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(Selective) English Translation of

“Tang Dynasty Incense Archaeological Discoveries”

(唐代出土薰器具形制)

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Silver and gold incense receptacles in Tang Dynasty

In terms of the development of incense holders in Chinese history, silver and gold incense holders produced in Tang Dynasty are unique and elegant. This presentation will focus on introducing the antiques excavated from Famen Temple¹ (陝西扶風法門寺地宮), Lintong Qing Shansi Sheli Ta Digong² (臨潼慶山寺舍利塔地宮), Henan Luoyang Shen Hui Heshang Mu Ta³ (河南洛陽神會和尚墓塔) as well as Korea and Japan. Accompanied with contextual information about Buddhism, [through this presentation] you will know more about the mystery and the secrets of gold and silver incense receptacles of the Tang Dynasty.

I hereby would like to thank the organizer for giving us this precious opportunity to be invited on this meaningful cultural journey.

It has been written, that although the smoke of incense is weak, it still has its strength, able to travel its stream, to float through every open window and door. Let us travel back to the Tang Dynasty, in order to know more about the past, and to thereby pass on the tradition of incense.

People living during the Tang Dynasty were comparatively opened minded, embracing new phenomena and influences. We are blessed that most of the antiques produced during the Tang Dynasty were safely collected and stored, so that we today are able to easily view the vibrant history of the Tang Dynasty. To know more about the use of incense during the Tang Dynasty, please look at these treasures that our ancestors passed on to our generation. In the following time, I would like to introduce you to censers, aromatics containers such as Xiang Baozi (香寶子) and aromatic boxes (香盒); and other related antiques.

¹ A Buddhist temple located in Shaanxi, China; built during the last years of Eastern Han.

² A Buddhist temple located in Xi'an, the temple was destroyed during the period of Emperor of Tang Wu; the reconstruction hasn't started until now.

³ A Buddhist temple located in Henan, China.

In recent years, more and more Tang Dynasty silver and gold incense receptacles have been excavated from Famen Temple, Lintong Qing Shan Si, Xi'an He Jiacun Tang Dai Jinyin Qi Jiaocang⁴ (西安何家村唐代金銀器窖藏), Jiangsu Sheng Dan Tu Ding Mao Qiao Jinyin Qi Jiaocang (江蘇省丹徒丁卯橋金銀器窖藏) and Henan Sheng Luoyang Shen Hui Heshang Mu Ta. Furthermore, there have been discoveries in Japan and Korea.

Censers in Lotus flower shape (蓮花形香爐)

Five-legged silver censer with flower ribbon chains and tortoise decorations with plate;

Excavated from Famen Temple

鑲金臥龜蓮花紋五足朵帶銀香爐. 法門寺 FD5:002 並盤 FD5:075

It is protected and saved in a good condition; the design is delicate and the decorations are splendid and beautiful. It consists of a lid, body and circular dish. The lid is designed with patterns of Lotus petals and the whole shape of lotus flowers; there is a spiritual tortoise lying on each Lotus. To enhance the effect of smoke floating around the censer continuously, the block buttons were designed with holes. The body of the censer was designed with floating cloud decorations, connected with five unicorn legs. The bottom of the censer was engraved with words indicating a production date and place: Xiantong Tenth Year⁵ (咸通十年), Wensi Yuan (文思院), Jiang Chen (匠臣), and Pang Guan (判官). For the circular dish, it was decorated with two long-tailed phoenixes, with Rui Cao⁶ (瑞草) in their mouths. The height is 50.5cm, the mouth diameter of the lid is 25.9cm, diameter of the circular dish 43cm and weight 15388g. It is mainly made by the hammering method (錘擊法); the patterns are made in gold.

The biggest contrast between silver and gold ware of the Tang Dynasty, and that of other Dynasties, is the hammering technique (repoussage and chasing) that was often used. This

⁴ A cellar located in Xi'an, the village of the Ho's family; it was place for storing silver and gold receptacles produced in Tang Dynasty

⁵ 869AD

⁶ A kind of grass which implied fortune and propitious meanings

technique was developed from Western countries, and it was mainly used for making silver gold ware in the West. The technique was invented based on the characteristics of silver and gold, which are soft and ductile. Gold and silver flakes were laid on top as gilt, or to be molded and then hammered into shape. This was used to form the shape of the object itself, or to create patterns. Some patterns were made in one go, some in two, some more. After the step of hammering was finished, the object would be brought to undergo the processes of cutting and grinding edges (剪邊磨稜), and polishing (打光).

Even though the hammering method was already used at the time of the Shang and Zhou dynasties, Tang dynasty gold and silver ware weren't necessarily traditions inherently born and developed domestically, as many related techniques and technology originated in Persia and Byzantine.

With reference to the Shang and Zhou periods, the method of hammering was further improved during the Tang Dynasty. The hammering method allowed for the designs of silver and gold ware to be more three-dimensional, with depth like a relief sculpture. This effect was anciently called Yin Qi (隱起).

According to *Yiqie Jing Yinyi* (一切經音義), a book on phonetics and semantics of classic texts, written by Tang Huilin (唐慧琳) in the year 820, "using hammering to create a high-relief Buddhist image, also engraving to create likeness, decorated with gold and silver." Aside from using the hammering method, the methods of gilding, chiseling and welding were also used during the Tang Dynasty.

Silver Censer with two golden phoenixes and five chains decorations

鎏金雙鳳鴻雁紋壺門座五環銀香爐 FD5:045

The body is made mainly of silver; the patterns made by gilding. The censer consists of a supporting base and a bowl-like body; the lid is lost. The overall shape of the censer looks like one bowl sitting on top of another bowl that has been overturned. The walls of the body have

been pressed with five vertical lines, to create five different partitions that each convex slightly out. The outer wall of the body connects with the decoration of a beast mask. The two sides were chiseled at the opposite side with honeysuckle patterns symmetrically. The bottom of the censer was connected with the body of the censer by using the welding method. The upper part of the base is engraved with lotus patterns. The base, which is hollow, has five openings with a Lotus flower bud in the middle of each opening; between each opening there is engraved a swan goose, with climbing plant and fish roe patterns. Height 14.5cm, diameter of the body 19.5cm, the diameter for the base 16cm, circumference 26.8cm, weight 1305g. On the wall of the body was engraved “50 liang (a unit of weight equal to 50 grams), gifted by Chen Zhang Zong” (“五十兩臣張宗禮進”).

Silver-censer with a high base circular base

壺門高圈足座銀香爐 FD4:019

It consists of a lid and a body of the censer. Its uniqueness lies in its simplicity of design. The body consists of two layers; the base consists of an inner and outer layer that have been riveted together; the inner layer is divided into six pieces, riveted joint to the base of the censer. Two chains are connected to the base. A cone-shaped lotus bud sits at the top of the lid, supported by three thin layers of metal sheets that form the petals of the lotus. Under the lotus bud is a hollow half sphere with engraved petals covering it. The hollow base has six doors. The words “Big silver censer...respectfully given Chen Yang” (“大銀香爐.....臣楊復恭”) are written on the lid. Height 56cm, height of the lid 31.3cm, height of the body 25.2cm, diameter of the body 20.7cm, circumference 34.6cm, weight 3920g.

Golden beast-legged censer

鎏金獸足香爐

It was discovered from Tong Qing Shansi Sheli Ta Digong Shijia Rulai Bao Zhang (潼慶山寺舍利塔地宮釋迦如來寶帳). The strong appearance gives viewers vibrant and energetic feelings. Height 13cm, diameter 13cm. The body was decorated with six masks and legs of the beast. The

lid is designed with an upside-down-bowl shape, with heart-shaped and flower-shaped decorations. The body was filled with incense ashes when it was discovered.

Hollow Bronze censer welded in gold

鎏金鏤空銅香爐

It was excavated from the Deng Feng Fa Wangsi Er Hao Ta Digong⁷ (登封法王寺二號塔地宮). It consists of a lid and body. The hollow part was welded in gold. The lid was decorated in Sunflower pattern; at the top of the lid is a pearl-shaped knob. Patterns of lotus flowers, clouds, tortoise and winding flowers also decorate it. The six doors are separated with equal spacing. An auspicious animal, rui shou (瑞獸), is on top of each opening.

Strong man with elephant mask bronze censer

象首金剛銅爐 FD3:018

This censer was made by the process of forging, and consists of a lid and a body. The appearance is similar with the Five-legged lying tortoise with Lotus flower patterns silver golden censer (鎏金臥龜蓮花紋五足朵帶銀香爐). The difference between them is that the lid knob of this bronze censer is in the design of a man with the head of elephant. The lid was decorated with openwork/fretwork climbing plant and flower patterns. There are metal rings under the rim of the censer, making it convenient to fasten the lid of the censer. The censer is supported by five legs, and between each legs is a dragon head that's holding a metal ring in its mouth, with a flower dangling on the ring. Height 42cm, diameter 24.5cm, depth 8cm, weight 8470g.

The above censers are similar in terms of the design and appearance. A shared feature among all of them is the lotus flower that adorns them as decoration. This, along with other resources, highlights the popularity of lotus motifs and patterns at the time.

Bronze mirror with auspicious animal decorations

⁷ A Buddhist pagoda located in Henan; built during the Tang Dynasty. It was also named as one of the earliest temple built in the Chinese history.

瑞獸銘文帶鏡

This kind of bronze mirrors appeared in the early stage of Tang Dynasty. What makes it unique is that it is decorated with images of people, buildings and furniture used at that time. In the middle of the mirror is an image of a lotus shape censer.

The birth of Sakya paintings scrolls

釋迦降生圖卷

Also named as the picture of Song Zi Tianwang (送子天王圖). The picture portrays a maid holding a tall lotus shape censer with a tall stem in her right hand, the smoke of the incense rising in spirals and wafting into the air.

The Amita Sutra (Fifth edition)

一切如來心秘密全身舍利寶篋印陀羅尼經卷·五代

It was discovered in Yu Lei Feng Ta Dingceng (於雷峰塔頂層), and it's now displayed in the Zhejiang Museum. Length 2m, height 6cm. An attractive Lotus flower shaped censer was placed in the middle of the painting which is called the Buddhist greeting rite. It was produced in the third year of Kai Bao 開寶三年 (975AD).

Jiangsu Danyang Southern Dynasties Tomb Mural

手捧蓮花香爐的羽人·江蘇丹陽南朝壁畫磚墓

In this mural, a celestial being is holding a five-legged censer. This type of censer matched with the censers which appeared in the Period of Sui and Tang Dynasties. The only difference is that the decorations of beast masks and strong men were added.

As we can see, most of the lotus motifs used at this period of time were related to Buddhism. The spread of Buddhism also brought great changes to the traditional censers. Buddhism had reached China as early as Han Dynasty, but saw a more widespread reach when foreign monks during the Eastern Jin Dynasty translated the classic Buddhist texts. The religion was further transmitted by Yan Cong (彥琮) in the Sui Dynasty, Xuan Zang (玄奘) and Yi Jing (義淨) in the

Tang Dynasty. Thanks to their extensive translation efforts of the Buddhist texts, the Chinese people were able to take charge over the process of change of the interpretation of the classic texts. In addition, the esteem that the rulers of the successive dynasties gave to Buddhism allowed the religion to flourish.

Originating from the religion of India, the lotus embodies the idea of “to grow out of the mud unsullied,” incorruptible and pure, a concept that is found in the worship of the Amitabha Buddha, in the Lotus Sutra. It’s an idea that has found pervasive appeal in the Mahayana school of Buddhism. With its appealing symbolism, the lotus flower has been preserved and immortalized in various forms. Besides being mentioned in Tang dynasty poetry and literature, [the lotus flower] is also found in patterns and decorations, such as on the censers that we have looked at today.

Having looked at the golden and silver censers, we would like to know what sort of role and position the use of incense had in the lives of the people in the Tang Dynasty.

Let’s first look at the emperor. To this Son of Heaven, who holds the divine right of kings, how did he use incense to achieve his political aims? Burning incense represented the will of heaven, reminding one of the Mandate of Heaven that was his as the emperor. It symbolized holding on to supernatural wisdom and knowledge. Through the adoption of relevant regulations, the importance of incense in the imperial court and political life was strengthened. According to *Zi zhi Tong Jian* (資治通鑑), *Xin Tang Shu* (新唐書) and *Quan Tang Wen* (全唐文), normally there would be an incense burner table set up in the main hall, and the affairs of the state would be handled before this display. The Emperor would give aromatic gifts to the ministers to gain their support. One of the ministers, Zhang Jiuling (張九齡) published a text called *Xiecixiang Yao Mian Zhi Biao* (謝賜香藥面脂表⁸), in order to thank the Emperor for his generosity and kindness. For candidates who were going to take the examinations for being a

⁸ A list of aromatics which the Emperor had sent him as gifts

minister in the court, they would participate in the incense ceremony, owing to its symbolization of a good future.

Apart from the court, the rich conducted competitions in order to compare the quality of aromatics between the families. People will also add aromatics while they were bathing, in order to make them smell good.

There was also a mother who her daughter eating aromatics until she had grown up. That girl didn't disappoint her mother's expectations, and was known for emitting a fragrance, becoming a courtesan.

Incense permeated the world of the Tang people, as if in a dream or fantasy. The reality of the world was transformed into an ideal realm, and life was able to be refined, free from vulgarity, and the senses able to enjoy an expansion of feeling. Aromatics were enjoyed from the upper to the lower classes, not only influencing societal customs, but at the same time also lead to a focused interest on ware and paraphernalia related to incense, leading to lavish censers.

Aromatics Container (香寶子)

Inevitably, ministers would show off their precious gifts bestowed by the Emperor in front of their friends and relatives. In the text *Wei Guolinggong Xie La Ri Ci Xiang Yao Biao*⁹ (為郭令公謝臘賜香藥表), it is described in detail the aromatics and incense ware that the Emperor bestowed to him in the Winter Solstice ceremony. One of the gifts was called Two Aromatic Medicine Containers in Silver and Gold (香藥金銀合子兩枚). The two containers were made of silver and gold for the purpose of storing aromatic medicines. In recent years in the field of textual criticism, these kinds of aromatics containers have been identified, one after the other.

⁹ A text written by Goulinggong, a military expert in the Tang Dynasty; recorded the entire aromatics gifts bestowed to him by the Emperor in order to express his thankfulness.

Silver aromatics container with human images

鑲金人物畫 銀香寶子 FD5:045, 007

It was produced by repousse and chasing, with flower patterns welded in gold. A pair of containers was discovered, and is different in terms of the pattern designs of the body. The knob was designed in a pearl shape; on the surface of the lid, there is a flying lion decorated on each of the petal. The body is divided into four doors with different pictures, such as celestial beings drinking together (仙人對飲), person playing Chinese wind instruments (簫人吹簫), golden snake spitting out a pearl (金蛇吐珠), Ba Ya playing the zither 伯牙撫琴. Height 24.7cm, diameter of the rim 13.2cm, depth 11.4cm, diameter of the stem 12.6cm, weight 901.5g.

Silver aromatic container with Ji Yue patterns

鑲金伎樂紋銀香寶子 FD5:093, 067

This container was also stored in a pair; made of gold, the patterns are welded in gold. The lid of the container is decorated with patterns of vine. Along the edge of the rim of the body are decorative patterns of water ripples and Lotus petals. The knob is in the shape of a pearl, with patterns of Lotus petals, Mandarin ducks and vine. On the wall of the body is engraved people dancing and playing the wind instruments. Patterns of Lotus petals decorate the base. Height 11.7cm, diameter 5.6cm, height of the cup 5.8cm, circumference 6.3cm and weight 149.5g.

These kinds of aromatic containers were usually produced and discovered in pairs. In the archaeology site of Famen Temple Di Gong (法門寺地宮), these kinds of receptacles were stored with censers in the same area. Also, as “a pair of aromatics container” (“香寶子一對”) is stated in *Yi Wu Zhang*¹⁰ (衣物帳), it is clear that these kinds of containers were produced in pairs. On the front and back side of the box FD5:011-4, and on the front, and two sides of the box FD5:11-5 that contain images of six-armed Guanyin, it clearly shows a censer with a pair of containers flanking it, showing that such containers came in pairs.

¹⁰ The list excavated with the antique at the same time which records a list of clothing or personal belongings

Sackcloth color painting of lion and phoenixes with censer; Stored in the Louvre

法國盧浮宮舊藏香爐獅子鳳凰紋彩色麻布畫

Height 75cm, width 92.5cm. The upper part is a pair of phoenixes; and the lower part of the painting is a censer in a lotus shape. Flanking both sides of the censer is a pair of aromatics container supported by vines. The purpose of this sackcloth was to serve as a tablecloth, or to hang on the wall as decoration.

Aromatic box with pagoda decoration

鎏金塔形銅合

It was excavated from the tomb of Jiangxi Rui Chang Xian Tang (江西瑞昌縣唐墓); height 14cm, diameter of the body 8cm. The knob was designed in the shape of pagoda; there are exquisite squares and strip patterns on each layer of the pagoda. The body is spherical in shape, with a tall stem in the shape of a suona (a Chinese sorna, or type of double-reeded horn). Its material is a gold alloy.

Bronze aromatic box

銅合

It was excavated in 1983 from Luoyang Shen Hui (洛陽神會) and the Tomb Tower of Shang (尚墓塔). It consists of a lid, body and stem. The knob is designed in the shape of Jiuchong Xianglun (九重相輪); the stem is in the shape of a Chinese trumpet (suona), and connected with the boxes with rivets. Height 15.6cm

Bronze aromatic box

銅合

A set with different sizes. Heights are 16.2, 15.5 (2), 11.2cm. Diameters are 9.4, 9.5, 9.4, 7.1cm. The designs are similar with the receptacles excavated from the tomb of Shen Hui Heshang (神會和尚墓) and the tomb of Jiangxi Rui Chang Tang (江西瑞昌墓). However, the number of floors of the pagoda on the knob is different; some are designed with five floors or seven floors.

Bowl and lid with stupa-shape handle;

Stored in Horyu-ji¹¹

銅合・法隆寺

It was produced during the Nara period (710-794), height 9.3cm, mouth diameter 6.5cm. It functions as an aromatics box.

Based on the evidence given, this kind of aromatics box comes as a single, unlike the aromatics containers (香寶子) that we have thus looked at, which came in pairs. In *Yi Wu Zhang* (衣物帳), it is clearly stated that there is an aromatic container that is singular in number (“香合一具”). Its function can be found in the Yuchong Chuzi (玉蟲廚子) displayed in Horyu-ji. In the picture, there is an old monk holding an aromatics box as well as a censer with handles, in order to make offerings to the Buddhist relics. The picture provides the best explanation for the function of the aromatic box.

Magpie-tail incense burner

鵲尾香爐

Length 39.2cm, mouth diameter 10.8cm. The body of the burner is wide, with a high base that is in a cup shape. Inside the burner is a pot, on the top of the rim there is a ring-shaped handle, to facilitate the removal of the pot for change of incense. It is connected with a long handle, on the part that is close to the burner there is a three-leaf, cirrus decorative motif made of a separate sheet of metal, and at the end of the handle is a lion figurine.

Magpie-tailed incense burner;

Excavated from Famen Temple

鵲尾香爐・法門寺 FD5:089

Formed by the welding of sheets of metal. Length is 44cm; it is in the shape of a cup, and has a long handle. The rim is plain; it has a circular body and a base in the shape of a Chinese suona.

¹¹ A Buddhist temple, it was once one of the powerful Seven Great Temple, located in Nara, Japan.

The handle is connected to the burner with a welded U shape silver strip; the end of the handle is in the shape of a ri yi (如意形). The words “Thirteenth year of Xiantong year 872 Wensiyuan made silver hand censer, and incense container” (“咸通十三年 872 年文思院造白銀手爐一枚並香寶子”) are engraved on the handle of the burner.

This kind of burners, as described in their own inscriptions, are called “hand censers” (手爐), since with its long handle, people can easily hold the burner. The name of the burner is based on the shape of the handle, hence the name “magpie-tail burner.” The name is mentioned in literature of the Southern Dynasty, and has appeared in texts and poetry of the Tang Dynasty. The incense burner is usually used in Buddhist ceremonies.

Burner with Ping Zhen handle;

Produced during the Nara to Heian Periods

瓶鎮柄香爐。法隆寺奈良～平安時代

Gilded copper. Length 39.2cm, mouth diameter 11.2cm, height 6.8cm. With an L shaped handle, and a heart-shaped decorative piece where the handle meets the body of the burner; on the end of a burner is a vase-shape decoration (瓶形). The base of the burner is designed in the shape of chrysanthemum petals. This style of design was popular during the Heian Period.

Incense burner with lion figurine;

Excavated from the Horyu-ji in the 8th Century

獅子鎮柄香爐・法隆寺奈良時代（8世紀）

Casted in a copper-nickel alloy. Length 38.5cm, mouth diameter 13.3cm, height 10.2cm. Long handle connects with the burner itself. A heart-shape decoration is attached onto the handle where it connects to the burner. A lion figurine sits at the end of the handle. The base of the burner is decorated in the shape of chrysanthemum petals.

Magpie-tailed incense burner with Ping Zhen handle;

Stored in Horyu-ji during the Asuka Period

鵲尾形柄香爐・法隆寺飛鳥時代

Produced by the method of gilding. Length 39cm, mouth diameter 13.3cm, height 10.2cm. The burner was designed in a thin cup shape. The end of the handle that is connected to the body of the burner is decorated with two half spheres; the end of the handle is designed in the shape of a magpie tail. This design has the best imitation of a magpie tail. This burner was used by priest Hyeja (高句麗僧慧慈), who was the teacher of Prince Shotoku Taiji (聖德太子) during the Asuka Period.

Burner in Magpie tail shaped handle;

Stored in Horyu-ji during the Asuka Period

鵲尾形柄香爐・法隆寺飛鳥時代

In terms of the crafting and the design of the burner, this burner is similar to the burner mentioned just previously. The only difference is that the height of the two decorative spheres on this burner is slightly lower than the one mentioned above. Length 35.5cm, mouth diameter 10.8, height 8cm.

Magpie-tailed shaped Red Sandalwood burner with golden inlay;

Excavated from Shoso-in¹²

紫檀金鈿鵲尾香爐・正倉院

There are in total five burners, stored in Nancang (南倉上部). There are mainly two kinds of materials for making the long handle incense burners – copper-nickel alloy and copper. Of all the materials, Red Sandalwood is the most beautiful. The body of the burner is inlay with honeysuckle and birds patterns. Previous stones have also been inlaid in the design. It was also designed with jewels patterns. At the rim of the pot is a lion figurine; another lion figurine decorates the end of the handle. Black and yellow silk strips criss cross along the handle; the end of the handle is decorated with lotus petal shapes.

¹² A treasure house belongs to Todai-ji, Nara.

Burner with pagoda-shaped handle

鍍金銅塔式柄香爐

Excavated in 1988 from the tomb of Jiangxi Rui Chang Tang (江西瑞昌墓). Height 6.5cm, mouth diameter 10.5cm, length of the handle 23cm, width 2.5 to 3.5cm. It consists of the body and base of the censer as well as a handle. It has an open mouth body; the handle and the burner are connected with the base and stem by an S shape hook. The burner side of the handle is decorated with an engraved peach shape, the other end of the handle is decorated with a pagoda figurine.

Burner with long handle

長柄手爐

It was excavated from the tomb of Luoyang Shen Hui Heshang (洛陽神會和尚墓塔). It has a cup-shaped body; the base is designed in the shape of roulette, and is connected with the body of the censer by rivets. The handle is designed in an upside-down U shape in order to connect with the body. At the end of the handle is a golden lion figurine sitting on the lotus flower. Length 40.6cm.

According to the evidence shown, it first appeared on the mural of Western Qin in Cave 169 (窟西秦壁畫) in Gansu Yong Jing Bing Ling temple (甘肅永靖炳靈寺). The Magpie-tailed burner is also depicted on a mural of a Southern Dynasties tomb. Length 13.5m, width 5.19m, height 5.1m. There are ten paintings on the two walls of Yongdao (甬道) and the tomb of Dongxi (墓室東西). In the painting called Man Plays with the Dragon (羽人戲龍), the man in the painting is holding an incense burner with a magpie-tailed handle. You can also find a large number of depictions of incense burners with magpie-tailed handles in Buddhist caves.

People making offerings to Buddha;

Wei of the Northern Dynasties

供養人·北魏

It is located in the North and the South Walls, Lotus Flower Cave of Longmen grottoes at Luoyang. In the stone carvings, disciples are following the monks to make offerings to the Buddha. The monks are holding incense burners; the bodies of the burners connected to funnel-shaped bases.

Emperor worshipping the Buddha;

Wei of the Northern Dynasties

帝后禮佛圖·北魏

Located at the East and the West sides of Cave 1 and 4 in Henan (鞏縣石窟第 1 窟、第 4 窟南壁東西兩側). The artwork clearly portrays a scene of the Emperor worshipping the Buddha. It is a grand and great procession, showing the nobility and rich following Buddhist monks in a solemn ceremony. The magpie-tailed incense burner and the aromatic boxes can be found easily in the picture. It is not difficult to find these kinds of incense receptacles in the mural and other paintings produced during the Tang Dynasty.

People making offerings to the Buddha;

Tang Dynasty

供養人·唐代

Located in the Longmen grottoes at Luoyang (龍門石窟), outside the Cave of Lotus Flower (蓮花洞). There are three people; at the front is a man holding an incense burner with a handle. There is an inscription reading "Tang [Dynasty] Zhen Guan (Emperor Tang Tai Zong era name), disciple Zhang Shizhen" (大唐貞觀廿年弟子張世禎).

Bodhisattva with a censer;

Tang Dynasty

菩薩像·唐

Painting No. 125 in the British Museum, collected by Mark Aurel Stein¹³; it is created on a silk banner with ink and colour. Height 62.8cm, width 19cm. Bodhisattva stands on a Lotus Flower

¹³ Sir Marc Aurel Stein, Hungarian-British archaeologist; primarily known for his explorations and archaeological discoveries in Central Asia.

stand in bare feet, wearing a three-pearl flame crown, wearing strings of pearls on the body, and carrying in the left hand a censer with a long handle.

Bodhisattva as Guide of souls;

Tang Dynasty

引路菩薩圖·唐

Collected by the British Museum, painting No.47 collected by Mark Aurel Stein, it is produced with ink and colour on the silk banner. Height 80.5cm, width 53.8cm. The Bodhisattva and the dead woman stand on the floating cloud which indicates that they are flying. Bodhisattva holds the stem of the Lotus flower with his left hand and a censer in his right hand, looking at the woman behind him.

Image of Guanyin with thousand hands and eyes;

Five Dynasties, the eighth year of Tianfu

千手千眼觀音圖·五代天福八年

Collected by the Guimet Museum No. 17775, coloured image. Height 123.5cm, 84.2cm. In the middle of the portrait sits Guanyin, outside the circle is the great Saraswati (大辯才天女), the celestial grandmother (婆藪仙), the Sun and Moon Bodhisattva (日月藏菩薩), as well as Dashen Vajrapani (大神金剛) and others. On the lower part is the Water Moon Guanyin (水月觀音); there is a female disciple on the left; she holds an incense burner in her right hand. The type of incense burner she holds continued in usage in the Song and Ming Dynasties.

Incense burner¹⁴香囊

¹⁴ Incense burner means a metal-made spherical incense burner; incense pouch means an aromatic container made of fabric in this text. Both can be referred to in Chinese as *xiang nong* (香囊).

In Tang Dynasty, incense burners were made for the rich to represent their social status. They would also suspend/hang a smaller size incense burners on themselves and on bed curtains in order to make the fragrance flow around them.

Incense burner with grapes, flowers and birds decorations

葡萄花鳥紋銀香囊

It was excavated from Hejia Village in Xi'an. It is now displayed in the Shaanxi History Museum. It was produced by the hammering method, is hollow with fretwork. Diameter of the outer wall 4.6cm, the diameter of the golden Xiangyu 2.8cm.

It is a hollowed sphere, the upper half the lid and the lower half the body. The two parts are connected by a leaf-shaped hinge. The hook helps control the opening and the closing of the incense burner. Inside the lower half are two Chiping huan (持平環)¹⁵. The rivet helps connect the Xianyu (香盃)¹⁶ with the sphere. The upper sphere has a circular ring through which a long chain is connected. Under the chain is a Lotus bud design. The design of the burner helps to maintain the suspended pot inside steady at a horizontal level, so as to prevent the leaking of aromatics. The decorations of flowers, birds and grapes are distributed equally on both the upper and lower halves. This kind of small incense burner originates from the earlier Dynasties; aside from the materials found from the Ma Wang Dui site (馬王堆) mentioned by the previous speakers, I would like to add some more information here.

According to the text *Taping Guang Ji* (太平廣記) in Chapter 318, a man called Wang Gongbo (王恭伯) fell in love with a woman at first sight; before they left each other, this woman gave an incense pouch to Wang as a goodbye gift. In chapter 295, it is recorded that a woman also gave an incense pouch to her husband as a goodbye gift. Based on the two stories shown, it is indicated that women would wear incense pouches, and would present it as a gift to other people. An incense pouch was also excavated from the tomb site of Xinjiang Yuli Xian Yingpan M22 (新疆尉犁縣營盤墓地) in 1995. It has been estimated that the pouch was produced

¹⁵ Rings which can help maintain the pot in the lower sphere at a horizontal level constantly

¹⁶ A bowl to hold aromatics in the incense burner

during the Jin and Han Periods. Length 8cm, mouth diameter 5cm. Cylinder shape, sewn in fabric; the body and the bottom parts of the incense pouch was made of red tough silk fabric. It is exquisite in terms of its craftsmanship. It has a strap at the mouth of the pouch, so people can fasten or loosen the pouch.

The incense burners produced in Tang Dynasty has many functions.

First, they could be used as incense receptacles. According to Volume Six “Incense Burner” (香囊) in the text *Yiqie Jing Yinyi* (一切經音義) written by Weilin (慧琳) “the incense burners were designed in a sphere-shaped receptacle. The design was intelligent and brilliant, the inner pot would not overturn and maintain at the same level constantly,” “they were produced in bronze, iron, gold and silver metals”. In another account, mentioned in the history of the early Tang Dynasty, the biography of Yang Yuhuan (楊玉嬾): during the An-Shi Rebellion, Yang Yuhuan¹⁷ committed suicide under the orders of the Tang Emperor Xuanzong (唐玄宗) in a place called Ma Wei Po (馬嵬坡). In his return journey from Sichuan to the capital, he reflected upon the old affection he had for Yang and secretly ordered for her to be reburied elsewhere. When digging her old burial mound, he said “the skin of Yang is putrefied, but the incense burner is still here”, indicated that incense burners were made of metals, and they were also used by upper class women.

Incense pouches can also use during Buddhist ceremonies. People placed Buddhist scripture inside their pouches and wore them, to avoid calamities and harm from evil. According to the text *Xu Zhai Xie Ji* (續齋諧記), a man called Huan Jing(桓景) followed Fei Zhang Fang(費長房) to study abroad. Fei told Huan that a disaster would happen to his family on 9 September; his family could only avoid the disaster by wearing an incense pouch on his shoulder.

¹⁷ Also known as Yang Guifei, consort of Emperor Xuanzhong, known as one of the Four Great Beauties of China.

At the later stage of the Tang Dynasty, pouches could be worn around the wrist; also it could be worn on the arm with the Buddhist scripture inside the pouch as to ward off evil spirits and disasters.

Silver incense burner with openwork and bird decorations

鎏金雀鳥紋鏤空銀香囊 FD5:080

Made of silver, with decorations welded in gold. The upper half of the sphere is the lid and the lower half of the sphere is the body; the two halves are connected with a hinge. It is symmetrical and hollow. Three circles with engraved swan geese decorate the sphere. There are three curved equilateral triangles on top of the sphere. On top of the lid is a rivet; the upper part is a lotus shape ring that connects with the long chain. The pot located inside the lower sphere is decorated with a golden flower. Diameter 5.8cm, diameter of the Chiping Huan 3.8cm, 4.8cm, diameter of the pot 2.8cm, length of the long chain 17.7cm, weight 92.2g.

Incense burner with bees and flowers decorations

鎏金雙蜂團花紋鏤空香囊·FD5:081

Made of gold alloy. Patterns are welded in gold. The upper and lower halves of the sphere are connected with a leaf shape hinge. Decorated with five rounded-embroidery (團花) designs of double-bee motifs, the crown of the sphere has a four bees rounded-embroidery design. The body of the sphere is in openwork with a broad-leaved design. The hook can help open and close the burner; at the bottom is also decorated with flowers pattern. Diameter 12.8cm, diameter of the pot 7.2cm, length of the long chain 24.5cm, weight 547g.

These kinds of incense receptacles were called spherical incense burner or incense ball.

According to the list *Yi Wu Zhang* (衣物帳), the item “two incense burners” (“香囊兩枚重”) was recorded, therefore providing us with its appellation as used in the Tang Dynasty.

Silver incense burner;

Excavated from Shoso-in

銀香囊 · 正倉院

Horizontal diameter 18cm, vertical diameter 18.8cm. Exhibited in the West Wing of the Shosoin. Made of silver, openwork with decorations of lion, dancing birds and Bao Xiang flowers (寶相花). Inside the silver sphere is a pot which maintains at a horizontal level. The difference between this burner and other incense burners is that it has a relatively larger volume, and has no chain, and can therefore roll around; it is for this reason that in *Xi Jing Za Ji* (西京雜記) it has been postulated to be a censer for mattresses.

The technology applied in the crafting of this censer is nowadays called the gimbal suspension (常平架). This technique was not only applied in the making of censers, but also on the lantern that was used during the dragon dances in the Song Dynasty. In the 16th century, European navigational compasses as well as modern-day industries also employ the principles behind the gimbal suspension.

The followings are some incense receptacles.

Silver flat spoon

素面銀香匙 FD5:004

Produced by using the hammering method. The spoon has a very flat, circular bowl, and the part of the handle starts off flat (where it is connected to the bowl) and gradually rounds out towards the end. At the end of the handle is nub in a pearl shape. Its function is to stir the aromatics. Length 18.5cm, diameter of the spoon 4.2cm, weight 42.25g.

Small silver table

素面銀香案 FD5:065

Made of welded gold sheets. Table shape, with the two ends of the table top curling up. Board-shaped legs, with the part that is connected to the top in a winding shape. There are two silver strips welded between the two legs. There are traces of polishing.

Unpatterned silver censer with bowl

素面銀香爐並碗盞 FD5:027

Produced by using the hammering and the welding method. It consists of a separate bowl and censer stand. Bowl is in the shape of a monk's alms bowl. The wall thickness is thin and the depth of the bowl is high. Circular base with circular stem. The rim of the bowl has a small handle. The bowl can fit into the mouth of the censer. Trumpet shaped stem with layers. Polishing was applied on the wall of both censer and bowl. Height 20.3cm, depth of the bowl 6.3cm, height of the stem 9.7cm, diameter of the stem 12cm, weight 925g.

Baekje golden bronze large censer

百濟金銅大香爐

Buyeo¹⁸ censer excavated in 1993 from an old temple in South Korea, South Chungcheong Province. Height of the censer 64cm, diameter 19cm, weight 11.8kg. Out of the 450 unearthed pieces, it was one of the largest. The patterns engraved on the censer were designed very exquisitely. The base of the censer is crafted in the shape of a dragon with its head raised high. The top of the lid is a phoenix. Decorations include celestial beings, auspicious animals, birds, sacred mountains, and magic clouds. The Korea government has set it as a national treasure. It is currently displayed at the Buyeo National Museum.

Aromatics 香料

Traces of aromatics have also been found:

Aloeswood;

Excavated from Horyu-ji

沈水香·法隆寺

¹⁸ Buyeo County is a county in South Chungcheong Province, South Korea.

Now displayed in the Tokyo National Museum. Aloeswood. Length 98.8cm, produced during the Asuka to Nara Periods in Japan.

Candana¹⁹ ;

Excavated from Horyu-ji

栴檀香 · 法隆寺

Also displaying in the Tokyo National Museum. Length 66.4cm, also produced during between the Asuka and Nara Periods in Japan.

Bai Tan Xiang²⁰;

Excavated from Horyu-ji

白檀香 · 法隆寺

Sandalwood. Length 60.3cm. Produced between the Asuka and Nara Periods.

Miaojin Mushan;

Excavated from Famensi

描金木山 · 法門寺

Used as offerings to Emperor Yizong of Tang. According to the record *Yi Wu Zhang* (衣物帳), fragrance woods such as Rutou Xiang Shan (乳頭香山), Tan Xiang Shan (檀香山) and Ding Xiang Shan (丁香山) were all carved and outlined in gold. Height 14.2 to 28.3cm, weight 1701.3g.

Huang Shu Xiang;

Excavated from Zheng Cang Yuan

黃熟香 · 正倉院

¹⁹ Scientific name: *Sirium myrtifolium*, aromatics under the sandalwood category.

²⁰ Also named as Sandalwood, *Lignum Santali Albi*

Also called Lanshe Dai; the name Todai-ji²¹ is implied in the name Lanshe. It is the biggest Aloeswood found in Japan. To purify the fragrance, the heartwood which contains no fragrance is removed. It is believed that its delicate fragrance can still be smelt today.

Jing Tong (box to hold scriptures);

Excavated from the Zheng Cang Yuan

經筒·正倉院

Octagonal pillar in shape, the paint applied on the outside contains agarwood powder (about 2cm thick), plus the flower bud of Ding Xiang and the seeds of leguminous plant. It has silver and gold flowers decorations inside. The lid and body were decorated with Tang flowers and birds patterns in silver colour.

Note from presenter: As these notes are meant to accompany a slideshow presentation, the main references are found on the slide titled “鳴謝”. In order to facilitate a broader perspective, only a small number of metal censers have been selected and mentioned.

²¹ Todai-ji, a Buddhist temple, one of the powerful Seven Temples located in the city of Nara, Japan.