. As for the category of clothing, there is no obvious proof or even indication that clothing was provided for the deceased. However, given that archaeologists assume that some of the figurines were originally dressed in textiles, which had entirely decomposed by the time of the excavation, it can also not be ruled out that clothing for the tomb occupant was originally supplied as well.

Most striking about the selection of burial goods is the wide representation of living beings replicated in figurative form. Out of the ten most frequently used items, half of them

are figurines. While those of domestic animals like chickens and dogs are thought to simply substitute for living beings the tomb owner kept in life and thus help to recreate a familiar environment in the afterlife, those of servants, horses and camels have a strong symbolic character. They are generally symbols of wealth and high living standards, but the horses and camels in particular have been purposefully made identifiable as of foreign origin through being accompanied by foreign looking grooms and riders, which marks them as imported exotic animals and thus raises their value and aura of prestige in comparison to indigenous animals of the same species.

Just like those figurines, are also the ink stones highly representative of wealth and prestige, as they are a sign of literacy, which in ancient times was a privilege of the educated elite. While both ink stones and figurines are made from materials with comparatively low material value, namely stone and/or pottery, does the symbolism and the associations they raise turn them into highly valuable objects for the deceased as status indications needed to establish and maintain a high social position in the afterlife.

These objects thus contrast the items made from other materials, in particular metals, like hairpins, coins and mirrors, which derive their value from the value of the material they are made from. The hairpins for instance are daily object without any significant symbolic power in themselves, however, the different materials they are made from, in the case of the hairpins excavated from Yanshi Xingyuan ranging from antler to metals like copper, silver and gold are still direct reflections of the financial situation of the deceased of who possesses them. Just because their value is not defined by symbolism, does not mean that they do not have symbolic power at all. The coins are known auspicious items and the mirrors are ascribed apotropaic powers due to the symbolism included in their backside designs for instance. These items thus promise a fortunate and save fate.

6. Differences and Similarities between Contemporary and Ancient Ancestral Offerings

Putting side to side the ten best-selling offerings papers from the Chinse e-commerce website *Taobaowang* and the ten burial goods left behind most frequently in the Tang tombs at Yanshi Xingyuan graveyard, they at first glance seem to have little in common due to being highly reflective of their respective time periods. If one looks beyond the visual and executive differences and focuses on the intended purposes of the goods however, several striking similarities become apparent.

The analyses have revealed that during both periods offerings fulfilling either one or several of three primary functions in the afterlife. An offering's purpose was either to cover a

basic need, to secure the fortunate destiny of the deceased through bringing good luck and protection or to raise the living standard and social rank of the deceased through signifying status. Despite both eras lying wide apart in terms of time, the offerings carrying such functions reflect a shared desired lifestyle the descendants wish upon their ancestors, including material well-being, social status and good fortune. The offerings used in order to bring about such a lifestyle are very different in both periods, but the methods used to turn an object into an offering that promises these comforts are the same. Through symbolism a horse figurine was marked as an exotic imported animal and thus as a status symbol which could help the deceased gain prestige and through that allow them to enter a higher social spheres. These days, the symbolic power of brands is exploited for the same effect of turning a regular item into more precious one. The major difference is that during the Tang dynasty the usage of valuable materials like metals in the making of burial goods allowed a second way to signify the value of an offering, something that is not possible anymore in the contemporary context since all offerings are exclusively made from paper.

7. Conclusion

Making offerings to the dead is a millennia old custom in China. Since Neolithic times have people provided the dead with things believed to be needed in the afterlife and are continuing to do so to this day. Throughout history have these things taken many different forms, evolving from daily objects and living beings buried with the dead in their tombs, to replicas of them made from durable materials, to replicas made form perishable materials to the present-day goods made exclusively from paper to be burned in ceremonies. In recent years, have the contemporary offering papers received much media criticism for allegedly deviating from long-standing traditions by including effigies of modern luxury items like *Gucci* handbags, which are portrayed as the result of infiltrating consumerism and on-setting commodification.

The in this thesis carried out investigation into the paper burning custom and into the larger context of ancestral offering practice has shown that there is little substance to these by the media popularized claims. Not only is there evidence to refute the idea that paper replicas of modern luxuries break with tradition, but on the contrary can these effigies be seen as the newest innovation in a long-standing and central theme in the practice in ancestor worship, namely the provision of status symbols to raise the deceased's position in the netherworldy social hierarchy.

The in the thesis gathered information has clarified that precious and luxurious goods are not new to the context of ancestral offerings. Ever since the Shang era with its precious

bronze vessels have they been a fixed component of the offering practice and were, as the imperial edicts from the Tang dynasty for instance attest, used in great numbers. They became an essential part of the offering repertoire, as they were believed to help the deceased improve their social status and thus overall living standard in the afterlife. In earlier times, precious and luxurious offerings were usually identifiable as such based on the material medium from which they were made. Metals like bronze, silver and gold were used for the manufacturing of burial goods with the value of the metal determining the value of the offering. When burial goods started being increasingly made from earthenware, new ways to demonstrate the value of an object had to be found since the comparatively cheap pottery medium was not able to fulfill this function. Symbolism therefore moved into the focus and became the mean through which the value of an offering was indicated. As the analysis of the burial goods from the Tang tombs at Yanshi Xingyuan has shown, were the pottery figurines of horses and camels for instance, which as figurative simulations of precious animals already are status symbols, deliberately designed to show off their foreign origin, through that marking them as exotic animals and raising their value even further. Just like these pottery figurines from the Tang dynasty, are also modern paper goods designed to show that they are precious and expensive to help a deceased move up the ladder of the netherworldly social hierarchy. Brand names, logos and designs simulating brand products fulfill this task now as brands are associated with a higher price range and thus indicative of wealth. The basic idea remains the same, only is the symbolism adopted to a modern context, allowing contemporary consumers, dead and alive, to identify the paper offerings as precious items. Thus, while the usage of luxury brand items in the age-old ancestral offering practice may at first glance seem out of place, are these offerings by no means a break with tradition. In fact, are they a modern take on the ancient practice of assigning value to an offering through symbolic power.

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Figures

Figure 1: " First Treasures made from Paper"

(Taobaowang 2019a)

Figure 2: "Occidental-Style Spirit Money"

(Taobaowang 2019b)

Figure 3: "Perforated Spirit Money"

(Taobaowang 2019c)

Figure 4: "Gold Bars made from Paper"

(Taobaowang 2019d)

Figure 5: “Iphone made from Paper”

(Taobaowang 2019e)

Figure 6: “Villa made from Paper”

(Taobaowang 2019f)

Figure 7: "Gold and Silver Mountains made from Paper"

(Taobaowang 2019g)

Figure 8: "Shirt made from Paper"

(Taobaowang 2019h)

Figure 9: "Cars made from Paper"

(Taobaowang 2019i)

Figure 10: "Cigarettes made from Paper"

(Taobaowang 2019j)

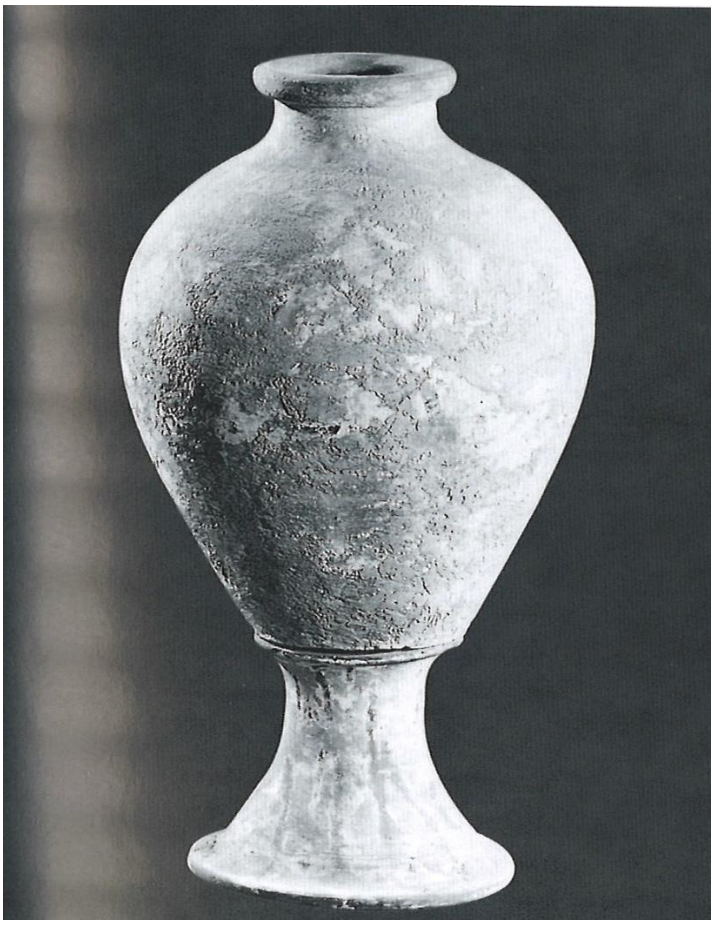

Figure 11: "Simple Pottery Jar"

(Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 419)

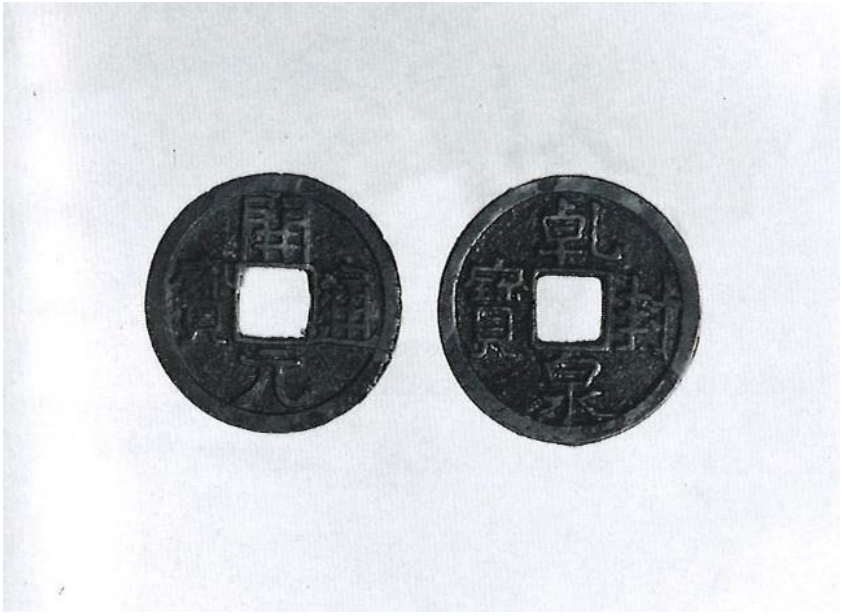

Figure 12: "Copper Coins of the Type *kaiyuan tongbao*"

(Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 443)

Figure 13: "Bronze Mirror with Auspicious Backside-Pattern"

(Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 440)

Figure 14: "Pottery Figurine of a Female Servant"

(Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 416)

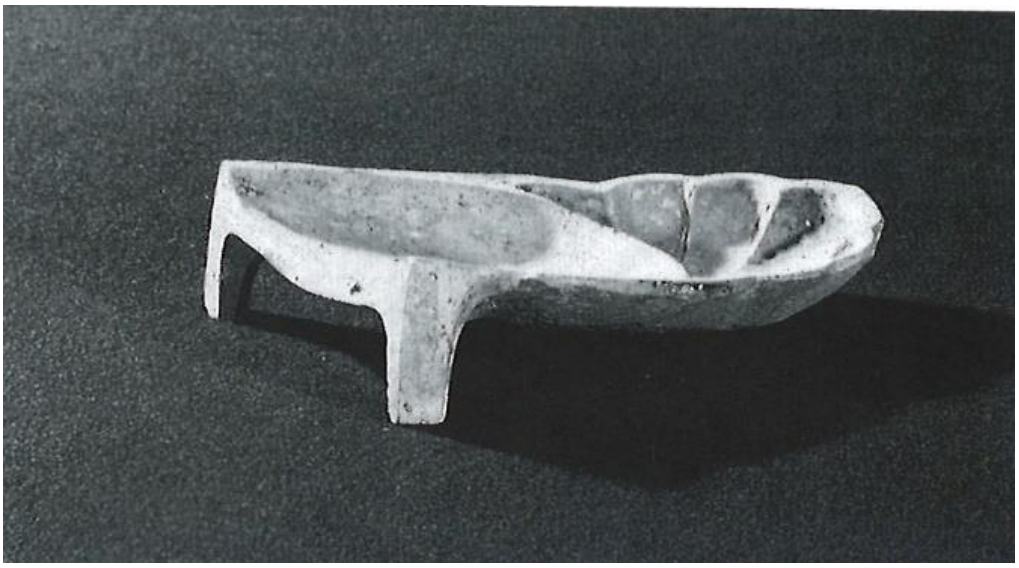

Figure 15: "Pottery Ink Stone"

(Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 419)

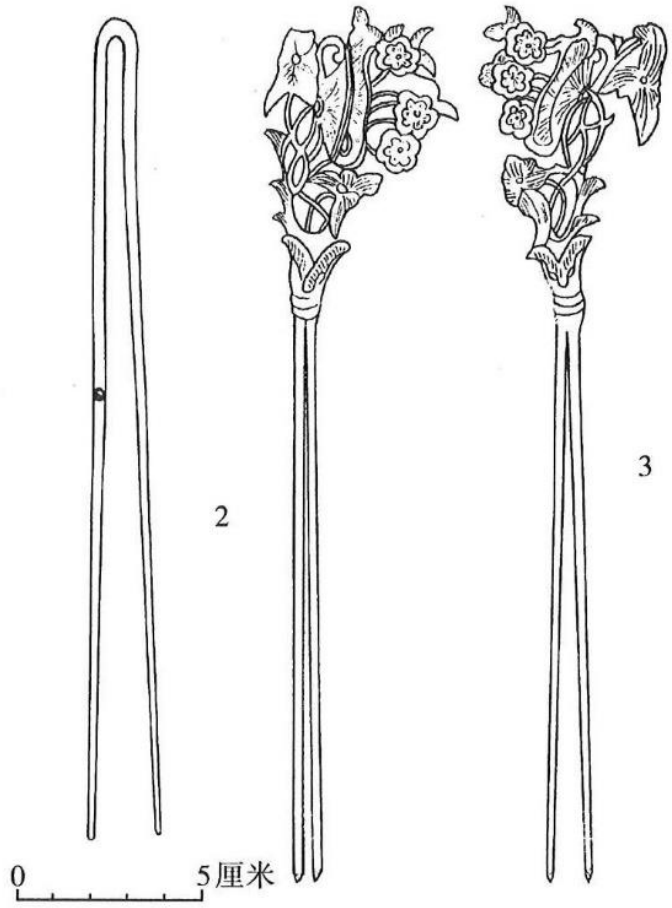

Figure 16: "Sketches of Silver Hairpins"

(Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 205)

Figure 17: "Pottery Figurine of a Horse with Foreign Rider"

(Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 413)

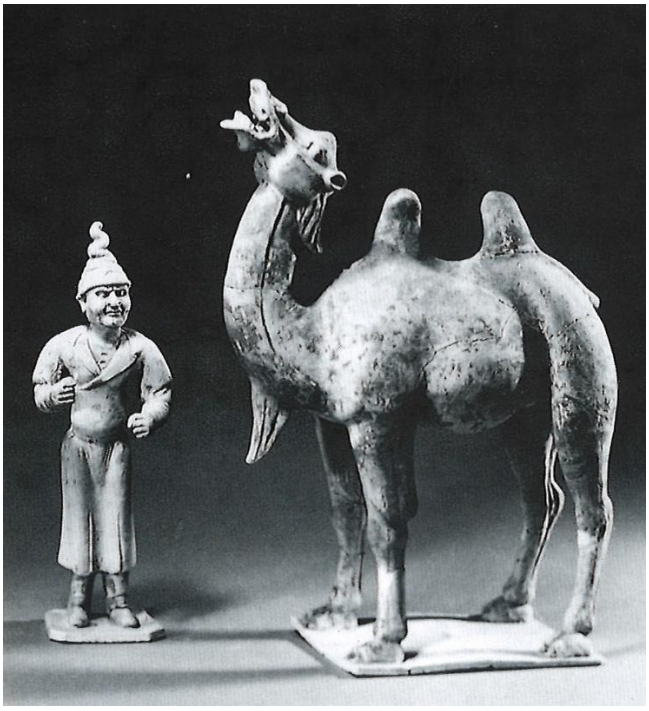

Figure 18: "Pottery Figurine of a Camel with Foreign Groom"

(Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 415)

Figure 19: "Pottery Figurine of a Chicken"

(Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 418)

Figure 20: "Pottery Figurine of a Dog"

(Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001: 418)