

# *Genuine Prestige Goods in Mortuary Contexts: Emulation in Polychrome Silk and Byzantine Solidi from Northern China*



Armin SELBITSCHKA

## ABSTRACT

Archaeologists across all fields of research usually conflate prestige and social status with their use of the concepts “prestige” and “prestige goods.” As a consequence, discussions of prestige goods focus on their active use in status competitions. Prestige is not equal to but one of several contributing factors to social status, however. Prestige is akin to the German noun *ansehen*, which expresses the notion of looking up to someone because of certain qualities possessed by that individual. This has serious ramifications for the traditional understanding of prestige goods. In order to distinguish genuine prestige goods from non-prestige goods in mortuary data, it is necessary to look beyond the motives of individual signalers and instead concentrate on the reactions of responders. Examining emulation of prestigious individuals unlocks the views of contemporary responders in ancient times. Copies of objects yielded from burials are tangible manifestations of *ansehen* (prestige). They convey the information that certain sets of individuals viewed the original items as more than mere luxury products or status symbols. To be sure, genuine prestige goods are most likely of high relative value, but they operate on a deeper social level than luxury items and status symbols. Genuine prestige goods highlight certain aspects of the attitudes of smaller pockets of society rather than universal social mechanisms. An in-depth analysis of various silk fabrics and emulated warp-faced compound tabby weaves (*jin* 錦) dated from the second to early fifth century C.E. burials in the Tarim Basin in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, P.R. China, along with a brief survey of Byzantine *solidi* (gold coins minted by the Eastern Roman empire) and their copies found in early sixth to mid-eighth century C.E. tombs in northern China, serve as the material basis for the argument about emulation and *ansehen*. KEYWORDS: prestige goods, emulation, Silk Road, Xinjiang archaeology.

## INTRODUCTION

THE TERMS “PRESTIGE” AND “PRESTIGE GOODS” FIGURE VERY PROMINENTLY IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES that seek to reconstruct past social orders. More often than not, status is used synonymously with prestige and, as a consequence, status symbols and prestige goods are treated without any degree of differentiation. The production

Armin Selbitschka is a Professor (Chair) of Ancient Chinese History and Archaeology at Ludwig Maximilians University (LMU) Munich.

and exchange of prestige goods are generally held to mark the beginning of social inequality and thus the start of complex society. Certain individuals actively used prestige goods to exert power over people who were not in possession of such objects.

However popular such notions of prestige and prestige goods may be among archaeologists, remarkably, neither sociological nor archaeological theorists have provided distinct definitions of either concept. It is no less surprising that, although both concepts are widely applied in studies of the early Silk Roads, scholars have failed to reflect on their deeper significance. Many books and articles refer to prestige goods without explaining what the notion actually means (e.g., [Bunker 2001:22, 36](#); [Liu 2010:4](#); [Sheng 2013:178, 181](#)). So far, common explanations of prestige goods among archaeologists have been too vague on the one hand and too narrowly focused on their function as tools of political and economic power on the other. Artifacts that have been identified as prestige goods were rarely more than status symbols. They reflected the exact positions their owners held in hierarchically structured societies, but these did not necessarily generate prestige, as may have been intended by the owner. In a stricter sense, prestige is not inextricably linked to the status of an individual. Many different interpretations notwithstanding, scholars usually assume that prestige is akin to esteem. A brief contemplation of the essential meaning of esteem as a social force already suggests that prestige is a relative concept that can only be ascribed by someone other than the self.

Naturally, this causes serious problems for archaeologists, because archaeologists rely on mortuary data more heavily than other sources when assessing matters of social structure, despite the many limitations of these remains. Mortuary data barely enable us to catch a somewhat objective glimpse of the social attitudes held by the deceased and their immediate families, let alone the views of third parties. Nonetheless, I propose that identifying instances of emulation in the mortuary record allows us to determine which artifacts generated real prestige. Analyses of silk textiles from several second to early fifth century C.E. cemeteries on the southern rim of the Tarim Basin (roughly at the center of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, PR China) and a survey of Byzantine *solidi* from various graveyards in northern China suggest that it is crucial to look beyond the motives of signalers or signaling groups if one seeks to recognize genuine prestige goods in archaeological contexts ([Fig. 1](#)).

Some of the inherent qualities of both kinds of finds apparently appealed to wider audiences as they were transmitted from China to the Eastern Roman Empire and vice versa. At first, woven fabrics from unspun silk threads were unknown in the Mediterranean world and thus were truly rare, exotic, and costly objects. Similarly, golden Byzantine *solidi* that weighed roughly 4.5 g and carried the portrait of a human being were unknown in the early medieval Chinese cultural sphere. Objects made of gold were niche products at the time and Chinese coins exclusively featured Chinese writing rather than anthropomorphic iconography. The archaeological record indicates that Chinese silks and *solidi* were highly coveted by some people, yet the genuine articles remained unattainable to all but a few. By way of studying copies of these two types of artifacts in their social contexts, I contend that the act of emulation expresses more than a one-dimensional striving for political control or evolutionary advantage ([Boyd and Richerson 1985:288](#)). It has the capacity to expose the intricate interplay between social actors on a deeper, more personal level.

In order to methodologically separate the prestige goods that fit my definition from vaguely defined prestige goods mentioned in earlier studies, I call such items “genuine prestige goods.” This article starts with a review of the most pertinent arguments on



Fig. 1. Archaeological sites in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, PR China (after Li 2003:14).

prestige goods in archaeological research and then proceeds to an in-depth discussion of notions of status and prestige in sociological literature. I then develop seven criteria for establishing the high relative value of grave goods that will enable scholars to recognize genuine prestige goods in archaeological contexts. In general, the more valuable an item was, the likelier that it generated prestige for its owner. The seven criteria are applied in two case studies of early imperial and early medieval Silk Road finds from northwestern and northern China.

#### PRESTIGE GOODS IN PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

In present-day vernacular the term “prestige good” is commonly used to describe costly objects that enhance the status of social actors by demonstrating their economic wealth. Such understanding of prestige goods dates back to 1899 (1934) when Thorstein Veblen published *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. The book famously introduced the concept of conspicuous consumption, which refers to members of stratified societies spending large amounts of money on things and displaying them ostentatiously. In reaction to such behavior, members of lower social levels often attempt to emulate higher ranking members of society in order to enhance their own social positions.

Marcel Mauss (1923–1924, 1966) picked up on conspicuous consumption while discussing the so-called *potlatch* practice once customary among Native American tribes of the coastal Pacific Northwest. Here, improving one’s social standing did not depend on showcasing wealth, but giving it away or destroying it. The underlying rationale was that expensive gifts required reciprocation (with interest). In cases where the recipient was unable to settle this debt, the giver wielded power over him. For instance, if some chieftains were able to take more highly valued copper plates out of circulation than their competitors, their own status increased (Clark and Blake 1994; Gosden 1987).

Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1986, 1989, 1990; Anheier et al. 1995) has refined Veblen and Mauss' notion of conspicuous consumption and expanded on Karl Marx' understanding of economic capital by introducing additional concepts: cultural capital, symbolic capital, and social capital. In principle, social capital describes the sum of social contacts an individual can rely upon. These are mostly generated within groups as social units and maintained by networks of various sizes (Coleman 1988; Durlauf and Fafchamps 2005; Lin 1999, 2001; Ostrom 2000). Cultural capital exists in three forms: *embodied* cultural capital is mainly based on socialization through family and education; *objectified* cultural capital denotes the use of certain material objects and the knowledge (based on embodied cultural capital) to use or appreciate them; and *institutionalized* cultural capital expresses itself, for instance, in academic titles. The interplay of these different forms of capital essentially determines symbolic capital. The way we talk or dress is one of several possible manifestations of symbolic capital; it makes our abilities visible to our social environment and thus is subject to its judgment.

Although Veblen, Mauss, and Bourdieu did not explicitly discuss prestige goods, their main arguments served as the theoretical framework for most subsequent studies, regardless of the respective fields in which they were conducted. For example, Veblen's insights were eagerly applied by economists (Bagwell and Bernheim 1996; Trigg 2001), anthropologists (Bliege Bird and Smith 2005), and archaeologists (Bagley and Schumann 2013; Clark and Blake 1994; Dietler 2011:183; Kristiansen 2012), despite occasional criticism of the original argument (Campbell 1995).

As far as the discussion of prestige goods among archaeologists is concerned, Aimée Plourde (2006, 2008, 2009) has most recently demonstrated that prestige goods not only originated with the advent of, but were essential for the formation of hierarchically structured societies. Following Amotz Zahavi (1995; Zahavi and Zahavi 1997), she argues that objects can be used to "honestly" transmit certain skills of an individual to an audience (Plourde 2009:268). These skills may include the ability to ensure subsistence by hunting or to establish good relations with people beyond the immediate social milieu (Plourde 2009:268). Plourde (2008:376) contests that prestige goods ultimately are a "manifestation of the end product of their [i.e., the proprietor's] operation," and as such they need to be costly to generate prestige. Based on these assumptions, Plourde has devised a theoretical "costly signaling model" through which prestige goods can be discerned as "honest" symbols of skill (Plourde 2006:4, 26, 46–68, 2008:378–381). Her arguments are essentially rooted in the work of evolutionary anthropologist Robert Boyd and evolutionary biologist Peter J. Richerson. Both scholars asserted on numerous occasions that the majority of the population ("naïve individuals"; Boyd and Richerson 1996:80) choose to imitate the actions of cultural leaders because it is less "costly and error prone" (Boyd and Richerson 1996:84) than learning cultural behavior on their own (see also Boyd and Richerson 1985:242–245; Richerson and Boyd 2001:449). This means, in turn, that the vanguards of society would have to invest more time and effort (i.e., costs) than others in order to assume their prominent roles. Intuitively, one would suppose that expending more resources might result in a reproductive disadvantage, but costly signaling theory (CST) aims to show that the opposite is true. As Stephen Shennan asserts, "investing in the gaining of status to the detriment of reproduction can lead to greater fitness in the medium- to long-term" (2002:225, 2008).

Darwinian archaeology is but one strain of archaeology that makes use of the prestige and prestige good concepts. Jonathan Friedman and Michael Rowlands (1977)

were the first scholars to publish a sophisticated explanation of the prestige good concept. Accordingly, prestige goods serve as luxury and ceremonial items in fledging complex societies. Those who command their production and exchange reinforce their own ritual superiority and exert economic control over the rest of society. For example, domination of the agricultural output can be converted into prestige through elaborate displays of wealth in feasts (Friedman and Rowlands 1977:221–222). Even more influential is the argument that the initial hierarchization of societies was only facilitated by the control of foreign prestige goods. Actors who were skilled enough to establish and sustain long-distance relationships that granted them access to revered materials or objects (i.e., prestige goods) attained higher status and thus exerted economic and political power over the community. Susan Frankenstein and Michael Rowlands (1978) subsequently emphasized this point and it has been widely adopted in many subfields of archaeology ever since (Brumfiel and Earle 1987; Champion 1982; Eggert 1991; Haselgrove 1982; Junker 1993; Kim 1994; Kristiansen 1987; Peregrine 1991*b*, 1992, 1996; Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens 1992; Shennan 1982*a*, 1982*b*; Underhill 2002). Although not quite as popular, stressing the social and political advantages that the control over the production of prestige goods brought to selected individuals has also gained traction among some scholars (Costin 1991; Hayden 1998; Kim 2001; Liu 2003; Peregrine 1991*a*).

Plourde was therefore but the last in a long list of scholars who share the assumption that the political elites of non-capitalist societies actively employ prestige goods—also described as prestige items, wealth goods, wealth items, luxury goods, exotic goods, or status symbols—in order to maintain their superior positions. This is achieved either by controlling foreign trade and thus restricting access to exotica or by commanding the labor of specialized or attached craftworkers and consequently the sought-after products they create. In contexts of emergent complexity, the power exercised by political leaders through the use of prestige goods eventually gave way to stratified societies.

Instead of relying on the work of Veblen or Mauss, Colin Renfrew (1986) initially assumed a Marxist approach. To his mind the concept of value was ideally suited to come to terms with the abundance of golden artifacts that emerged from mid- through late fifth millennium B.C.E. burials at Varna, Bulgaria. In a more recent study, Renfrew (2012) elaborates on the subject and concludes that value as a heuristic tool needs to be thoroughly defined before it can be applied to archaeological material. The Varna gold and other metals throughout European and Western Asian antiquity may have been highly valued and thus prestigious in some cultures, but contemporary cultures in other parts of the world may have prescribed to different value systems. In Neolithic China, for example, jade seems to have been favored as a so-called prestige good. Be that as it may, Renfrew's conclusions are ultimately similar to evolutionary and more traditional approaches. He and others contend that during periods of emerging metal production, having command over certain types of metal such as gold or copper greatly enhanced the owner's social status and thus fostered social inequalities (Flad 2012:321–326; Liu 2003:4–17).

A limited number of scholars have been somewhat critical of the established view of prestige goods. For instance, Rowan Flad and Zachary Hruby (2007:9) oppose the political use and economic understanding of artifacts as “wealth goods” on two grounds. On the one hand, such assertions were commonly based on insufficient evidence. On the other, they do not take the specific use of the actual objects into

account. The second point in particular highlights the fact that utilitarian items might also have been related to prestige, which the traditional attitude towards prestige goods neglects. Flad and Hruby (2007:10) stress that utilitarian goods, prestige goods, and wealth goods depend “on culturally specific values.” Ultimately, it is their use and their inherent qualities that make artifacts prestigious (Flad 2007:109–111, 2011:16–34; Flad and Hruby 2007:9–11).

To be sure, such a refined explanation of prestige goods offers more analytical depth. Nevertheless, neither Flad and Hruby (2007), nor archaeological scholars in general, have devised a specific method that would enable archaeologists to identify particular objects or object groups that truly generated prestige for their proprietors (in addition to the references mentioned above, see Chapman et al. 2006; Dietler 2010; Graeber 2011; Higham et al. 2007; Miller 1987; Mizoguchi 2013; Mullins 2004, 2011; Trubitt 2000). This is largely because relevant studies take the concept of prestige to be common knowledge that warrants no further discussion. Stephen Shennan (2002:226) recognizes this issue when he writes that “archaeological discussions . . . have made extensive use of the concept of prestige but have rarely been very specific about its nature.” Archaeologists instead focus on the structuring qualities of so-called prestige goods as active agents in the social process. Shennan does not ameliorate the problem, however. On the contrary, even though specifically dealing with “prestige,” he does not distinguish it from status (Shennan 2002:224–228). Such indiscriminate treatment of these two fundamental ideas invites closer scrutiny.

#### STATUS VERSUS PRESTIGE

Status in its most universal sociological definition denotes the position of an individual within society (Boudon and Bourricaud 1992:550) (Table 1). Anthropologists and

TABLE 1. VARIOUS PARAMETERS OF SOCIAL STATUS COMPARED WITH PRESTIGE

SOCIAL STATUS		PRESTIGE	
BASIC	REFINED	BASIC	MAY BE BASED ON
Depends on external judgment	Education	Depends on external judgment	Material wealth
Age	Intelligence	One aspect of social status	Immaterial qualities ('virtues')
Gender	Monetary wealth	Equivalent to German <i>Ansehen</i>	
Occupation	Command of physical force Command of material goods Presumed ability to control physical phenomena Ability to restore mental and physical health Obedience of others Deference of others Esteem of others		



archaeologists often emphasize that this position is either *ascribed* or *achieved*. Following Ralph Linton, “*ascribed* statuses are those which are assigned to individuals without reference to their innate differences or abilities,” while “*achieved* statuses are, as a minimum, those requiring special qualities, although they are not limited to these” (Linton 1936:115, emphases in original; also see Ames 2008:489; Foladare 1969; Peebles and Kus 1977). Ascribed status, then, comprises congenital characteristics such as race, gender, and age, whereas achieved status depends on past accomplishments. For instance, the status of the Queen of England is ascribed since she inherited the position from her father. Considering that being elected into office (ideally) rests on the political merits of the candidate, the status of the President of the United States of America is achieved. The latter point indicates that certain portions of a given society must concur on evaluative parameters when they judge the actions of each other (Homans 1974:197). What constitute merits to some observers are flaws to others. It follows that status is a relative and dynamic concept. Yet, the more pressing question is: what exactly are those parameters? Race, gender, and age are some of the basic variables that contribute to a person’s social standing today. Further, the definition of ascribed status emphasizes that money or other forms of material wealth, along with subjective traits such as ambition, effort, performance, deference, obedience, or esteem received by individuals can enhance their social position (Boudon and Bourricaud 1992:551; Homans 1974:198).

Prestige has been defined, for instance, as (a) the standing or estimation of individuals in the eyes of people, or (b) their commanding position (Henrich and Gil-White 2001:168). On closer inspection, it becomes clear that this vision of *prestige* basically corresponds with the above explanation of ascribed *status* (Table 1). By invoking theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking as an example of someone who is “often said to have ‘prestige’,” Henrich and Gil-White (2001:167) attribute high status to a person who excels in a desired field. Similar to a host of other scholars in various disciplines, they equate the esteem signalers receive with the status they hold in society (Gould 2002:1147; Henrich and Gil-White 2001:177). The notion of “esteem” is highly relevant for our understanding of prestige inasmuch as both concepts are usually used interchangeably (Goode 1978:3). However, George Homans (1980) makes the vital observation that esteem or prestige is but one of several constitutive dimensions of (ascribed and achieved) status (Table 1).

#### *Prestige as a Relative Concept: The Notion of Ansehen*

However ambiguous or vague the common explanations of prestige and status may be, they all concur that prestige describes some kind of positive veneration extended by responders toward signalers. The English term “esteem” in its sense of expressing a feeling of respect or admiration for someone indeed comes rather close to the point. The German word ‘*Ansehen*’ describes the same attitude. *Ansehen*, used as a verb, literally means “to look up to someone or something,” but has the advantage of also being used as a noun for the admiration that comes from looking up to someone or something. The following hypothetical examples demonstrate that assuming the onlooker’s or responder’s perspective is indispensable if one wishes to identify genuine prestige goods on the basis of mortuary evidence.

In theory, there are two reasons for responders to look up to signalers. First, a person might be admired for their immaterial qualities. For instance, the general public still holds Mother Teresa's selfless actions in high esteem even though some concerns about her dogmatic religious and political views, supposedly questionable care for the sick, and purported mismanagement of donations have been raised (Larivée et al. 2013:326–332).

Second, individuals might be venerated due to their command of certain objects that make at least part of their admired qualities physically visible. According to Pierre Bourdieu's (1986:50–51, 1990) concept of objectified cultural capital, audiences might not only appreciate these individuals for the material and aesthetic appeal of the artifacts they possess, but also for having the intellectual expertise necessary to acquire and utilize them. Such items would be genuine prestige goods. Signalers may very well use them in active attempts to attract admiration or exert economic and political power over others as many archaeologists have argued, but it is essential to realize that such efforts need not necessarily have the desired outcome. Even more crucially, senders who do *not* consciously aim at garnering prestige may nevertheless be admired on account of certain goods in their possession. This claim is somewhat related to Flad and Hruby's (2007:9–11) assertion that utilitarian objects may also carry prestige. For example, a person may rely on the support of an antique cane that means nothing to most onlookers, but some observers might recognize it as something special and admire its owner for his or her good taste and the financial means to acquire such an exquisite and exclusive item.

Accepting the relative insignificance of the intentions of senders, however, is essential to understanding the phenomenon correctly. Ultimately, responders decide whether the behavior or objects of signalers genuinely generate prestige, that is, *ansehen*. This is best explained by another hypothetical example. Nowadays, expensive and powerful sports cars are often referred to as prestige goods. Viewers who appreciate the technical sophistication, power, aesthetics, and potential to attract attention that is inherent in such automobiles would agree, but these cars might mean something entirely different to other observers. Some might not find them aesthetically pleasing; others might regard them (and by extension their owners) as incarnations of the evils of cut-throat capitalism. Some environmentalists would condemn the waste of natural resources that goes along with gas-guzzling sports cars. Therefore responders in any given society or even members of a single social class are hardly ever likely to unanimously agree on what constitutes prestige or prestige goods. Some individuals will always hold certain skills, virtues, or objects in highest regard, whereas others will not care about the same skills, virtues, or associated objects in the slightest. Thus, rather than ascribing universal structural significance to prestige and prestige goods, it is more appropriate to focus on the significance ascribed by small sets of individuals such as groups, cliques, or extended families (DeMarrais 2011:165–166; Freeman 1992; Homans 1950; Mokken 1979; Moody 2001; Richerson and Boyd 2001:458).

In sum, prestige is not equivalent to social status, although it is a contributing dimension to it. Prestige is also not exclusively and solely generated by material wealth, as it can also be attributed through personal traits such as wisdom, selflessness, or other qualities a certain set of individuals regard as valuable. The German noun *ansehen* most aptly describes how prestige is generated by people (responders) with shared core values who look up to signalers who command more of the skills and traits they value (Table 1).



## IDENTIFYING PRESTIGE GOODS IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS: RELATIVE VALUE, PRESTIGE, AND EMULATION

Taking this more nuanced understanding of prestige as a steppingstone, the most pressing question becomes: How does prestige relate to mortuary data? Material remains preserved in tombs usually do not directly reveal any of the immaterial qualities of the deceased. In addition, archaeologists are missing information on whether certain artifacts were intended to enhance the social profile of their owners. They are also lacking clues as to how the larger society surrounding the proprietors perceived those objects.

An even more fundamental issue is at stake: Are mortuary data even suitable for inferring social significance? In the past, two strands of archaeology have extensively discussed this question and proposed almost diametrically opposed answers. Essentially, proponents of the so-called “New/Processual Archaeology” regard the quantity and quality of burial goods recovered from any given cemetery as direct reflections of past social structures. The more wealth accumulated in a tomb, the higher the status of its occupant (Binford 1971; Saxe 1970). In contrast, post-processual archaeologists emphasize that this straightforward correlation cannot be taken for granted. The burial itself was but the final act in possibly quite a long list of funerary rituals that may have served to exaggerate the actual social position of the deceased (and ultimately also supposed to boost the status of the bereaved). Thus, a much larger number of objects of substantially higher quality might be unveiled from a grave than the dead individual would have been able to command during his or her lifetime (Morris 1992:1–30; Parker Pearson 2000:9). There is no need to go into more detail here, since the debate has already been extensively covered in previous scholarship (Flad 2000:5–9; O’Shea 1984:3–22). Suffice it to say that my argument works in either case, since it focuses on the effect material culture has on an audience rather than the intentions of the deceased or their survivors. For our purposes, it is of secondary importance whether a lavishly decorated garment cut from the finest fabrics available at the time was thought to impress observers while the owners themselves were hosting a magnificent feast or while they were lying fully clothed on a bier for all guests to see during a funerary feast. The key is that at least some audience members held the dead individuals or their descendants in greater esteem on account of the garment.

The difficulty for archaeologists is finding evidence of such instances of admiration. I propose that the act of emulation and its physical expression in any kind of material culture provides a way to pinpoint prestige and identify genuine prestige goods in mortuary contexts. *Emulation* must not be mistaken for *imitation*, however. Richerson and Boyd (2001:446) argue that imitation encompasses the adaptation of the entire behavior of a single person. Out of several dozens of individuals, observers choose the one whose behavior they find most beneficial. The implication for the example of elaborate attire is that onlookers would not just copy the piece of clothing itself, but also adopt the *habitus* of the deceased that goes along with wearing it (Bourdieu 1990). Obviously, this is very difficult to accomplish if guests only laid eyes on the deceased for the first time at the funeral ceremony. Considering that funerals were venues of social competition that involved large audiences (Hayden 2009:32–33), we cannot assume that the deceased or their living relatives were personally acquainted with every single guest. Unlike imitation, the act of emulation does not attempt to duplicate every aspect of the behavior of another human being, but only a fraction of it. Emulation

focuses on copying the results of actions instead of the actions themselves (Tennie et al. 2006:1159–1161). Emulating nice attire (and other kinds of material culture) expresses one person's appreciation for the visual representation of another person's behavior. The admiration of responders may have deeper roots in the actions of signalers—that is, responders may actually imitate signalers—but this need not always be the case.

The argument presented in the previous section suggests that the notion of *ansehen*/prestige invariably entails positive value judgments on the part of the recipients. However, object value in itself is a highly complex issue that is usually tied up in the discourse surrounding prestige goods (Papadopoulos and Urton 2012; Renfrew 2012). As the common assumption goes, the more exotic or rare an item, the higher its value. Although still arguing within the limits of this framework, Rowan Flad (2012) urges a more profound approach. Building on the work of Arjun Appadurai (1986) and Igor Kopytoff (1986), he insists that researchers should consider the social context in which an item was used and, even more importantly, acknowledge that its social contexts might have changed over time. Object value is therefore a dynamic concept that requires us to look at all stages of an object's biography, including its production, use, and eventual disposal (Flad 2012:309–312).

Any quest for genuine prestige goods in mortuary contexts must thus start with an assessment of the relative value of the objects under review. In what follows, I develop a set of seven specific criteria to help in establishing the relative value of any object with some degree of certainty. First, relative high production and acquisition costs of items are the most widely accepted features of prestigious quality, as these costs guarantee a degree of exclusivity. It is safe to assume that ownership of costly objects was admired by people in ancient times. Thus, two aspects of the relative value of a material or object may be examined: (1) its high cost relative to other finds in the archaeological assemblage; and (2) its "intrinsic value," that is, the worth a given society or culture ascribes to an object based on shared norms. As mentioned briefly above, the different degrees of appreciation of gold and other metals in Neolithic Europe and jade in Neolithic China are examples of the "intrinsic" aspect of relative value. Appadurai (1986:34) and Renfrew (2012:259) therefore suggest substituting "prime value" for "intrinsic value." Directly related to the prime value of any good is the availability of raw materials (second criterion) and the labor intensity and technical expertise required to produce it (third criterion) (Flad 2012:310; Hayden 1998:12).

Relative intrinsic value may relate more strongly to the fourth criterion, exoticism. Artifacts whose nature or provenance were perceived as exotic could have appealed to some observers. Such exotic items were often rather costly, but not necessarily so (Appadurai 1986:38; Miller 1987:122). Mary Helms (1992:159) maintains that prestige could be gained by traveling to distant places in order to "obtain politically and ideologically useful materials." Imbued with the aura of the unknown, artifacts from far away realms could evoke feelings of appreciation, admiration, or longing among the uninitiated in one's native country. The only ones to decipher their hidden meanings were the travelers who acquired them (Helms 1992:159–160, 1993:101–108, 173–191). Exotic objects represent cultural and symbolic capital in Bourdieu's (1977, 1986, 1990) sense.

A fifth criterion for assessing relative value relates to items that were subject to social restrictions (Appadurai 1986:38; Kopytoff 1986:74). According to the distinction between status and prestige laid out above, such items would be treated as status symbols. It is important to keep in mind, however, that status symbols do not

necessarily induce prestige as defined here (Barkow 1975:558). For instance, the crown and scepter as symbols were inextricably linked to medieval European kings. Judging from the perspective of suppressed and exploited subjects of some iniquitous regents, these symbols did not inherently foster universal admiration of those kings.

A sixth criterion is based on archaeologists analyzing the special position or nature of certain finds within burial good assemblages (Flad 2012:310; Renfrew 1986:148). Objects placed in special positions may not only have been of particular importance to the burial ritual itself, but also served a special function during the tomb occupant's lifetime. Seventh, a find might be identified as an heirloom object. The longer the biography of an object, the greater the chance that it has accumulated additional, ideologically charged meanings (Flad 2012:310; Fogelin and Schiffer 2015; Gosden and Marshall 1999; Kopytoff 1986; Stahl 2010).

The following list summarizes the seven criteria for assessing the relative value of an archaeological object:

1. Relative high production or acquisition costs (suggesting exclusiveness)
2. Availability of raw materials
3. Labor intensity and technical expertise in production
4. Exoticism
  - (a) Nature of object itself
  - (b) Provenance
5. Social restrictions
6. Special character in context of tomb assemblage
  - (a) Nature of object itself
  - (b) Position in tomb and in relation to body
7. Heirloom

I contend that the higher the relative value of an item, that is, the higher number of the seven criteria apply to objects recovered from burials, the likelier it was regarded as a genuine prestige good by appreciative viewers. Such artifacts may very well have generated *ansehen* among some responders. This can only be safely assessed using the litmus test of emulation, however. Copies and their originals must stem from geographically related tombs that date from at least the same era. Ideally, burials that yield copies would date slightly younger than tombs that contained originals, since the goal for the archaeologist is to demonstrate that the copies were produced in reaction to originals. In order to add another layer of certainty, special attention needs to be paid to criterion seven, the position of the finds within the respective tomb assemblages. It seems plausible to assume that copies being placed on the body of the deceased or in the burial chamber in the identical positions of contemporary originals would indicate that the copies and originals had comparable functions.

#### EMULATION OF SILK FABRICS IN TARIM BASIN BURIALS

##### *Tarim Basin Sites and Archaeological Materials*

Here I analyze silk finds from a total of 79 tombs that date from the second through early fifth centuries C.E. (Table 2). The tombs are distributed across four cemeteries along the so-called Southern Route of the Silk Road (Hansen 2012:6). As this epithet indicates, the Loulan (Lopnor) 樓蘭, Yingpan 營盤, Zhagunluke 札滾魯克 (Uyghur: Charchan), and Niya 尼雅 graveyards are located at the southern rim of the Tarim

TABLE 2. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF SILK FINDS BY WEAVE TYPE IN TARIM BASIN BURIALS

	NO. TOMBS PER SITE	JUAN 絹		QI 綺		JIN 錦		TAQUETÉ	
		NO.	% OF	NO.	% OF	NO.	% OF	NO.	% OF
		TOMBS	TOTAL	TOMBS	TOTAL	TOMBS	TOTAL	TOMBS	TOTAL
Lopnor	13	11	84.6%	7	53.8%	10	76.9%	0	n/a
Yingpan	29	18	27.6%	5	17.2%	6	20.7%	4	13.8%
Zhagunluke	25	6	24.0%	2	8.0%	6	24.0%	8	32.0%
Niya	12	5	41.7%	2	16.7%	5	41.7%	0	n/a
Total tombs with silk finds	79	41	51.9%	16	20.3%	27	34.2%	12	15.2%

Basin, which sits roughly at the center of today's Xinjiang Autonomous Region (Fig. 1). In the early twentieth century, *Sven Hedin* (1937) and *Aurel Stein* (1928a, 1928b) were the first to partially excavate these sites. Since the late 1960s, Chinese and Japanese archaeologists have revisited them on a regular basis and produced a steady stream of excavation reports.<sup>1</sup> The following arguments are based on the findings of early European explorers and more recent Chinese archaeologists. It is worth noting that more than the 79 tombs discussed here are known from the four sites. Many are extremely poorly preserved since most of them have been looted or flooded at least once over the past century. In addition, a small number of more or less well-preserved burials have already been excavated, but still await publication. Thus, readers may catch glimpses of finds that completely lack archaeological context. These extraordinary artifacts are usually textiles that appeared in exhibition catalogues or individual studies.

A few burials surprised the excavators by yielding well-preserved mummies and clothes. The finds from ostentatiously furnished tombs such as 95MN1M3 and 95MN1M8 at Niya and 95BYYM15 at Yingpan (source of the so-called “Yingpan Man”) feature in almost every book or article on the early Silk Road. Their occupants wore several layers of extravagant silk (as well as cotton and wool) garments and spare attire was placed in their tombs. Occasionally, they were covered by large silk blankets. However, we must not treat these remarkable burials as default yardsticks for comparison, especially when we are interested in textile finds. Even though Tables 2 and 3 gather a fair number of tabby and *jin*-silk fabrics that emerged from the Tarim Basin tombs, most of them were not nearly as well stocked as 95MN1M3, 95MN1M8, and 95BYYM15. Table 2 includes tombs that might have yielded several square meters of various kinds of silk fabrics along with burials that might have contained just a single fragment of silk cloth. The percentages of tombs that yielded silks listed in this table need to be viewed against this backdrop. A similar caveat concerns clothes that surfaced from the Tarim Basin tombs. Apart from the apparel yielded from 95MN1M3, 95MN1M8, and 95BYYM15, a few other garments were almost fully preserved, but even these pieces were partially decayed at spots that were in direct contact with the skin of the deceased. Unless there are clear traces of mending, it is almost impossible to determine whether such attire was worn while the deceased was still alive.

As for the tomb assemblages, every single site revealed burials that contained finds to which at least two of the seven criteria of relative value apply. In general, the standard equipment found in the assemblages fails to conform to more than one criterion, although some of the artifacts likely were somewhat costly. The bulk of the common

TABLE 3. COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF JIN-SILK FINDS FROM TARIM BASIN BURIALS

INVENTORY NO.	DETAILS JIN-SILK ITEMS				THREAD COUNT (PER CM)		
	DESCRIPTION <sup>a</sup>	DECORATIVE PATTERN	FIND SPOT	CHINESE INSCRIPTION	BASE COLOR	WARP	WEFT
<b>Yingpan</b>							
95BYYM14:8-2b	Narrow ribbon applied to damask-like silk robe to cover seam	Rectangles, volutes	Body	None	Red	50	10
95BYYM14:7	Fragment	Rectangles, animals	At hip	王	Red	n/s	n/s
95BYYM15:14	Two cloths sewn together	Cloud scroll, lion, bird	At hip	右(祐)壽	Beige	159	22
99BYYM7:21	Narrow ribbon applied to lower edge of silk jacket	Floral design	Body	None	Red	n/s	n/s
99BYYM13	Narrow ribbon applied to edges of damask-like ( <i>qi</i> ) silk robe	n/s	Body	None	n/s	n/s	n/s
95BYYM20:4	Narrow ribbon applied to edge of garment	Cloud scroll	Body	登高	Red	180	44
99BYYM23:3	n/s	n/s	n/s	Illegible	Blue	160	32
<b>Loulan/Lopnor</b>							
34:46	Narrow ribbon applied to edge of garment	Cloud, dragon, animal	Body	仁繡	Red	40-42	20-30
35:20	Fragment	Wavy line, two dots		None	Faded	n/s	n/s
35:18.a	Pouch	Cloud scroll	Coffin	無極	Red	40	24
35:18.b	Narrow strip applied to pouch No. 35:18	Cloud scroll, ducks	Coffin	宜	Blue	50	24
L.C.i.06	Narrow strip applied to cotton fragment	Cloud scroll, birds	Body	韓仁繡文宏吉 子孫無極	Faded	n/s	n/s
L.C.i.09	Three fragments	Cloud, feline, ovine	Body	萬	Blue	n/s	n/s
L.C.i.010	Fragment	Ovines in lozenges	Body	None	Green	n/s	n/s

(Continued)

TABLE 3. (Continued)

INVENTORY NO.	DETAILS JIN-SILK ITEMS				THREAD COUNT (PER CM)		
	DESCRIPTION <sup>a</sup>	DECORATIVE PATTERN	FIND SPOT	CHINESE INSCRIPTION	BASE COLOR	WARP	WEFT
L.C.ii.01	Fragment, likely part of garment	Monster, animals	Body	None	Ochre	n/s	n/s
L.C.ii.03	Wedge-shaped fragment	Cloud, feline, deer	Body	延年益	Red	n/s	n/s
L.C.ii.04	Fragment	Lozenge, zigzag line	Body	None	Yellow	n/s	n/s
L.C.ii.07.a	Fragment	Cloud, animal, equestrian	Body	樂明光	Blue	n/s	n/s
L.C.ii.07.c	Three fragments, likely part of garment	Cloud scroll, birds	Body	長樂	Red	n/s	n/s
L.C.ii.05.a	Fragment	Wavy line, rectangle	Body	None	Blue	n/s	n/s
L.C.ii.08.a	Fragment, likely part of garment	Octagon, seven dots	Body	None	Yellow	n/s	n/s
L.C.iii.04.b	Ribbon, likely part of garment	Octagon, seven dots	Body	None	Blue	n/s	n/s
L.C.iii.02	Fragment	Cloud scroll	Body	None	Red	n/s	n/s
L.C.iii.04.c	Fragment	n/s	Body	None	Faded	n/s	n/s
L.C.iii.012	Several fragments	Cloud scroll, birds	Body	None	n/s	n/s	n/s
L.C.iii.016	Fragment	Unrecognizable	Body	None	n/s	n/s	n/s
L.C.iii.017.a	Fragment of garment	Cloud, feline, beast	Body	None	Lost	n/s	n/s
L.C.iii.017.b	Fragment of garment	Unrecognizable	Body	None	Lost	n/s	n/s
L.C.iii.017.c	Fragment of garment	Unrecognizable	Body	None	Lost	n/s	n/s
L.C.iii.019	Narrow strip	Cloud, feline, equestrian	Body	None	Dark	n/s	n/s
L.C.iii.020	Fragment		Body	None		n/s	n/s
L.C.iii.01	Fragment	Cloud, feline, caprine	Body	永	Blue	n/s	n/s
L.C.iii/MB2.38	Fragment	Cloud, feline, caprine	Body	永昌	Blue	n/s	n/s

(Continued)



TABLE 3. (Continued)

INVENTORY NO.	DETAILS JIN-SILK ITEMS				THREAD COUNT (PER CM)			
	DESCRIPTION <sup>a</sup>	DECORATIVE PATTERN	FIND SPOT	CHINESE INSCRIPTION	BASE COLOR	WARP	WEFT	
L.C.iii.04.a	Several garment fragments	Cloud, feline, bird	Body	登高明望四海 (?)	Blue	126	26	
L.C.iii/MB2:47	Fragment, likely part of garment	Cloud scroll	Body	登高貴富	Blue	n/s	n/s	
L.C.iii/MB2:42	Fragment	Cloud, mythical being	Body	望四海貴富 壽為國慶	Blue	132	27	
L.C.iii.011	Fragment, likely part of garment	Cloud, feline, equestrian	Body	長樂明光	Blue	129	24	
L.C.iii/MB2:44	Fragment	Cloud, feline, equestrian	Body	長樂明光	Blue	n/s	n/s	
L.C.iii/MB2:45	Fragment	Cloud, feline, bird	Body	長壽明光	Blue	138	26	
L.C.iii.018	Fragment	n/s	Body	None	Faded	144	30	
L.C.iii/MB2:33	Fragment	Cloud, bird, animals	Body	延年益壽	Red	n/s	n/s	
L.C.iii/MB2:34	Fragment	Cloud, bird, animals	Body	延年益壽長保子孫	Red	84	22	
L.C.iii/MB2:32/37	Fragment in two pieces	Cloud, animals	Body	延年益壽大宜子孫	Red	96	27	
L.C.iii/MB2	n/s	n/s	Body	廣山	Blue	84	22	
L.C.iii/MB2	n/s	n/s	Body	續世	n/s	129	27	
L.C.iii/MB2	n/s	n/s	Body	澤	n/s	n/s	n/s	
L.C.iii/MB2	n/s	n/s	Body	孫	n/s	n/s	n/s	
L.C.iii/MB2	n/s	n/s	Body	年	n/s	n/s	n/s	
L.C.iii/MB2	n/s	n/s	Body	萬	n/s	n/s	n/s	
L.C.v.014	Narrow strip	Spirals	Body	None	Faded	n/s	n/s	
L.C.v.017	Two narrow strips	Wavy line, two dots	Body	None	Blue	n/s	n/s	
L.C.v.023	Small fragment	n/s	Body	None	Faded	n/s	n/s	
L.C.v.027.a	Three fragments	Ovine in lozenges	Body	None	Green	n/s	n/s	

(Continued)

TABLE 3. (*Continued*)

DETAILS JIN-SILK ITEMS				THREAD COUNT (PER CM)			
INVENTORY NO.	DESCRIPTION <sup>a</sup>	DECORATIVE PATTERN	FIND SPOT	CHINESE INSCRIPTION	BASE COLOR	WARP	WEFT
L.C.v.027.b	Seven fragments	Lozenge, wave, dots	Body	None	Green	n/s	n/s
L.C.vi.03	Narrow strip	Rectangles	Body	None	Red/black	n/s	n/s
L.C.vii.07.a	Some strips, likely pieces of garments	Cloud scrolls	Body	None	Red	n/s	n/s
L.C.vii.07.b	Two narrow strips	n/s	Body	None	n/s	n/s	n/s
L.C.vii.02	Fragment	Wavy line, two dots	Body	子孫宜錦世績	Blue	n/s	n/s
L.C.ix.02	Small fragment	Tiger stripes	Coffin	None	Faded	n/s	n/s
L.C.x.04	Small fragment	Monster, animal	Coffin	None	Yellow	n/s	n/s
<b>Zhagunlake</b>							
96QZIM60:2	One fragment	Cloud, mythical beings	Body	延年益壽大宜子孫	Red	80	28
98QZIM137:1	One fragment	Twines, birds	n/s	None	White	120	40
98QZIM141:c2-1	One fragment	Octagon, blossoms	Collect.	None	Red	136	44
98QZIM141:c2-3	One fragment	Twines, blossoms	Collect.	None	Green	112	47
98QZIM142:1-2	Five fragments	Twines	Body	None	Red	150	36
<b>Jiava 'airike</b>							
95XQJM6	One fragment	n/s	n/s	年, 益, 壽, 長	n/s	n/s	n/s
<b>Niya</b>							
95MNIM1:30	Pillow	Mountain, animals	Coffin	韓侃吳牢錦右二	Blue	188	22
95MNIM1:43	Edging of woolen robe	n/s	Body	None	n/s	n/s	n/s
95MNIM1	Waistband	n/s	Body	None	n/s	n/s	n/s
95MNIM1:42	Mittens	Geometric patterns	Hands	None	n/s	n/s	n/s
95MNIM1:10	Small bag holding two wooden combs	n/s	Coffin	None	n/s	n/s	n/s
95MNIM1:18	Small bag	Mountain, tree	Coffin	金池鳳	White	230	24

(*Continued*)

TABLE 3. (Continued)

INVENTORY NO.	DETAILS JIN-SILK ITEMS				THREAD COUNT (PER CM)			
	DESCRIPTION <sup>a</sup>	DECORATIVE PATTERN	FIND SPOT	CHINESE INSCRIPTION	BASE COLOR	WARP	WEFT	
95MN1M1	Edges of robe	n/s	Body	恩澤下歲大執長保 二親子孫息極疆 世毋極錦宜二 親傳子孫	n/s	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3:25	Face cover	Wavy line, two dots	Face	None	Blue	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3:26	Face cover	Lozenges, blossoms	Face	None	White	100	30	
95MN1M3:24	Blanket	Cloud scrolls	On occ.	王侯合昏千秋萬歲 子孫	Blue	168	22	
95MN1M3:32	Pillow	Wavy line, two dots	Head	極錦宜二親傳子孫	Blue	160	24	
95MN1M3:40	Robe	Chequer	Body	None	Black/yellow	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3:57	Pair of trousers	Cloud scrolls	Body	王侯合昏千秋 萬歲子孫	Blue	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3:51	Mitten, right	Wavy line, two dots	Hands	世毋極錦宜	Blue	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3:51	Mitten, left	Wavy line, two dots	Hands	二親傳子孫	Blue	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3:56	Pillow	Cloud scrolls	Head	王侯合昏千秋 萬歲子孫	Blue	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3:43	Robe, jin A	Animals, humans	Body	None	Blue	108	24	
95MN1M3:43	Robe, jin B	Wavy line, two dots	Body	世毋極錦宜二 親傳子孫(?)	Blue	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3:47	Pair of trousers	Cloud, equestrian	Body	長樂大明光	Blue	176	20	
95MN1M3:44	Mitten palm, jin A	n/s	Hands	延年益壽	Red	176	29	
95MN1M3:44	Mitten shaft, jin B	Wavy line, two dots	Hands	世毋極錦宜 二親傳子孫	Blue	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3:53	Socks	Cloud, mythical beings	Feet	延年益壽長葆子孫	Blue	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3:12:⑦	Pouch containing mirror, jin A	Yellow lozenges	In box	None	Blue	n/s	n/s	

(Continued)

TABLE 3. (Continued)

INVENTORY NO.	DETAILS, JIN-SILK ITEMS		DECORATIVE PATTERN	FIND SPOT	CHINESE INSCRIPTION	BASE COLOR	THREAD COUNT (PER CM)	
	DESCRIPTION <sup>a</sup>						WARP	WEFT
95MN1M3:12:⑦	Pouch containing mirror, <i>jin</i> B	Wavy line, two dots	In box	世, 極錦宜二親傳子	Blue	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3	Small fragments in toiletry box	Wavy line, two dots	In box	世毋極錦宜二親傳子孫(?)	Blue	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3	Small fragments in toiletry box	Cloud scrolls	In box	王侯合昏千秋萬歲子孫(?)	Blue	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3:49	Fish-shaped emblem	Twines	At hip	None	Brown	76	22	
95MN1M3:30	Pouch	Wavy line, two dots	Coffin	宜二親	Blue	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3:20	Bag containing two wooden combs	Cloud, winged animal	Coffin	None	Red	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3:18	Narrow band applied to edge of hat	Cloud scrolls	Coffin	王侯合昏千秋萬歲子孫	Blue	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3:18	Small triangular fragment applied to hat	Geometric patterns	Coffin	None	Brown	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3:22	Jacket, <i>jin</i> A	Wavy line, two dots	Coffin	世毋極錦宜二親傳子孫	Blue	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3:22	Jacket, <i>jin</i> B	Monster, bi 璧-disc	Coffin	廣山	Red	120	24	
95MN1M3:22	Jacket, <i>jin</i> C	Cloud, animals	Coffin	None	Blue	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M3:60	Arm guard	Wavy line, two dots	Coffin	世毋極錦	Blue	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M4:22	Fragment applied to garment	Equestrian, camel	n/s	None	n/s	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M8:29	Pillow	Cloud scrolls	Head	安樂如意長壽無極	Red	n/s	n/s	
95MN1M8	Wide bands applied at edges of wool robe, <i>jin</i> A	Mountain, equestrian	Body	文大	Red	176	24	

(Continued)

TABLE 3. (Continued)

INVENTORY NO.	DETAILS JIN-SILK ITEMS			THREAD COUNT (PER CM)			
	DESCRIPTION <sup>a</sup>	DECORATIVE PATTERN	FIND SPOT	CHINESE INSCRIPTION	BASE COLOR	WARP	WEFT
95MN1M8	Wide bands applied at edges of wool robe, <i>jīn B</i>	Cloud, animal, birds	Body	延年益壽長葆子孫	Red	176	20
95MN1M8	Wide bands applied at edges of wool robe, <i>jīn C</i>	Cloud, animal, birds	Body	安樂繡	Red	176	24
95MN1M8	Wide bands applied at edges of wool robe, <i>jīn D</i>	Cloud, animal	Body	宜子孫	Red	176	24
95MN1M8	Wide bands applied at edges of wool trousers	Cloud, animal, birds	Body	延年益壽長葆子孫	Blue	176	24
95MN1M8	Mittens	Cloud, animal	Hands	受右	Blue	160	24
95MN1M8:35	Pillow	Mountain, animal, tree	Head	千秋萬歲宜子孫	Blue	154	24
95MN1M8	Mittens	Yellow geometric pattern	Hands	None	Blue	n/s	n/s
95MN1M8	Narrow strip applied at the edge of pouch attached to goryt	Brown geometric pattern	Coffin	None	Red	n/s	n/s
95MN1M8:49	Hat, <i>jīn A</i>	Clouds, human	Coffin	河生山內安	White	176	24
95MN1M8:49	Hat, <i>jīn B</i>	Clouds, human	Coffin	德口子	White	176	24
95MN1M8:41	Trouser-shaped emblem	Cloud, mountain	Coffin	討南羌	Blue	220	24
95MN1M8:15	Arm guard	Cloud, animal, birds	Coffin	五星出東方利中國	Blue	220	24
95MN1M8:52	Bag	Tiger stripes	Coffin	None	Beige	132	24
95MN1M8:53	Fish emblem	Horned mythical creature	Coffin	None	Blue	160	20

(Continued)

TABLE 3. (Continued)

INVENTORY NO.	DETAILS, JIN-SILK ITEMS				THREAD COUNT (PER CM)		
	DESCRIPTION <sup>a</sup>	DECORATIVE PATTERN	FIND SPOT	CHINESE INSCRIPTION	BASE COLOR	WARP	WEFT
95MNI1M8:55	Bag containing two wooden combs	Equestrian, tiger	Coffin	None		220	20
59MNI1M001	Fragments on upper body of male occupant	n/s	Body	延年益壽大宜子孫 (?)	Red	n/s	n/s
59MNI1M001	Fragment on mouth of male occupant	n/s	Body	延年益壽大宜子孫 (?)	Red	n/s	n/s
59MNI1M001	Hat	n/s	Body	延年益壽大宜子孫 (?)	Red	n/s	n/s
59MNI1M001	Narrow band applied at edge of silk hat	Lozenges	Head	陽 (?)	Black/grey	n/s	n/s
59MNI1M001	Narrow band applied at edges of face cover	Lozenges	Face	陽	Black/grey	n/s	n/s
59MNI1M001	Pillow	Cloud, animal	Head	延年益壽大宜子孫 (?)	Red	n/s	n/s
59MNI1M001	Robe, <i>jīn</i> A	Cloud scrolls	Body	萬世如意	Red	168	25-26
59MNI1M001	Robe, <i>jīn</i> B	Cloud, animal	Body	延年益壽長葆子孫	Red	n/s	n/s
59MNI1M001	Mittens	Cloud, animal	Hands	延	Red	n/s	n/s
59MNI1M001	Socks	Cloud, animal	Feet	延年益壽大宜子	Red	n/s	n/s
59MNI1M001	Pillow	Cloud, animal	Head	延年益壽大宜子孫 (?)	Red	n/s	n/s
59MNI1M001	Socks	Lozenges	Feet	陽	Black/grey	74-76	34-36
59MNI1M001	Fragments in box	Cloud, animal	Coffin	延年益壽大宜子孫 (?)	Red	n/s	n/s

<sup>a</sup> n/s, not stated in excavation reports.



grave goods comprised indigenous products such as woolen clothes, composite bows, the occasional iron knife, some wooden saddles, wooden tableware, and many other small finds made from wood or leather. About one half of the burials featured a few high quality items that might qualify as prestige goods. The bronze mirrors, silk fabrics of various weaving patterns, and glass beakers certainly came at high acquisition costs and, as imports from either China or Western Asia, were surely fairly exotic. For the sake of brevity, I next focus on assessing the relative value of silk fabrics in accordance with the seven criteria established above. I then argue that the emulation of warp-faced compound tabby weaves (*jin 錦*) mark them as genuine prestige goods.

### *Introducing Silk Fabrics*

During the second through early fifth centuries C.E., silk was still a foreign and somewhat exclusive commodity in the Tarim Basin. So far, no evidence has been found of local silk production. As Yü Ying-shih (1967:151), a historian of early imperial China, states: “Of all the goods exported from Han China, silk was the single commodity that was the most cherished by foreign peoples.” The term “silk” has been indiscriminately employed as a catch-all phrase for a variety of fabrics that all made use of the same raw material: immensely long, sturdy silk threads. The high prime value of finished silk cloth is easily understandable. All types of silk cloth were the product of a very time-consuming process that called for very specific resources and expertise even before weaving could begin. The caterpillars of domesticated silk moths (*Bombyx mori*) only feast on leaves of White Mulberry trees (*Morus alba*) until they prepare themselves to metamorphose by spinning a cocoon using a single thread up to nine hundred meters long. Breeders had to boil the cocoon to kill the caterpillar before its metamorphosis was completed to prevent the fully-fledged moth from cutting through the thread. Several single threads would be reeled into a thicker thread, which was suspended onto a loom (Selbitschka 2010:147–148). Even before the process of weaving began, the silk threads corresponded with criteria 1–3: high production costs; not readily available in the Tarim Basin; and requiring considerable skill (growing Mulberry trees and breeding silkworms).

By the fifth century C.E., the ancient Chinese had mastered the production of three main types of silk cloth, distinguished by different weaving patterns:

1. *Juan* 絹: simple tabby cloth built by interlacing warp and weft threads
2. *Qi* 綺: technologically sophisticated, monochrome, patterned, damask-like weave
3. *Jin* 錦: even more complex polychrome, patterned, warp-faced, compound tabby weave

All three types of cloth are known from written sources and scattered burial sites. A small number of graves at Zhagunluke and Yingpan revealed another type of silk cloth, however:

4. *Taqueté*: polychrome, patterned, weft-faced, compound tabby weave.<sup>2</sup>

### *Assessing the Relative Value of Simple Tabby Silk (juan)*

Comparatively simple tabby weaves (*juan*) figure most prominently among the silk textiles from Tarim Basin burials (Table 2). Seeing that 41 out of 79 tombs (51.9%) yielded this kind of cloth, it does not seem terribly exclusive at first glance. Nonetheless, the fact that the majority of occupants were wearing woolen clothes

shows that even this kind of silk cloth was by no means available to everyone. Entire garments tailored from tabby silk are also the exception. Most of the finds listed in Table 2 are small pieces of fabric and ribbons that were applied to various kinds of clothes and accessories. The high relative value the local population placed on these silk fabrics is further attested by the recycling of even the smallest fragments in order to decorate tiny pouches (Xinjiang Wenwu 1999a:10, 2002b:7, 9).

By the third century C.E., Tarim Basin societies had widely adopted silk tabby weaves as currency. This is evident from Kharosthi texts that have been found in the settlement sites of the Loulan region and Niya. Kharosthi (a.k.a., Gandhari) was a northern Indian script that was used by the indigenous population to transcribe the northern Indian Prakrit dialect then prevalent among Tarim Basin residents (Salomon 1996). One document tells us that tabby silk was owed to Chinese merchants by members of the indigenous population (Burrow 1940:1, no. 3). Another states that a buyer acquired a female slave for the amount of 41 bales of tabby silk (Burrow 1940:9, no. 35). A third record conveys that at least some Buddhist monks were prone to physical violence against fellow clergymen: depending on the severity of their physical altercations, fines between 5 and 15 bales of tabby silk were ordered (Burrow 1940:95, no. 489).<sup>3</sup> The fact that tabby silk was adopted as currency suggests that it may not have been the most exclusive and exotic good, but its restriction to roughly one half of the tombs under review as well as its highly economic use therein still render it a rather valuable product. Finally, extracting tabby silk currency from circulation for whatever reason meant destroying wealth. Only people of certain means would have been able to do that.

#### *Assessing the Relative Value of Warp-Faced Compound Tabby Silk (jin)*

In total, 27 out of 79 tombs (34.2%) yielded polychrome warp-faced compound tabby weaves (*jin*) (Table 2). As for the *juan* finds discussed above, this number must not be overemphasized, since the tombs contained anything from miniscule fragments to entire blankets (Table 3). Contemplating the sheer complexity of *jin*-silks along with their aesthetic qualities, such fabrics seem at first glance to be quintessential prestige goods. Made from silk threads of between two and five different colors they were (and still are) a mesmerizing sight regardless of what different individuals might have thought of them (not unlike the aforementioned sports cars) (Fig. 2). They also share, of course, a prime value based on their technical refinement. For instance, one piece of 46 cm-wide cloth was discovered in tomb 95MN1M8 at Niya; it had been woven with a density of 176 threads per centimeter (Table 3). This means that more than 8000 threads of four different colors would have been arranged on a highly complex loom, while taking intricate decorative patterns such as Chinese characters into account (Wang et al. 1999:103).<sup>4</sup>

Chinese historiography reports that during the late first century B.C.E. and early second century C.E., government workshops had to be closed because the production costs of silk surpassed the financial means of the imperial court to pay for it (Hanshu 1962, chap. 19A:732). A glance at the archaeological record even suggests the exact monetary value of *jin*-silk within the Tarim Basin societies, since a 52 cm × 24 cm fragment retrieved from a tomb at Loulan bore the following Kharosthi ink inscription: “Polychrome patterned [silk] of Bimva Srihetasa, [worth] one hundred [pieces of] money” (Xinjiang Loulan 1988:34). We have no way of knowing whether this price-tag referred to just the small fragment yielded by the tomb or if it originally labeled a



Fig. 2. Arm guard made from polychrome patterned warp-faced compound tabby silk with inscription “五星出東方利中國 [Five stars arise in the east to benefit the Middle Kingdom],” Tomb No. 8, Niya cemetery No. 95MN1 (after Zhao and Yu 2000:63, fig. 24.f).

much larger piece of fabric, however. Furthermore, we can only speculate about the relative value of “one hundred pieces of money,” since our knowledge of the purchasing power of coins in the Tarim Basin during the second to fifth centuries C.E. is almost nonexistent (Wang 2004:31). Be that as it may, even without knowing the exact monetary value of *jin*-silks, they easily meet criteria 1–3: their production costs were immense; silk threads were unavailable in the Tarim Basin; and the amount of labor and technical expertise to weave them was enormous.

*Jin*-silks also seem to have met criterion 5. Another *Hanshu* passage mentions that social restrictions were imposed on the possession of this type of silk cloth. According to a decree dating from 199 B.C.E., merchants were strictly banned from acquiring as well as wearing clothes made from monochrome and polychrome patterned silk (*Hanshu* 1962, chap. 1:65, chap. 24B:1153; Swann 1950:231). This made *jin*-silks a highly exclusive commodity. (How Tarim Basin societies got access to them is discussed below.)

Moreover, the elaborate designs of polychrome warp-faced compound tabby weaves added to their exotic appearance, which meets criterion 4. Landscapes of mountains and clouds populated by dragons, tigers, or riders on horseback (Figs. 2, 3, Table 3) are familiar motifs in the art of the Han Period (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) (Linyi 1984:48–49; Liu 2006:36–40). To the eyes of the local population, such patterns must have looked fairly peculiar. Mary Helms’ (1992:159–160, 1993:101–108, 173–191) notion that a mystical aura surrounds strange iconography comes to mind. The air of exoticism that wafts around mythological sceneries only thickens when they are interspersed with woven Chinese characters. Indigenous observers would have had to





Fig. 3. Fragments of silk polychrome patterned warp-faced compound tabby weave with inscription “*deng gao* 登高 [(may you) ascend (lofty) heights]” adorning front edge of occupant’s robe, Yingpan Tomb No. 95BYM20 (after Zhao and Yu 2000:42, fig. 10).

command considerable cultural capital to read such alien imagery and writing. Judging from the abundance of Kharosthi documents discovered in domestic areas, as well as some Kharosthi inscriptions found on a few finds from tombs, Chinese characters and iconography would have been illegible to the local population, and therefore exotic (Selbitschka 2010:160–161; von Falkenhausen 1999:51–52).

Considering Mary Helms' (1992:159–160, 1993:101–108, 173–191) claim that long-distance travelers who acquired the purported prestige goods were the sole keepers of their inherent cultural secrets begs the question: How exactly did the *jin*-silks get to the Tarim Basin? Were there specific journeymen who were able to decipher their iconography and inscriptions? Silk fabrics are commonly considered to have been the most important factor in so-called tributary trade. The assumption is that foreign parties such as the Tarim Basin polities submitted to Chinese suzerainty by delivering tribute to court. In return, they were lavishly rewarded with silk of various kinds (Yü 1967). A comprehensive analysis of Chinese diplomatic interactions with the Tarim Basin states between the first and fifth centuries C.E. has shown that there were next to no Chinese counter gifts of any significance. *Jin* and other silk fabrics were extended to political entities in what is now called Xinjiang in meaningful quantities on only four occasions. Moreover, none of these exchanges involved states associated with the four cemeteries under review here. The large numbers of imperial presents were either dowries in diplomatic marriages with local rulers or inauguration gifts when local rulers were incorporated into the Chinese bureaucratic system (Selbitschka 2015:98–104).

In contrast, tens of thousands of silk bales and especially *jin*-silk were given to nomad confederacies from the northern steppes such as the Xiongnu 匈奴 (Yü 1967:47). They, along with their almost equally mighty successors were powerful enough to extort huge numbers of Chinese “gifts” on a regular basis. Thus, it seems most likely that *jin*-silks, in particular, were traded by pastoralists as middlemen. Furthermore, there is little written evidence of actual silk trade between China and the Tarim Basin. The only piece I could find is a Kharosthi document that mentions Chinese merchants, who were expected to settle a tabby silk debt. It is clear that these traders came to the Tarim Basin and not the other way around. More significantly, they dealt with tabby weaves and not *jin*-silks (Burrow 1940:9, no. 35).

Even if *jin*-silks were not directly imported by the local population and no one really comprehended their iconography and inscriptions, they communicated ample symbolic capital to the outside world. In addition to high costs, technical complexity, exotic Chinese origin, and social restrictions, the immense relative value of these extraordinary textiles is beyond doubt. The only criteria that were not met were 6 and 7, although one could argue that an item such as the arm guard from Niya tomb 95MN1M8 depicted in Fig. 2 (and comparable finds in 95MN1M3 and Yingpan tomb 95BYYM15) occupied special positions in the respective tomb assemblages. (This is a discussion for a separate article.) Suffice it so say that warp-faced compound tabby weaves were highly valuable. Elsewhere, my analysis revealed that only a minority of relatively wealthy Tarim Basin residents had access to them (Selbitschka 2010:153–158) (Tables 2, 3).

*The Responder's Point of View: Weft-Faced Compound Tabby  
Silk (Taqueté) as Copies of jin*

So far, there is no visible trace in the archaeological record that *jin* or any other kind of silk weave generated prestige, that is, an attitude of *ansehen*, among a set of like-minded individuals toward the owners of the silk. This is hardly surprising considering that no attention has been paid to the potential reactions of responders. Even if flamboyant and exotic silks were intended to gain the admiration of onlookers, assessing the high relative value of these artifacts does not offer any insights on whether such attempts were indeed successful. It is extremely difficult for archaeologists to reconstruct

abstract value judgments of dead social actors. Nevertheless, I have developed a hypothesis by analogy with purported contemporary prestige goods. Like expensive sports cars, Rolex wrist watches are often referred to as modern-day prestige goods. The fact that certain clientele cannot resist buying cheap knock-offs while on vacation in some parts of the world suggests that they relate certain qualities to the ownership of the original model. To put it simply, by wearing fake Rolex watches, they pretend to be something they are not. If the proprietor of an original should be buried sporting his original watch, whereas some of his contemporaries were buried in the same cemetery wearing only replicas, then future generations of archaeologists would not be too far off in assuming that the latter aimed to present themselves as being in possession of the same esteemed traits as the owner of the authentic time piece. Most likely, such positive traits would be reduced to economic wealth, which, as the above discussion illustrated, is one of several possible aspects of genuinely generated prestige.

The Tarim Basin burials presented such fortunate circumstances. Polychrome patterned weft-faced compound tabby silk weaves (*taqueté*) were brought to light in twelve tombs at Yingpan and Zhagunluke (15.2% of the total tombs) (Tables 2, 4). It has been convincingly argued that the weft-faced patterning technique originated in West Asia (Becker 1987:81–82; Emery 1980:8–13). This rather descriptive *terminus technicus* already hints at the most significant difference between polychrome patterned warp-faced compound tabbies (*jin*) and polychrome patterned weft-faced compound tabbies (*taqueté*). Both kinds of fabrics are based on a tabby weave that enhances the stability of the fabric structure. In *taqueté* cloth, the pattern is not achieved by overleaping warp threads but by overleaping weft threads. Owing to the inherent qualities of the silk thread, in particular its length and sturdiness, the technique of using warps to pattern a fabric was unique in China. Any other organic thread consists of rather short fibers that need to be spun into a longer thread. Such threads would have eventually torn under their own weight if arranged vertically as patterning warps on a loom for several meters. Silk threads consist of rather few individual fibers that are only slightly twisted; they can more easily withstand the strain of their own weight.

Looking at some of the Tarim Basin *taqueté* finds, it is easy to see that their iconography resembles Chinese warp-faced compound weaves. They depict wave-like mountainous landscapes as well as strange beasts and equestrians (Xinjiang Weiwu'er et al. 2003b:2–3; Wang 2005:104–105; see also the Yingpan finds below) (Figs. 4, 6). The most noteworthy details for the present discussion, however, are small, primarily orthogonal shapes that were positioned in front of or under the animals. Although rather crudely executed, they unmistakably imitate Chinese characters, one of the defining features of Chinese warp-faced weaves.

In the absence of evidence of weaving workshops at any of the Tarim Basin sites, there is no way of knowing whether these copies were produced on location or in West Asia as the weaving technique suggests. Perhaps the silk market in Sasanian Persia (224–651 C.E.) was more liberal than imperial Chinese officials when it came to polychrome patterned silk fabrics and offered cheaper merchandise than the steppe nomads. From a political point of view, it might indeed have been easier for the smaller states that are associated with the Yingpan and Zhagunluke cemeteries to access West Asian rather than Chinese merchandise. Unlike the states that were home of the Loulan and Niya sites, they barely figured at all in Chinese historiography. Whereas China's political relations with Loulan and Niya take up several pages in some early



TABLE 4. WOOL AND SILK TAQUETÉ FINDS FROM TARIM BASIN BURIALS WITH PUBLISHED TOMB INVENTORIES

IDENTIFICATION		DETAILS TAQUETÉ ITEMS					THREAD COUNT (PER CM)	
NO.	MATERIAL	DESCRIPTION <sup>a</sup>	DECORATIVE PATTERN	FIND SPOT	CHINESE INSCRIPTION	COLORS <sup>b</sup>	WARP	WEFT
89BYYM1:7a	Wool	n/s	n/s	n/s	None	Red, yellow, green	15	14
89BYYM1:7b	Wool	n/s	n/s	n/s	None	Red, yellow	15	11
89BYYM1:7c	Wool	n/s	n/s	n/s	None	Red, yellow, blue	16	10
89BYYM7:9	Wool	Blanket	Rosettes, lozenges	Pit bottom	None	Red, yellow, blue	n/s	n/s
89BYYM8:5	Silk	Garment appliqué, 50 cm long × 8.4 cm wide	Dragons, cloud scroll	n/s	None	Red, yellow	21	20
89BYYM10:15	Silk	Narrow ribbon	Dragons	n/s	None	Red, beige, green	n/s	n/s
95BYYM15:3-2	Wool	Fragment in lower edge of double-sided wool robe	Rosettes	On body	None	Red	28	68
95BYYM15:3-3	Silk	Lower half of both sleeves	Heart-shaped ornament	On body	None	Red	32	50
95BYYM15:12	Silk	Narrow ribbon applied at neckline of silk pullover	Geometric patterns	On body	None	Beige	n/s	n/s
95BYYM15:13	Silk	Narrow ribbon applied to <i>qi</i> silk pouch	Geometric patterns	At hip	None	Red, beige, blue	n/s	n/s
99BYYM8:21	Silk	Narrow ribbon applied at edge of cotton robe	Cloud scroll, dragons	On body	田	Red	33	24
99BYYM8:16	Silk	Narrow ribbon applied at lower edge of silk jacket	Cloud scrolls	On body	田	Red	n/s	n/s

<sup>a</sup> n/s, not stated in excavation reports.

<sup>b</sup> Single color, base or most prevalent color.



Fig. 4. Silken polychrome patterned weft-faced compound tabby weave (*taqueté*) imitating Chinese characters that was retrieved from Zhagunluke Tomb No. 98QZIM131 (after Zhao 2005a: color Plate 10.c).

standard histories, Yingpan and Zhagunluke were awarded no more than a few columns of text conveying only the most basic geographic and ethnographic data (Selbitschka 2010:56–57, 76–79, 87–88, 103–105).

At Yingpan, the weft-faced copies served the same purposes as their original counterparts, just as hypothetical Rolex emulations would on the wrists of their owners. Unfortunately, the data from Zhagunluke is too scanty to allow such conclusions. It is well attested that Chinese *jin*-silks as well as *taqueté* fabrics were interred with the deceased, but the evidence from the burials have not yet been released (Xinjiang Weiwu'er 2016:figs. 35, 65, 66, 68, 69, 73, 79). It is noteworthy, though, that larger pieces of *taqueté* cloth seem to have been attached at the edges of garments (Xinjiang Weiwu'er 2016:fig. 80). The fact that originals and copies were used similarly is illustrated by the grave goods in two contemporaneous graves at Yingpan. The occupant of tomb 95BYYM20 was wearing a robe whose edges were adorned by a narrow band of red Chinese *jin*-silk that bears the inscription *deng gao* 登高, “[May you] ascend [lofty] heights” (Xinjiang Wenwu 2002b:33; Zhao 2002:42–43) (Fig. 3, Table 3). Further details about this burial are unavailable as the *jin*-silk is the only find that has been published thus far. More is known about tomb 99BYYM8, which was occupied by an adult male and an adult female of unknown age. They were buried in a manner unique to Yingpan. The heads of both the man and woman were wrapped in floss silk cloths and both wore a headband cut from red tabby silk cloth and adorned with small round platelets made from either bronze (the man) or gold (the woman) leaf. Their chins were fastened by chin straps (*mentonnière*). The deceased man was dressed in a cotton robe to which a narrow red *taqueté* band had been applied at the long edge (Xinjiang Wenwu 2002a:67; Zhao 2002:58–59) (Figs. 1, 5, 6). The woman wore a tabby silk jacket adorned on the lower edge with the same silk *taqueté* as the man's robe.

It would be interesting to know whether such garments had been worn regularly by the man and woman or if they had been made exclusively for the funeral. As I

mentioned above, this is a difficult question to answer. Figure 5 demonstrates that Tarim Basin cloth finds were not at all in pristine condition. Nevertheless, traces of mending and some signs of use on three items from Niya tomb 95MN1M3 indicate that at least some of the attire in the tomb was worn while the occupants were alive (Wang et al. 1999:101–105). Even if the clothes had been specifically tailored for display during the funerary rites, the effect of original and imitated fabrics would have been the same. The guests gathered at the tomb should see and admire certain skills that the occupants (or the bereaved) related with the original textiles.

It stands to reason that the valuable exotic Chinese originals—and by association certain of their owners' qualities irretraceable to us today—were highly admired by some members of ancient society, yet remained unattainable to them. Non-Chinese copies were meant to compensate for this perceived defect. There is a host of possible reasons why someone might not have been able to get their hands on specific objects: lack of financial means, social restrictions, or shortage in supply immediately come to mind. The important point, however, is to realize that certain social circles equated the possession of particular items with certain positive traits. Copies of the desirable warp-faced compound tabby weaves (*jin*)—a genuine prestige good in the context of the Tarim Basin tombs—were thought to identify their owners with these traits.

One might wonder how deeply the practice of emulation permeated the Tarim Basin societies. Given the poor condition and sometimes inadequate documentation of the sites, this is a difficult problem to tackle. Much of the information that might originally have been available has long since decayed or been stolen. Judging from the



Fig. 5. Robe with *taqueté* ribbon embellishment on front edge, worn by male occupant of Tomb No. 99BYYM8 at Yingpan (after Zhao and Yu 2000:58, fig. 19).





Fig. 6. Detail of *taqueté* fabric with imitation Chinese character *tian* 田 [field] adorning robe of male occupant, Tomb No. 99BYYM8, Yingpan (after Zhao 2002:59, fig. 59.1).

material we actually have at our disposal, it seems emulation was not very widespread among the ancient Yingpan and Zhagunluke populations. The tomb assemblages that included *taqueté* silks usually comprised of high quality items. This suggests that even copies of *jin*-silks were not all that easy to acquire.

#### EMULATION OF BYZANTINE *SOLIDI* IN NORTHERN CHINESE BURIALS

Emulation on a much larger scale is visible in a number of northern Chinese tombs that date roughly from the early sixth to the mid-eighth century C.E. Table 5 summarizes all finds of Byzantine *solidi* and their copies in Chinese burials. Publications of these finds usually offer a little more information than whether the burials yielded either an original or a copy.<sup>5</sup>

TABLE 5. BYZANTINE *SOLIDI* AND IMITATIONS YIELDED BY NORTHERN CHINESE TOMBS (EARLY SIXTH THROUGH MID-EIGHTH CENTURIES C.E.)

SOURCE	TOMB <sup>a</sup>		OCCUPANT(S)			<i>SOLIDUS</i>			LOCATION ON BODY		
	LOCATION <sup>b/</sup> TOMB NO.	CONDITION <sup>c</sup>	DATE C.E. <sup>d</sup>	NO. <sup>d</sup>	NAME	SEX	AGE (YEARS)	DIAM./WEIGHT		AUTHENTIC? <sup>e</sup> RULER (DATE C.E.)	PERFORATION(S)
Stein 1928 <i>a</i> :646	XJ, Turfan, Astana/i.3	Looted	Early 6 <sup>th</sup> c.?	2	No epitaph	♂	n/s	n/s	Justinian I (527–565)	None	Mouth
Stein 1928 <i>a</i> :648	XJ, Turfan, Astana/i.5	Looted	Early 6 <sup>th</sup> c.?	3	No epitaph	♀	n/s	n/s	Imitation	None	Mouth
Stein 1928 <i>a</i> :648	XJ, Turfan, Astana/i.6	Looted	632	2	No epitaph	♀	n/s	n/s	Imitation	None	Mouth
Xinjiang Weiwu'er 1972:10	XJ, Turfan, Astana/TAM92	n/s	Late 7 <sup>th</sup> c.	n/s	No epitaph	n/s	n/s	n/s	Imitation	None	Mouth
Xinjiang Bowuguan 1978:2	XJ, Turfan, Astana/ TKM102	n/s	Mid-7 <sup>th</sup> c.	n/s	No epitaph	n/s	n/s	n/s	Imitation	None	n/s
Tulufan 2006 <i>a</i> :21	XJ, Turfan, Jiaohe/M11	n/s	Early 7 <sup>th</sup> c.	2	No epitaph	♂	82	1.8 cm	Imitation	None	n/s
Tulufan 2006 <i>b</i> :40	XJ, Turfan, Muna'er/M102	Looted	656	2	Wu Huan 武歡	♂	n/s	1.8 cm	Imitation	Loop	n/s
Tulufan 2006 <i>b</i> :31	XJ, Turfan, Muna'er/M203	Looted	609	2	Zhang Rongzi 張容子	♂	n/s	n/s	Imitation	n/s	n/s
Tulufan 2006 <i>b</i> :31	XJ, Turfan, Muna'er/M214	Looted	7 <sup>th</sup> c.	2	No epitaph	n/s	n/s	n/s	Imitation	n/s	n/s
Tulufan 2006 <i>b</i> :40	XJ, Turfan, Muna'er/M302	Looted	7 <sup>th</sup> c.	2	No epitaph	n/s	n/s	2.2 cm	Imitation	None	n/s
Tulufan 2006 <i>c</i> :63	XJ, Turfan, Badamu/M103	n/s	7 <sup>th</sup> c.	2	No epitaph	♂	n/s	1.8 cm	Imitation	n/s	Mouth
Tulufan 2006 <i>c</i> :62	XJ, Turfan, Badamu/M106	n/s	7 <sup>th</sup> c.	2	No epitaph	n/s	n/s	2.15 cm	Imitation	n/s	n/s

(Continued)

TABLE 5. (Continued)

SOURCE	TOMB <sup>a</sup>			OCCUPANT(S)			SOLIDUS				
	LOCATION <sup>b</sup> / TOMB NO.	CONDITION <sup>c</sup>	DATE C.E. NO. <sup>d</sup>	NAME	SEX (YEARS)	AGE	DIAM./WEIGHT	AUTHENTIC? <sup>e</sup> RULER (DATE C.E.)	PERFORATION(S)	LOCATION ON BODY	
Tulufan 2006c:71	XJ, Turfan, Badamu/M234	n/s	7 <sup>th</sup> c.	1	No epitaph	♂	n/s	n/s	Imitation	n/s	n/s
Tulufan 2006c:63	XJ, Turfan, Badamu/M235	n/s	7 <sup>th</sup> c.	3	No epitaph	n/s	n/s	1.8 cm	Imitation	n/s	n/s
Tulufan 2006c:71	XJ, Turfan, Badamu/M237	n/s	7 <sup>th</sup> c.	2	No epitaph	n/s	n/s	n/s	Imitation	n/s	n/s
Tulufan 2006c:71	XJ, Turfan, Badamu/M238	n/s	7 <sup>th</sup> c.	3	No epitaph	n/s	n/s	n/s	Imitation	n/s	n/s
Tulufan 2006c:50	XJ, Turfan, Badamu/M252	Undist.	7 <sup>th</sup> c.	5	No epitaph	♀	n/s	n/s	Imitation	n/s	Mouth
Tulufan 2006c:72	XJ, Turfan, Badamu/M301	Looted	7 <sup>th</sup> c.	2	No epitaph	n/s	n/s	n/s	Imitation	n/s	n/s
Tulufan 2006c:72	XJ, Turfan, Badamu/M303	Looted	7 <sup>th</sup> c.	1	No epitaph	♂	n/s	n/s	Imitation	n/s	n/s
Tulufan 2006c:63	XJ, Turfan, Badamu/M304	Looted	7 <sup>th</sup> c.	2	No epitaph	n/s	n/s	3.5 cm	Imitation	n/s	n/s
Ningxia Wenwu 2012:114	Ningxia, Guyuan/ M4	Undist.	Early 7 <sup>th</sup> c.	1	No epitaph	♀	35–45	1.6 cm/2 g	Justinian I (527–565)?	2×	Head
Ningxia Wenwu 2012:127	Ningxia, Guyuan/ M33	Undist.	Early 7 <sup>th</sup> c.	2	No epitaph	♀	25–35	1.8 cm/3 g	Justinian I (527–565)?	1×	Head
Yuanzhou 2009:86	Ningxia, Guyuan	Looted				♂	ca. 50	1.54 cm/2.6 g	Leo I (457–474)	2×	Pelvis
								1.67 cm/2.9 g	Justin I (518–527)	3×	Clavicle
			575	2	Tian Hong 田弘			1.62 cm/2.6 g	Justinian I (527–565)	4×	Head
								1.62 cm/3.3 g	Justinian I (527–565)	3×	On coffin

(Continued)

TABLE 5. (Continued)

SOURCE	TOMB <sup>a</sup>		OCCUPANT(S)				SOLIDUS					
	LOCATION <sup>b/</sup> TOMB NO.	CONDITION <sup>c</sup>	DATE C.E.	NO. <sup>d</sup>	NAME	SEX	AGE (YEARS)	DIAM./WEIGHT	RULER (DATE C.E.)	AUTHENTIC? <sup>e</sup>	PERFORATION(S)	LOCATION ON BODY
Yuanzhou 2014:136	Ningxia, Guyuan	Looted	658	2	Shi Daoluo 史道洛	♂	66	2 cm/4.6 g	Justin II (565–578)	2 ×	2 ×	Floor
Ningxia Huizu 1996:59	Ningxia, Guyuan	Looted	671	1	Shi Hedan 史訶耽	♂		2.3 cm/2 g	Imitation	2 ×	2 ×	Feet?
Ningxia Huizu 1996:82	Ningxia, Guyuan	Looted	678	1	Shi Daode 史道德	♂	65	2 cm/4 g	Imitation	1 ×	1 ×	Head
Shijiazhuang 1977:388	Hebei, Shijiazhuang	Looted	540	2	Li Xizong 李希宗	♂	39	2.1 cm/3.6 g	Theodosius II (408–450)	2 ×	2 ×	Floor
								1.68 cm/2.49 g	Justin I (518–527)	None	None	Floor
								1.7 cm/2.6 g	Justin I (518–527)	None	None	Floor
Cixian 1984:6	Hebei, Cixian	Looted	550	1	Ruru Princess Lü 茹茹閼 公主	♀	n/s	1.6 cm/2.7 g	Anastasius I (491–518)	None	None	n/s
Nei and Nei 1975:182	Imn. Mongolia, Hohhot	n/s	Late 5 <sup>th</sup> c.?	1	No epitaph	n/s	n/s	1.8 cm/3.2 g	Justin I (518–527)	None	None	n/s
Zhang et al. 1986:26	Shaanxi, Xi'an	Undist.	Early 7 <sup>th</sup> c.	1	No epitaph	n/s	n/s	2 cm/0.97 g	Imitation	None	None	Head?
Xi'an 2005:19	Shaanxi, Xi'an	Looted	580	2	Shi Jun 史君	n/s	n/s	1.75 cm/1.75 g	Imitation	None	None	Sarcoph.
Xia 1961:446	Shaanxi, Xi'an	n/s	Late 7 <sup>th</sup> c.	n/s	n/s	n/s	n/s	2.15 cm/4.1 g	Imitation	None	None	n/s

(Continued)

TABLE 5. (Continued)

SOURCE	TOMB <sup>a</sup>				OCCUPANT(S)				SOLIDUS		
	LOCATION <sup>b</sup> / TOMB NO.	CONDITION <sup>c</sup>	DATE C.E.	NO. d	NAME	SEX (YEARS)	AGE	DIAM./WEIGHT	AUTHENTIC? <sup>e</sup> RULER (DATE C.E.)	PERFORATION(S)	LOCATION ON BODY
Zhang and Wang 1992:55	Shaanxi, Xi'an/ 89Dian	Undist.	Early 7 <sup>th</sup> c.	1?	No epitaph	n/s n/s	n/s	2.15 cm/0.8 g	Imitation	None	n/s
Xia 1959:67	Shaanxi, Xianyang		600		Dugu Luo 獨孤羅	n/s n/s	n/s	2.1 cm/4.4 g	Justin II (565–578)	None	n/s
Shangluo 1997:6	Shaanxi, Shangluo/M3	Undist.	Early 7 <sup>th</sup> c.	2	No epitaph	n/s n/s	n/s	1.8 cm/2.8 g	Justin II (565–578)	1 ×	Neck
Taiyuan 2010:36	Shanxi, Jinyuan/ M552	Dist.	Early 7 <sup>th</sup> c.		No epitaph	n/s n/s	n/s	2.3 cm/3.3 g	Heraclius (610–640)	None	n/s
Luoyang 1982:25	Henan, Luoyang/ C7M27	Undist.	664	2	An Pu 安菩	♂ n/s	n/s	2.2 cm/4.3 g	Heraclius (610–640)	None	Right hand
Liaoning and Chaoyang 1997:53	Liaoning, Chaoyang/M3	Looted	Early 7 <sup>th</sup> c.	2	No epitaph	n/s n/s	n/s	2 cm/4.4 g	Heraclius (610–640)	1 ×	Mouth

<sup>a</sup> n/s, not stated in excavation reports.

<sup>b</sup> XJ, Xinjiang.

<sup>c</sup> Dist., disturbed context; Undist., undisturbed context.

<sup>d</sup> Number of individuals in burial: 1, single; 2, double; 3, triple; 5, quintuple occupancy.

<sup>e</sup> If authentic, coin is listed by name of Roman ruler and dates of reign.



The relative value of Byzantine gold coins according to the criteria laid out above is quite high. Although they were small in size (usually no more than 2.3 cm in diameter and 4.6 g in weight), fairly easy to produce, and convenient to transport, they were not readily available in northern China, which corresponds to criterion 1. By the late third century C.E., gold as a raw material had become scant because of massive demand by Buddhist monasteries (criterion 2). The custom of gilding large-scale sculptures had all but exhausted domestic gold deposits and caused a tremendous price surge (Golas 1999:123).

The exotic nature of Eastern Roman gold coins is also beyond doubt (criterion 4). As early as the Western Han (206 B.C.E.–9 C.E.) period, China knew about the existence of the Western Roman Empire, but there is little evidence that the two realms were in direct contact with each other. Except for a doubtful mission from Marcus Aurelius (161–180 C.E.) to the Eastern Han (23–220 C.E.) in 166 C.E.—the visitor was probably a private merchant masquerading as an official envoy—and the establishment of a few embassies during the seventh century C.E., the Roman and Chinese courts remained distant from one another (Leslie and Gardiner 1996:161). The majority of exchanges between the Eastern Roman and Chinese cultural spheres were focused on commerce done in stages. It is highly unlikely that large numbers of Byzantine merchants ever set foot on Chinese ground or vice versa (Hansen 2012:82, 111). Thus, Eastern Roman artifacts remained rare and unusual sights in China (criterion 4b). As for the exotic character of the *solidi* as objects, they could hardly have been more different from traditional Chinese coins. While the former were minted in gold, the latter were cast in bronze. Moreover, from the early second century B.C.E. onwards, the obverse of so-called Chinese “cash” coins were dominated by two to four Chinese characters that either referred to the weight of the coin or the ushering in of a new era (Fig. 7), while the obverses of *solidi* showed the faces and names of the emperors under whose reign they were issued (Fig. 8). The image of a human being and Latin writing must have left an impression on Chinese observers who were only used to seeing Chinese graphs (criterion 4a). The fact that most of the *solidi* and *solidi* copies also assumed special functions within tomb assemblages (criterion 6) and some were even heirlooms (criterion 7) is discussed below.

The mortuary data from northern China is fraught with problems. The majority of the tombs under review had been looted and the exact locations of many of the coins within the assemblages were not noted. Nonetheless, there is still some information to work with. For instance, by far the majority of finds come from the Turfan area in modern-day Xinjiang (Fig. 1). Of the 20 coins listed in Table 5, only one is an original Byzantine *solidus*; the remaining 19 finds were likely local copies. Similar to the *jin-* and *taqueté* silk applications on Yingpan (and perhaps Zhagunluke) clothes, emulation did not stop with the object itself. At Turfan, originals and copies were used in the same fashion. Both kinds of gold coins were found in the oral cavities of the occupants of roughly contemporary tombs. The little available evidence suggests that male deceased were given a slight preference over females in that more gold coins were found in men’s mouths. Although not included in my list, many of the female occupants at Turfan were buried with a Sasanian silver drachm or, remarkably, a copy of the coin in their mouths (Skaff 1998:69). Whether the northwestern Chinese Byzantine gold or Sasanian silver coins might have had any relation with the ancient Mediterranean *obolos* custom is unclear at this point. A single coin was placed into the mouth of the deceased as payment to the ferryman Charon, who transported the souls of the dead across the

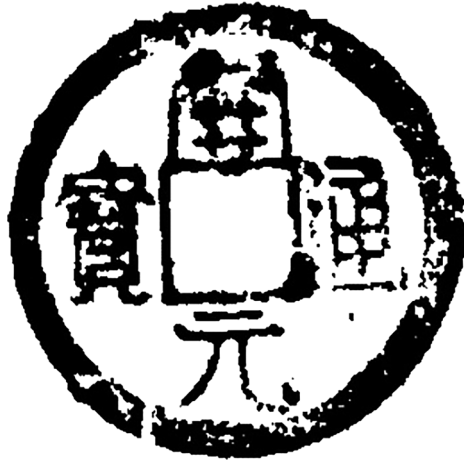


Fig. 7. Line drawing of a *Kaiyuan tongbao* 開元通寶 [“Circulating treasure (i.e., coin) marking beginning of new era”] coin, dated ca. 730 c.e. (after [Taiyuan 2010:40](#), fig. 14).



Fig. 8. Line drawing of *solidus* collected from field at Qingshui 清水, Gansu province; coin minted during the reign of Emperor Phocas (602–610 c.e.), inscribed “[OMINVS] N[OSTER] FOCAS PERP[ETVVS] AVG[VSTVS] [Our lord Phocas Eternal Augustus]” (after [Yu 2006:74](#), fig. 2).

river Styx into the netherworld. We know that similar ideas indeed traveled from Classical antiquity as far as northern China because they were made visible by the chin straps that were recorded in some of the Yingpan tombs and other mainland Chinese burials ([Müller 2006](#)). Unfortunately, only one more instance of *obolos* (placing coins in mouths) is safely attested from Tomb No. 3 at Chaoyang 朝陽 in Liaoning province

(Liaoning and Chaoyang 1997). Since there are no further finds in the area, it remains unknown whether the phenomenon was more widespread and if copies might have substituted for authentic *solidi* at other sites as well.

Although four out of six tombs at Guyuan 固原 in Ningxia province were looted, it appears as if *solidi* were used as part of a different custom there. The undisturbed burials of two single females yielded one original *solidus* each. Both *solidi* were found near the heads of the deceased and both exhibited at least one perforation. These small holes suggest that the coins were once attached to some kind of organic material, either sewn onto a cloth or suspended from some kind of thread. There is no way of knowing whether this was done when the deceased were still alive or was occasioned by the funeral. The respective finds from the remaining four burials suggest that the *solidi* and their copies were part of more or less intricate headdresses. The metalwork of the more elaborate pieces incorporated Sasanian iconography. This is not too surprising since epitaphs contained in some of the Guyuan tombs convey that the occupants at this particular cemetery were all members of the same family and traced their origins back to Sogdiana (a region in modern-day Tajikistan and Uzbekistan). The male occupants share the surname Shi 史, which was usually associated with the ancient city state of Kish (Skaff 2003:478–480). Despite being Chinese officials, the deceased seem to have retained their native religions. Once Zoroastrianism became the state religion in Sasanian Persia, it was soon adopted by the Sogdian city states. The Sasanian headdresses along with other Zoroastrian imagery in the tombs suggest that the *solidi* and their copies fulfilled a crucial role in some kind of religious practice. We cannot be sure what exact function the coins fulfilled, but it is obvious that they were vital to the process. However, *solidi* were foreign objects even back in Sogdiana and served no known purpose in Zoroastrian rituals hints at a more representational function of the coins in the context of elaborate golden headdresses. The prestige associated with the originals prompted the production of thinner and lighter copies.

The Guyuan finds are interesting for another reason. Their presence suggests that even members of the same family had difficulty getting their hands on originals. That this was not due to financial limitations is amply demonstrated by their rich graves. Many gold and silver objects remained in their tombs even after robbers had looted them. It seems as if genuine *solidi* were a rare commodity in sixth through mid-eighth century northern China, despite the fact that they were issued as currency in the western hemisphere of the early medieval world. Some of the authentic coins might very well have been heirlooms. For instance, Shi Daoluo's 史道洛 *solidus* was minted sometime during the reign of Justin II (565–578), but was not buried until 658 C.E. A similar situation occurred in Tian Hong's 田弘 tomb. The earliest of his five *solidi* dates over a century older than the burial itself. Of course it is possible that such pieces were acquired a couple of decades after they had been minted, but Tian Hong's coins suggest that a collection was accumulated over several generations.

The relative value of Byzantine *solidi* was certainly not nearly as high as that of Chinese *jin*-silks, but they were cherished enough that they were taken out of circulation by being buried at sites that stretched from the northwestern to the northeastern ends of mainland China. The high relative value and rarity of Byzantine *solidi* is also confirmed by the fact that only one was stashed in the famous Hejiacun 何家村 hoard in Xi'an, which comprised over 220 silver and gold objects in addition to silver ingots, drinking vessels and belts made from glass, rock crystal, and jade, as well as rubies, sapphires, and amber

(Hansen 2003:15). More importantly, at almost all known stations of their journey to the east, *solidi* were associated with enough prestige to warrant emulation.

#### CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion has demonstrated that prestige as a social force is not equivalent to social status, even though past studies have mostly treated it thusly. This has significant ramifications for using the concept of prestige goods as an analytical category. Previous scholarship has mainly concentrated on proving that pre-historic societies had developed hierarchical structures. Prestige goods are considered active forces that shaped the structure of ancient societies; indeed, they may very well have been intended as such. However, prestige, like any social phenomenon, is not simply a unilateral tool employed by the powerful and wealthy. If prestige is defined as *Ansehen* or esteem, it demands that we take its actual effect on recipients seriously. So-called prestige goods only imparted prestige to their owners when onlookers truly admired the owners for their command of certain objects. Consequently, spotting genuine prestige goods in archaeological contexts is less about identifying dominant power structures and more about exposing the intricate workings of society as a whole.

With the publication of Thorstein Veblen's seminal study *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, emulation as a strategy for blurring and overcoming social boundaries attained a prominent role in the discussion of social hierarchy (Miller 1987:136). Many scholars linked emulation with status, which in turn was equated with prestige. A more nuanced approach towards prestige and emulation as suggested here facilitates a deeper comprehension of ancient social and cultural practices. Shifting focus from signalers to responding parties demonstrates that the act of emulation was likely not simply a manifestation of the efforts of eager upstarts attempting to improve their own social standing. It enables us to entertain the idea that people in the Central Asian Tarim Basin and even on the eastern margins of the Roman Empire—since Chinese *jin*-silks traveled at least as far as Palmyra (Schmidt-Colinet et al. 2000; Stauffer 1996; von Falkenhausen 1999:44–52, 2000)—appreciated these magnificent textiles for more than their apparent exoticism and costs. These were the most flamboyant and technically complicated fabrics available at the time, a fact that surely did not go unnoticed by potential consumers. The common way of denoting prestige objects chiefly by virtue of cost or rarity (i.e., high relative value) can only be a first step in the analytical process. Admittedly, archaeologists seldom have more evidence to work with other than that indicating cost, exclusiveness, or exotic character of artifacts, so written records might augment some of the conclusions based on archaeological evidence. However, detecting instances of contemporary emulation in close geographic proximity and use with the original object makes it possible in some cases to take the second necessary step of distinguishing genuine prestige goods from mere status symbols or luxury goods. The prestige associated with such artifacts was a decisive factor for acquiring or producing copies. It is important to understand that the act of emulation always is an expression of the *ansehen* that is awarded to a person or an object. To put it simply, if someone did not like what they saw, they would not have bothered copying it. Applying such rigorous standards to one's archaeological material means that we have at least one convincing method at our disposal for identifying genuine prestige goods in mortuary settings.

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## NOTES

1. For Loulan, see Bergman (1939:118, 128–134, 140–142); Hedin (1937:6, 90–97, 132); Stein (1928a:225–230); Sylwan (1949:36–49); and Xinjiang Loulan (1988:23–39). For Yingpan, see Stein (1928b:755–761) and Xinjiang Wenwu (1994, 1999a, 2001, 2002a, 2002b). For Zhagunluke, see Xinjiang Weiwu'er et al. (2003a, 2003b) and Zhongguo and Xinjiang (1997). For Niya, see Wang and colleagues (1999) and Xinjiang Wenwu (1998, 1999b, 1999c, 2000).
2. For technical aspects of different silk weaves, see Becker (1987:83–87) and Emery (1980:76–78, 133–136, 140–144).
3. The document numbers in these citations refer to inscribed wooden tablets or slips that were found at Niya and in the Lopnor region.
4. For a description of looms of that era, see Becker (1987:1); Kuhn (1995:78); and Zhao (2005b:96–107). For a recent discovery of models of silk looms, see Chengdu and Jingzhou (2014).
5. For a slightly outdated list of coins and provenance, see Thierry and Morrisson (1994).

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