On the Metallic Buckle with a Round Front and Square Rear Unearthed in East Asia

Fang Xiaotian*

Introduction

The metallic buckle with a round front and square rear is a kind of belt accessory from the Han and Wei-Jin dynasties. This kind of belt has been unearthed in China and North Korea, like Jinning of Yunnan, Kunming, Luoyang, Anxiang of Hunnan, Karasahr of Xinjiang, and P’yŏngyang (Table I). In addition, there are six pieces not unearthed buckles shown on the catalogue. These buckles are ten centimeters long or so. Three pieces are made of jade, two pieces are made of silver, and one piece is made of copper gilding. The time period is from late Western Han to Western Jin. They are not the same absolutely, but have some common features: a round front and square rear; an arc perforation in one end of the round side; movable belt tongue behind the arc perforation; the whole belt buckle decorated mostly with dragon and tiger except one piece in sheep design; most have a rope or triangle design at the edge; in the eye, body of the pattern and edge triangle part studding with precious stones; and some with decorative small balls. Till now, these buckles have been found alone without matching belt accessories. The buckle is widely found in China and North Korea, and is connected

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<Table I> Metallic buckle with round front and square rear unearthed in East Asia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tomb</th>
<th>Structure of the tomb (unit: m)</th>
<th>Buckle (unit: cm)</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jinning, ShizhaishanM7</td>
<td>Shaft tomb 3.4*2.3</td>
<td>made of silver, 10.1*(6.1-4.2), inlay with gold, tiger pattern</td>
<td>Middle Western Han</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhenbaidong, Korea, M37</td>
<td>Wooden-chambered tomb</td>
<td>made of gold, 11.5*6, with the diamonds on the tiger eyes and the side of the frame, with tiny silver of the frame, tiger pattern</td>
<td>Middle and Late Western Han</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiyanli, Korea, M219</td>
<td>Wooden-chambered tomb</td>
<td>made of silver, dragon pattern, with rope pattern of the frame</td>
<td>Middle and Late Western Han</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhenbaidong, Korea, M92</td>
<td>Wooden-chambered tomb</td>
<td>made of silver, 12.1, dragon pattern</td>
<td>Middle and Late Western Han</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhenbaidong, Korea, M2</td>
<td>Wooden-chambered tomb</td>
<td>made of silver, 12, dragon pattern</td>
<td>Middle and Late Western Han</td>
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closely with the culture of Xiongnu and Xianbei, which were related to the spread and exchange of the cultures in East Asia. So scholars in China, Japan, and Korea all pay much attention to it. Sun Ji’s research on this topic is valuable. He made a summary of the types and development

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shiyanli, Korea, M9</td>
<td>Wooden-chambered tomb</td>
<td>dragon pattern, with rope pattern of the frame</td>
<td>Early Eastern Han</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiamaying [夹马营] tomb, Luoyang</td>
<td>Multi-room brick-chambered tomb, total length: 8</td>
<td>made of jade, 8.5*(4.3-5.6), dragon pattern</td>
<td>Late Eastern Han</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liuhong Tomb, Anxiang</td>
<td>Single-room brick-chamber tomb, 3.6x3.6</td>
<td>made of gold, 9* (6-5.5), dragon pattern</td>
<td>Die in 306 AD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogedaqin [博格达沁] site, Karasahr</td>
<td></td>
<td>8 dragons pattern, with ruby and turquoise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yangfutou [羊甫头], Kunmin</td>
<td></td>
<td>made of gold, 10.8* (4.7-5), dragon pattern, tiger pattern</td>
<td></td>
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The evolution of the belt accessories in his article, “Zhongguo gudai de daiju” (Belt accessories in ancient China). He especially combined it with historical books and divided belt accessories into periods of Daijue [带鐍], Daikou [带扣], and Diexie [蹀躞带]. This was an important contribution to belt accessories research. Japanese scholars have paid much attention to its national attributes and manufacture process. However, for the buckle, there are still further issues that need more discussion. This paper mainly focuses on two questions. The first is the origin and development of the buckle, which is still in academic debate. This paper will study belt accessories that are relevant to this buckle one by one and discuss its origins from in terms of such issues of age, location and nationality. Secondly, this paper examines the influence of belt buckles with a round front and square on Han and Tang costumes. From the Han to the Tang dynasties, more and more records can be found in written materials. How does this happen? After studying archaeological materials we can find the buckles with a round front and square rear, and later Diexie were usually found along with a belt hook, which supplies clues for research into this problem.

The Origin and Development of Belt Buckles with a Round Front and Square Rear

To list the relevant belt accessories one by one.

Type A, belt buckles with a round front and square rear in Xiongnu culture.

In Xiongnu culture, a kind of buckle with a round front and square rear was popular. Its materials are mainly in bronze and the shape is irregular, with a round front and square rear generally. It is decorated with a sheep and cattle design or an animal fighting. There are a few designs on the edge, with a front-position buckle tongue that cannot be moved. There are buckles unearthed alone or in pairs. Such kinds of belt buckles
have been mainly unearthed in Dyrestuisky Kultuk cemetery (Picture I, 1-3), Corso Geer cellar (Picture I, 4), Holun Tolgoi cemetery, and Bacangmu Heraga cemetery. The era of these locations is the Western Han dynasty (200 BC-100 BC). In addition, the buckles have also been found in China like Daodunzi cemetery (Picture I, 5),11 Xichagou cemetery,12 and Jiaohegouxi cemetery.13 Daodunzi and Xichagou are in the middle and late period of the Western Han dynasty (100 BC-100AD). Xichagou is in the early period of Western Han dynasty (200 BC-100 BC). Sun Ji wrote, in *Belt accessories in ancient China* that the Daijue of Xiongnu “affects deeply the shape of the belt buckle of Han dynasty.”14 But they are very different in terms of decoration, material, buckle tongue, and pair matching.

Type B, buckles with a winged horse, pig, and tiger pattern of the Diexie belt.

The Diexie belt buckle is similar to buckles with a round front and

<Picture I> Type A&B buckle

* No.1 and No. 2 from Dyrestuisky Kultuk cemetery; No.3 from Corso Geer cellar; No.4 from Daodunzi tomb, Ningxia, M1; No.5 from Laoheshen M56, M105; No. 6 from Jalainur tombs; No.7 from Tumed Left Banner tombs; No. 8 from Helingeer tombs.
square rear in shape. Their main difference lies in that there is set of rings and drooping Diexie on the Diexie belt. This kind of Diexie belt can be found in Zhalainuoer (Picture I, 6), Yushu Laoheshen (Picture I, 5), Inner Mongolia Tumed Left Banner (Picture I, 7), and Helingeer Lingpi cellar (Picture I, 8). Most scholars believe that the Zhalainuoer tombs are from the Eastern Han dynasty and that the Yushu Laoheshen middle tombs are from the late period Western Han and early Eastern Han. The Diexie belt in the Tumed Left Banner and Lingpiyao cellar were all believed as the works of Northern Wei, but Sun Ji has pointed out the age is during the Han and Jin dynasty according to its design and shape characteristics.

Type C, buckles with Diexie belt carved with dragon and tiger design.

The materials are mainly in glided gold, gold, silver, and jade. The main unearthed locations are Dingxian county, Luoyang, Yixing (Picture II, 5), Nanjing, (Picture II, 1), Wuhan, Guangzhou, Chaoyang (Picture II, 2, 3), Beipiao (Picture II, 4), Ji'an, Mongchontosŏng of Korea, and Xinshan of Japan. Besides, there are

* No.1 from Xue Qiu [薛秋] tomb, Nanjing; No. 2 from Yuantaizi [袁台子] tomb, Chaoyang; No. 3 from Fengche duwei [奉车都尉] tomb, Chaoyang; No. 4 from Labadong [喇叭洞], Beipiao, IIM101; No. 5 from Zhou Chu [周处] tomb, Yixing.
many collections in Asian art museums of Japan and Amsterdam. Among these sites, Caoxiu died in Taihe 2nd year (224), Zhouchu tomb is in Yuankang 7th year (297), Guangzhou Dadao mountian tomb is Taining year two (324), Ding county No. 43 tomb should be in the late Eastern Han dynasty, Chaoyang and Beipiao tombs are considered as the remains of Qianyan, in the late period of Han and Wei-Jin. Based on all the above, it can be concluded that this kind Diexie belt firstly appeared in the late period of Eastern Han, popular in the Wei-Jin period and no later than the late period of Eastern Jin.

To summarize the characteristics, the time and the place of the above buckles, shown as Picture III, table II.

According to the above table, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. Type A buckles, which are the earliest type of buckles, appeared in the early period of the Western Han dynasty. It is a typical Xiongnu style item mainly found in Russia, Outer Mongolia, and Xiongnu tombs around China. The belt buckle with a round front and square rear is affected by type A buckle in shape.

The cultural communication between China proper and the northern grassland region goes back to the Shang dynasty, the middle and late periods of the Warring States, and the Qin dynasty. One of the important influences of northern grassland region culture to China proper mainly focused on the mythical creatures and the hind leg flip animal dermatoglyphic pattern originated from the Eurasian steppe, which are popular in Gansu, Ningxia, and Shanxi. The patterns are decorated mainly in rectangular waist tag. The main unearthed spots are sites such as Gansu Zhangjiachuan Majiayuan cemetery, Inner Mongolia Xigoupan cemetery, Shanxi Pengyang Baiyanglincun cemetery, and Xian northern suburb.
Lebaishi M34. Shanyueying pointed that the mythical creatures’ dermatoglyphic pattern and waist tag design “basically have fallen on the territory of Qin dynasty,” and speculated that the producing area of Qin according to the inscription on the waist tag unearthed from Xigoupan cemetery. Huns biographies [史记·匈奴列传] says: “in 174 BC, Emperor Wen of Han granted Xiongnu the golden accessories,” which means this kind of waist tag probably. This tag had been popular in the early period of the Western Han dynasty and then gradually disappeared. Along with more communication between Han and Xiongnu after Maodun established the Xiongnu empire, its culture gradually began to influence China proper. Therefore the belt buckle with a round front and square rear was the new belt buckle pattern that was affected by Xiongnu culture.

2. Differing from the type A belt buckle
The design of the buckle with a round front and square rear is a typical Han style and was not used in pairs. The two kinds of buckles are distributed in different scope. They are two different system.

Dragon design is the typical decoration design of Han culture. The dragon design on the tag appeared in the Western Han dynasty in Nanyue emperor grave and Ningxia Tongxin Daodunzi. The collection buckle with dragon and turtle design in Taipei Imperial Palace is much more similar to the two above. As for the unearthed buckle in Lelang, its movable belt tongue is different from the ones in Xiongnu and no matching pair has been found till now, which shows that there are big differences in tying methods of the two buckles. Probably the buckles in pairs always connect the belt from the two sides and drooped down by going through the inactive tongue. While single buckles did not need this procedure. It could fix the belt on the other side by belt tongue and put the rest of the belt behind the buckle.

Type A buckles are mainly found in Xiongnu core zones and few can be found in China proper. But the buckles with a round front and square rear are found in the central area of China and the kingdoms around. The
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reason that the buckles were distributed so widely is that the extension activities were started from Emperor Wu of Han. In Yuanshou year four (119BC), Weiqing and Huoqubing marched from Dingxiang and defected to Xiongnu; in Yuan ding year six (111BC), Nanyue was repelled; in Yuanfeng year two (109BC), King of Dian surrendered and his field was named Yizhou county; in Yuanfeng year three (108BC), to change the Weishi Korea into Lelang, Xuantu county; in Yuanfeng year six (105BC), Dayuan was defeated. In Emperor Zhao and Emperor xuan period, the territory range of Emperor Wu of Han was basically maintained. Shenjue year three (67BC), Rizhu King surrendered to the dynasty, his dominion was established as the Xiyuduhu. Countries like Yanqi were included in the scope of Han empire. The Han emperors always gave the costume and implements to the frontier kings. Yuanfeng year four (77BC), Fujiezi killed the king of Loulan and declared his brother Weituqi as the king. Then the Wu emperor of Han gave the new king seals, vehicles and many other things. Ganlu year three (51BC), Huhanye Emperor of Xiongnu submitted to Han dynasty, and Xuan emperor of Han grant him cloth, seals and swords. Therefore, although the buckles with round front and square rear are found in border areas like Lelang, Yanqi, and Jinning, they do not belong to Xiongnu or other countries but the rewards from our Han dynasty.

3. The *diexie* belt is a kind of belt totally different from the buckle with a round front and square rear. It originated from the west and the earliest ones come from the north prairie area (type B). Since the late period of the Eastern Han, it began to be widely popular in central origin and Sanyan (type C) until the end of the Jin dynasty. Type B is different obviously from type C. Types B and C belong to different systems, just like type A and the buckle with a round front and square rear. Type B *diexie* belt owns more characteristics of type A--the Xiongnu style, while the head and ring pattern of type C is of a round front and square rear, decorated with a dragon and tiger design, which is clearly influenced by the buckles with a round front and square rear.
The type B belt buckles are characterized as follows. The buckle and head are made in embossment style by pairs with inactive belt tongue, which are all similar to type A Xiongnu buckles. Looking from the distribution range, it also belongs to the north region of type A. This is closely connected with type A. In addition, the winged horse and pig designs are possess strong national characteristics. Subai once pointed out that the winged horse image can link with the horse image on the book *Wei Shu-Diji* in which there is a mythical creature, “like a horse,” guiding the migration of the Tuoba tribe. Although the nationality of the Jalainur and Yushu Laoheshen tombs are still in discussion and the images may not only belong to Tuoba Xianbei, it is a clear fact that this type of buckle inherits the characteristics of type A-Xiongnu buckles and is modified in the design and belt decoration to form its own style.

The type C belt is a revision of the buckles with a round front and square rear popular in Eastern Han and Western Han. The circular engraving came to the penetrated-sculpture and the ring and diexie were added into it, becoming a new pattern popular in the Wei and Jin dynasties. But from the dragon and tiger design, we can still see its inheritance to the buckle with a round front and square rear.

**The Influence of Belt Buckles with a Round Front and Square Rear to Han and Tang costume**

From the Han to Tang dynasties, there was the big change from the form to the value of belt accessories. Contrast the clothing articles in the books *Xu Han Shu*, and *Jiu Tang Shu*, we can discover from “Yufu zhi of Xuhanshu” [Clothing record] that for the clothing of the emperor to officials, the difference was mainly manifested in hats, jade pendants, knives, seals, and ribbons. But belts were not mentioned, which shows that belts at the time were not been paid much attention in formal clothing. Generally from the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring states to
the Han dynasty, the Chinese traditional belt accessories were only the belt hook with less attention, which cannot be used to distinguish the identity. In contrast, in the Xin Tang Shu and Jiu Tang Shu, the belt is widely recorded in all kinds of clothing, such as the daqiumian of the emperor's sacrificial garment; the sacrificial garment of officials; and the royal clothing of officials. In the Tang dynasty, the belt became an important clothing accessory with the function of identity and status symbol, which is significantly different from the Han dynasty. How did this change happen?

The buckles with a round front and square rear can provide clues to solve the problem. For the found sixteen pieces buckles with a round front and square rear, seven pieces were handed down from ancient times or collections. For the other nine pieces, four pieces were unearthed together with the hook, during which the hooks of two pieces from Liuhong tomb were placed under a gold buckle. This is a noteworthy phenomenon. In addition, there was also a similar phenomenon in the unearthed diexie belt of the Eastern Han and Wei-Jin tombs (Table III).

The hook and buckle were unearthed from the same tomb, which means there are at least two belts in the grave goods. The locations of the unearthed hook and buckle from Liuhong tomb indicate that they belonged to the same owner of the tomb. Although the locations of the burial accessories of several other tombs are disorganized, we can predict that the burial condition of these tombs are the same as Liuhong’s tomb. Generally speaking, two belts with the hook and buckle were hard to use at the same time. Thus, most likely these two kinds of belts respectively belong to different sets of clothing. The hook should be used with a jade pendant and jade sword accessory as China's traditional dress since Han dynasty. Such as Nanjing Gaosong tomb, where a cirrus cloud form jade pendant, a trapezoidal jade heart-shaped jade pendant, a small jade wall, a jade annual pendant, jade beads, a jade buckle, and a jade sword accessory were unearthed. Different from the group of dress implements, belts equipped with buckles are used for another kind of clothing. Jin Shu says that “most of
the officers will use the leather belt, but the military suit will use the *piluo* belt”²⁸ [革带，古之鞶带也，谓之鞶带，文武众官牧守丞令下及騶寺皆服之⋯⋯其戎服则以皮络带代之]. *Piluo* belt can also be named as “*guoluo* belt,” “*ju* belt,” which refers to the belt with buckles. To research the owner of these tombs with the unearthed buckles, Liuhong was a general.
of Zhennan; Xueqiu a Zhefeng captain; and Caoxiu a Dongda general and the minister of war. The owner of Chaoyang tomb with unearthed buckles was a Fengche commandant. Wang Guowei once wrote in the paper, “Hu fu kao” [Research on Hu dress] that Hu dress “With Huiwen hat, leather belt and boots.” 29 is the standard configuration of Hu dress. So we can see that, in Jin dynasty, the buckle was different from the hook, which was obviously the accessory of the military uniform based on Hu dress.

In the early period of the Western Han dynasty, this kind of clothing was mainly used for reward, also popular during the Hou and the above grade, which is the Langzhong's daily clothing together with the crown. At that time, Hu dress “with a belt” had not been popular. From the late period of the Eastern Han, Hu dress became popular gradually. The Xu Han Shu says: “Ling emperor like the clothes, bed-curtain, bed, chair, food, music and dance of Hu. The riches and honors in the capital also like these.”

So we can find that during the Wei and Jin dynasty, the hook and the buckle stood for two different styles unearthed together in the tomb. Till the northern dynasties, Hu dress becomes the daily or royal clothing. For example, in Meng xi bi tan, Shen Kuo wrote, “till the Northern Qi dynasty, the dress of China completely copied the Hu style.” This shows the popularity of Hu dress. Ultimately by the Tang dynasty, the design was finalized with a strict level of regulation, which affects the attention to the traditional Han type belt.

Notes :

1 Yunnan Bowuguan, Yunnan Jin Ning Shizhaishan gumuqun fajue baogao [The Jin Ning Shizhaishan Cemetery]. (Wenwu Chubanshe, 1959), 112.
2 Yunnansheng wenwukaogu Yanjiusuo, Kunming yangfutou mudi [Kunming yangfutou cemetery]. 3, (Kexue chubanshe, 2005), 857-858.
3 Luoyangshi wenwu gongzuodui, “Luoyang Dongguan jia Mayinglu donghan
mu [Eastern Han Tomb at Dongguan Jiamaying in Luoyang]”, Zhongyuan wenwu 3, (1984), 45.


5 Han Xiang, “Yanqi guodu, Yanqi dudufu zhisuo yu Yanqizhencheng bogedaqin gucheng diaocha [Reconnaissance of the Ancient City of Bogdaqin]”, Wenwu 4, (1982), 8-12.

6 Emma C. Bunker, Nomadic Art of the Eastern Eurasian Steppes, Yale University Press, No.82, 83, 84, 86 And one belongs to Shanghai Museum. One belongs to Taipei Palace Museum.


9 Shiga, Kazuko, “Sadai hokuhoukei taikin gokou kinginsei dasyutsu kougu ni tsuide [Notes on the Belt Buckles in Northern Asia in the Chinese Han Period, Especially the Gold and Silver Embossed Buckels]”, Godai bunka 46, (July-August 1944).


12 Sun Shoudao, “‘Xiongnu xicha gou wenhua’ gumingun de faxian [the Discovery of xiongnu Culture in Xichagou]”, Wenwu 8-9, 1960.


14 Sun Ji, “Belt accessories in ancient China, Essays on ancient Chinese vehicles
and garments, (Wenwu Chubanshe, 2001).
15 Zhenglong, Neimenggu Zhalainuo'er gumuqun diaochaji [the Investigate of cemetery in Zhalainuoer of Inner Mongolia], Wenwu 9, (1961).
16 Jilinsheng wenwukaogu yanjiusuo, Yushu Laoheshen, (Wenwu Chunashe, 1987).
23 Huanghua kaogu xueyuan, “Fajue xi cun dadaoshan jin zhong baogao” [Excavation of Tombs of Jin Dynasty in Dadaoshan, Xicun], Kaoguxue zazhi, (1932).
27 Sima Qian, Shi Ji. (Zhonghua Shuju, 1982), 2897.
28 Fang Xuanling et al., Jin Shu, (Zhonghua Shuju, 1974), 772.
30 Sima Biao, Xu Han Shu (Zhonghua Shuju, 1965), 3272.
31 Shen Kuo, Meng xi bi tan (Zhonghua Shuju, 1959), 23-24.
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Keywords: The metallic buckle with round front and square rear, Han and Jin dynasty, the exchange of the cultures in East Asia, the military suit
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전원후방형금속대구(前圓後方型金属带扣)는 한(漢)과 위진(魏晉) 왕조에서 만들 어 쓰던 일종의 허리띠 부속물이다. 이들 유품들은 그 형태가 모두 동일하지는 않 지만 몇몇 공통점을 가지고 있다. 즉, 유행적 공통점을 들 수 있는데, 앞이 둥글고 뒤가 넓은 모양을 하고 있다는 점, 둥근 앞면의 한쪽 끝에 황금으로 산구멍들을 뚫어 장식하고 그 뒤에 움직이는 결쇠를 매단 점, 양 무늬로 장식한 한 점만을 제외하면 떨고리 전체가 대개 육과 호랑이 무늬로 장식된 점, 테두리는 대개 큰무 놈이나 세모무늬로 장식한 점, 눈 부분의 무늬와 테두리의 세모무늬에 보석들을 밝 아 놓은 점을 들 수 있다. 이런 종류의 유품은 주로 중국과 북한 지방에서 출토되 었는데, 동아시아의 고대 문화 전과 및 교류와 관련된 연구에 중요한 의미를 지니 고 있다. 이 논문은 이러한 전원후방형금속대구의 기원과 발전 과정에 주목하고, 이들이 한에서 당(唐) 왕조에 이르는 기간 동안 복식에 미친 영향을 분석하는 데 초점을 맞추었다.

주제어: 전원후방형금속대구(前圓後方型金属带扣), 한(漢) 왕조, 진(晉) 왕조, 동아시아 문화교류, 군복