

Transmission of Han Pictorial Motifs into the Western Periphery: Fuxi and Nüwa in the Wei-Jin Mural Tombs in the Hexi Corridor*

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Abstract

This paper examines the ways in which Fuxi and Nüwa were depicted inside the mural tombs of the Wei-Jin dynasties along the Hexi Corridor as compared to their Han counterparts from the Central Plains. Pursuing typological, stylistic, and iconographic approaches, it investigates how the western periphery inherited the knowledge of the divine pair and further discusses the transition of the iconographic and stylistic design of both deities from the Han (206 BCE–220 CE) to the Wei and Western Jin dynasties (220–316). Furthermore, examining the origins of the migrants on the basis of historical records, it also attempts to discuss the possible regional connections and migration from different parts of the Chinese central territory to the western periphery.

On the basis of these approaches, it reveals that the depiction of Fuxi and Nüwa in Gansu area was modelled on the Shandong regional pattern and further evolved into a unique pattern formed by an iconographic conglomeration of all attributes and other physical characteristics. Accordingly, the Shandong region style not only spread to surrounding areas in the central Chinese territory but even to the more remote border regions, where it became the model for funerary art motifs.

Key Words: Fuxi, Nüwa, the sun, the moon, a try square, a pair of compasses, Han Dynasty, Wei-Jin period, Shandong, migration

Prenos slikovnih motivov na zahodno periferijo: Fuxi in Nüwa v grobnicah s poslikavo iz obdobja Wei Jin na območju prehoda Hexi

Izvilleček

Pričujoči prispevek v primerjalni perspektivi obravnava upodobitev Fuxija in Nüwe v grobnicah s poslikavo iz časa dinastij Wei in Zahodni Jin (220–316) iz province Gansu

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(območje prehoda Hexi) v odnosu do njune upodobitve v grobnicah s poslikavo iz časa dinastije Han (206 pr. n. št.–220 n. št.) v osrednjem kitajskem območju. Na osnovi tipoloških, stilističnih in ikonografskih pristopov proučuje, kako je zahodna periferija podedovala znanje o božanskem paru, ter prikaže prenos ikonografske in stilistične zasnove obeh božanstev iz dinastije Han v dinastiji Wei in Zahodni Jin. Prispevek nadalje s pomočjo zgodovinskih virov raziskuje izvore migrantov ter poskuša prikazati možne regionalne povezave in migracije iz različnih delov osrednje kitajske planjave na zahodno periferijo.

Z uporabo teh pristopov se je pokazalo, da sta bili podobi Fuxija in Nüwe iz province Gansu oblikovani na osnovi regionalnega modela iz območja Shandong. V provinci Gansu sta se nato nadalje razvili v edinstveni ikonografski model, sestavljen iz različnih atributov in ostalih fizičnih karakteristik. Skladno s tem se regionalni model območja Shandong ni širil le v sosednja območja, temveč tudi v bolj oddaljene obmejne kraje, kjer je postal tipični model grobnim motivom.

Ključne besede: Fuxi, Nüwa, sonce, luna, tesarjev kotnik, šestilo, dinastija Han, obdobje Wei Jin, Shandong, migracije

Introduction

In the textual sources, Fuxi 伏羲 and Nüwa 女媧 are represented as the greatest primaeval cosmogonic deities, who created the first human beings from a pre-existent substance and guide the world to civilizational achievements. While Nüwa appears as a goddess who contributes to the formation of the cosmic-natural order by “patching up the azure sky and chopping off the legs of a giant turtle to set up the four poles”¹ (He 1998, 479) and plays a part in the birth of the human race, Fuxi is shown as a type of legendary ancestor who guides the human world and gives instruction concerning a variety of advanced solutions to social and philosophical problems. As creators of humankind and human society, they also appear to be instrumental in establishing the state of marriage.

With the appearance of the so-called “horizontal-pit grave” fashioned from bricks and/or stones from the middle Western Han period (206 BCE–9 CE) onwards, the two deities began to be depicted on the surface of the underground chamber walls, on ceilings, on stone sarcophagi, and on the walls of offering shrines built above the ground. The images could be carved in stone or brick or painted on the surfaces of the walls. The two deities are both depicted as hybrid figures with a human face/head and snake-like body, generally holding the sun or the moon, a try square or a pair of compasses or, alternatively, a plant recognizable as being a

1 *Huainanzi* 淮南子, the second century compendium of essays in the sixth chapter records: 女媧五色石以補蒼天, 斷鯀足以立四極 (He 1998, 479).

longevity mushroom *lingzhi* 靈芝. In some tombs, the inscriptions next to these images define the divine hybrid creatures as Fuxi and Nüwa,² thus providing reliable evidence for their identification;³ nevertheless, in the early phases of their appearance their identification is not universally regarded as beyond doubt.⁴

Even though the transmission of knowledge, ideas, and technological innovations can be traced back some millennia to the initial waves of migration, the more systematic transmission of Han intangible and tangible heritage began with the migration of Han people to remote border regions under the expansionist policy of the Han Wudi 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE) and then under the first Eastern Han emperors. The establishment of official outposts in border territory resulted in the transfer of numerous officials and military commanders to new positions in these remote locations. The loss of imperial authority and thus of the central government powers, which was followed by several natural disasters and the Yellow Turban Rebellion during the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220), plunged the Central Plain into a state of war and disorder, causing even greater migration to the remote border territories after the collapse of the Han dynasty, especially to the Liaoning and Gansu areas.

One consequence of this massive migration was the transmission of elements of Han culture such as its burial customs, including the construction of the tombs and pictorial decorations, which began to flourish again with the onset of economic stability. The architectural structure and the pictorial design of Han and Wei Jin tombs in the Gansu region confirm such influences. The majority of the tombs are built of small bricks and consist of between one and three chambers, usually square, with vaulted ceilings and accompanied by side rooms up to four in number.⁵ As such, they reflect the Han tomb architectural structure from the Central Plain, even though some local characteristics were also incorporated into the architectural design. One of the most distinctive features is the so-called *zhao-bi* 照壁 wall, a tall screen wall or gate tower positioned above the tomb gate and built of small bricks and decorated with carved or painted images. Pictorial motifs also more or less follow the pictorial repertoire from the central region of the Chinese territory and depict motifs from the celestial and terrestrial worlds: various divine creatures, beasts, and birds, the Four Divine Animals, guardians and auspicious omens, everyday activities (scenes of feasting, banquets, kitchen work, farming, hunting, and sericulture) domestic animals, and the tomb's occupants.

2 For the few examples of Fuxi and Nüwa in tombs defined by inscriptions, see Wang (2018, 104–6).

3 There are also abundant textual sources attributing human heads/faces and snake/dragon-like bodies to Fuxi and Nüwa.

4 See Wu 1995; He 2001, 62–63; Wang 2018, 104; see also Zhao 2019.

5 For a detailed analysis of tomb structure in Gansu region see Zheng (2002, 46–56).

Many scholars have noted such connections between the two regions, revealed through the iconographic and stylistic analysis of murals and further confirmed by the historical facts of migration waves to the western periphery.⁶ On the basis of the work of these scholars, the present article aims to put forward the analytical method of a Fuxi and Nüwa case-study in order to further discuss the possible regional connections and address issues related to the relationship between the centre and the periphery.

We will therefore examine the depiction of Fuxi and Nüwa in the Wei 魏 (220–265) and Western Jin periods 西晉 (265–316) mural tombs in Gansu, comparing them with their Han counterparts. Applying typological, stylistic, and iconographic approaches, we will investigate how the western periphery inherited knowledge of the divine pair and further discuss the transition of the iconographic and stylistic design of the two deities from the Han to the Wei and Western Jin dynasties. Furthermore, by examining the origins of the migrants on the basis of the textual sources, we will investigate the influence of the various regional traditions transmitted through migration from different parts of central Chinese territory to the western periphery. As these two research approaches are mutually complementary, they allow a more comprehensive understanding of the transmission process in the historical development and thus of the transmission to the western periphery of the mythological conception of symmetrically arranged deities, their physical appearance and visual qualities, and their attributes. Within that context, we will also address issues related to the relationships between the centre and the periphery, reveal to what extent the Han image of the two deities was incorporated into the western local heritage, and endeavour to interpret the particular characteristics evident in the artistic and symbolic representations of Fuxi and Nüwa, and thus the modification of the divine couple in terms of local patronage along the Hexi Corridor.

We will begin with a general description of Fuxi and Nüwa in Gansu Wei-Jin mural tombs, providing detailed information on their physical appearance, number, and location; this will be followed by an account of the depiction of the two deities in Han art, and of the transmission of iconographic and stylistic features from central plains to the western periphery. We will argue that depiction of Fuxi

6 While most of the archaeological reports have briefly noted the connections with the Han motifs in the central region, a more general approach has been taken by Zheng Yan (2002), who conducted a systematic in-depth analysis in which he not only demonstrates the continuation of Han heritage in the Hexi corridor during the Wei-Jin period but also shows the extension of Han influence through the Hexi region to the foreign bordering lands in what is currently Xinjiang, and its reverse influence back to Central Plain during the time of the Northern dynasties. Lin Shaoxiong (1999) also observed that the style of Han pictorial bricks in Gansu continues in the Wei-Jin mural tombs. Furthermore, He Xilin (2001) discussed the influence of Han mural paintings on mural tombs in the western and eastern border regions from the Han and Wei Jin Nanbei periods. See also Sun Yan (2011) and Guo Yongli (2012).

and Nüwa in the Gansu area was modelled on the Shandong regional pattern and further evolved into a unique pattern based on an iconographic conglomeration of all attributes and other physical characteristics. Finally, we will focus on the migration process as revealed by textual sources, in order to support the arguments presented in the iconographic and stylistic analysis.

Fuxi and Nüwa in the Gansu Wei-Jin Mural Tombs

Distribution of the Fuxi Nüwa Tombs

Wei and Western Jin tombs with murals in the province of Gansu are found in four main areas, which were all new settlements established by the Western Han after the Xiongnu 匈奴 were driven from the Hexi Corridor: Jiuquan 酒泉/Jiayuguan 嘉峪關, Dunhuang 敦煌, Wuwei 武威, and Zhangye 張掖. The tombs are distributed over the vast area from Wuwei in the east to Dunhuang in the west, with the majority of tombs having been discovered near the cities of Jiuquan/Jiayuguan and Dunhuang.⁷

Fuxi and Nüwa appear in 14 tombs dated to the Wei and Western Jin periods (Table 1).⁸ Even though Wei-Jin mural tombs in Gansu province are situated in the vast region extending around 800 kilometres from the southeast to the northwest in the Hexi Corridor, the distribution of the “Fuxi Nüwa tombs” clearly indicate that there was a preference for these two images in the cities of Jiayuguan and Gaotai located in the middle region of the Hexi Corridor (Map 1). There are eight tombs with Fuxi Nüwa depictions in the vicinity of Jiayuguan/Jiuquan, five in Gaotai city, and just one in Dunhuang.⁹ Not a single such tomb has been discovered south of Gaotai.

7 For a list of unearthened mural tombs from the Wei and Western Jin periods in the Hexi region, see Zheng 2002, 44–45; Guo 2012, 1–9; Sun 2011, 7–9, see also Vampelj Suhadolnik 2014, 46–48. They are mainly concentrated in Dunhuang 敦煌, Guazhou 瓜州, Jiayuguan 嘉峪關, Jiuquan 酒泉, Gaotai 高台, Minle 民樂, Yongchang 永昌 and other places. In addition to tombs, several individual bricks with painted motifs have also been unearthened at different graveyards. They belonged to various different tombs which have been severely damaged or destroyed, with only some bricks being preserved.

8 Some scholars would argue that the depiction of a figure with three human upper part bodies and a serpentine tail on the ceiling of the Baguiying 八卦營 Tomb M2 in Minle county 民樂縣 in Gansu is also Nüwa (Shi 2006, 34) or Fuxi (Cheng et al. 2014, 12). The imagery is distinctive to majority of Fuxi Nüwa images not only in Gansu, but also in other more central regions. It could hardly be seen as three bodies on one serpentine tail. Furthermore, the usual attributes do not appear around the three-headed creature in Baguiying tomb. Therefore, this could not be Fuxi or Nüwa and most probably represents another divine creature riding a dragon.

9 From the slightly later period of Qian Liang 前涼 (314–376), there is another one example of Fuxi and Nüwa on the ceiling (*zaojing* 藻井) in the Foyemiaowan tomb in Dunhuang (see Guo 2012, 2).

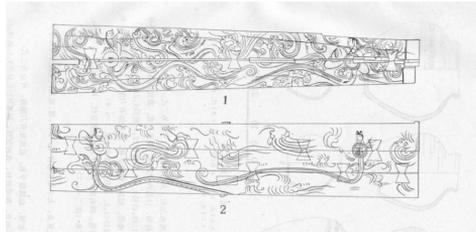


Map 1: Distribution of Fuxi Nüwa tombs in Gansu area (author: Shan Siwei, Wuhan University).

Location of Fuxi Nüwa Images in the Tombs

Most of the depictions show Fuxi Nüwa as a symmetrically arranged divine couple (17 examples). With regard to the location of their depiction, it is essential to point out that 14 out of 17 Fuxi Nüwa depictions appear on the inner side of the wooden coffin cover (Fig. 1). Except for the vertical image on the coffin cover from the town of Nanhua in Gaotai, all the remaining examples are from the Jiayuguan/Jiuquan area. Apart from the images found on coffin covers, only three are to be found on chamber walls: one example adorns the caisson ceiling (*zaojing* 藻井) of the middle room in Kushiukou Tomb M1 in Luotuocheng, Gaotai; another decorates the eastern wall of the second chamber in the Luotuocheng Tomb M2; and the third appears on the upper part of the *zhaobi* wall in the Foyemiaowan Tomb M1 in Dunhuang.¹⁰ In addition to the 17 images of symmetrically arranged pairs, four individual images of Fuxi or Nüwa have been found on separate bricks. While two Fuxi bricks and one Nüwa brick come from the Luotuocheng tomb in the southwestern district (Gaotai) (Fig. 2), one brick with Nüwa comes from the Xusanwan grave complex in the Tomb 1999Q3 (Gaotai), from the front room according to Guo (2012, 56–57). Owing to grave-robbing and the tomb's destruction the exact position of these bricks remains unknown, but we can certainly assume that they were part of the decoration on the four walls of the grave chambers and were also most probably arranged in pairs, as representations of the divine couple.

¹⁰ See also note 9.



a



b1



b2



c1



c2

Figure 1: Fuxi and Nüwa on the coffin covers

*a) Fuxi and Nüwa, Xincheng Tomb M1, Jiayuguan, Gansu. 1: male coffin, 2: female coffin
(After Gansu sheng wenwudui et al. 1985, 23).*

*b) Fuxi and Nüwa, Xincheng Tomb M13, Jiayuguan, Gansu. 1: male coffin, 2: female coffin
(After Wang 2013, 60).*

*c) Fuxi and Nüwa, Sunjiashitan Tomb M3, Jiuquan, Gansu. 1: male coffin, 2: female coffin
(After Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2017, 28).*



Figure 2: Nüwa, Luotuocheng tomb in the southwest area, Gaotai, Gansu (After Shi 1999, 14).

Three Types of Fuxi Nüwa Depiction in Gansu

With regard to their pictorial composition, the depictions of Fuxi and Nüwa in the Gansu region can be classified in accordance with three types. The first type is characteristic of the horizontal composition on the coffin covers and is the most



3a



3b

Figure 3: Fuxi and Nüwa in vertical composition

- a) Fuxi and Nüwa, Maozhuangzi Tomb, Jiayuguan, Gansu (After Kong et al. 2006, 81).
 b) Fuxi and Nüwa, Gaotai 2003 GNM10 Tomb, Gaotai, Gansu (After Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2005, 28).

popular one, being commonly found in the Jiayuguan region. In most cases, Fuxi and Nüwa are depicted among swirling clouds with long serpentine tails, stretching out towards each other and placed on both sides of the coffin cover (Fig. 1). There seems to be no specific rule regarding their tails, which are sometimes interlaced and sometimes not.

The second type is associated with vertical composition, in which the two deities are portrayed close together with their faces turned to each other and with intertwined tails. While the elongated form of the coffin cover most probably determined the horizontal composition, it also provided a framework for further attempts to depict them in the vertical; accordingly, two examples of the second type are found on coffin covers (Maozhuangzi Tomb in Jiayuguan, Gaotai 2003 GNM10 Tomb) (Fig. 3). This manner of vertical depiction is also seen on the *zaojing* ceiling in Gaotai (Kushuikou M1 Tomb, Luotuocheng).

The third type is related to compositions featuring the two deities but depicted individually on separate bricks. One such example is the depiction of Xiwangmu 西王母 flanked by Fuxi and Nüwa at the top of the *zhaobi* wall in Dunhuang (Fig. 4). Three separate bricks from Luotuocheng Tomb M2 (Fig. 2) and one Nüwa brick from Xusanwan 1999Q3 Tomb (Fig. 5) also belong to this type. Although the bricks were most probably part of a coherent compositional structure either vertical or horizontal, their physical appearance differs slightly from the rest of the depictions, and thus could easily be classified as a separate type. The main difference is seen in the location of the two celestial bodies: while in all other examples the sun and the moon are portrayed in front of the chest, on the bricks from Luotuocheng Tomb M2 both figures grasp the celestial bodies with their hands, and in the Xusanwan Tomb the moon is situated next to Nüwa, who has now assumed a fully human image. Furthermore, particular focus has been put on the legs, which have become larger and more dynamic, thus imbuing the images with a sense of movement.

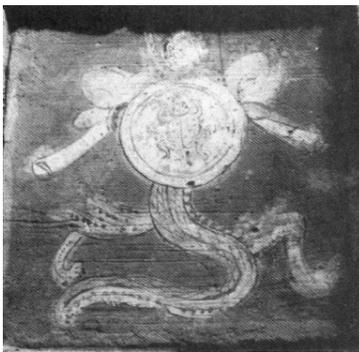


Figure 4: Fuxi and Nüwa at the top of the *zhaobi* wall, Foyemiaowan Tomb M1, Dunhuang, Gansu (After Yin 2008, 99).



Figure 5: Nüwa, Xusanwan 1999Q3 Tomb, Gaotai, Gansu (After Guo 2012, 183).

General Characteristics

Both deities are depicted as snake-bodied figures with a human upper body; they are shown holding a try square and a pair of compasses and with the sun and the moon in front of the chest, emphasized by the images of the bird and toad. In all but one example, Fuxi is shown with a three-peaked cap, also called a “mountain-like hat” (*shanzixing* 山字形), which evolved into one of the most typical characteristics of Fuxi in the Gansu region. Nüwa, by contrast, has her hair elegantly arranged in various hairstyles characteristic of Han women. Both deities are dressed in garments with wide sleeves, reflecting a typical Han clothing style also commonly seen in Han pictorial art. Furthermore, they are often portrayed with legs ending in tiger’s paws. Hence, the basic characteristics of the Fuxi Nüwa image in Gansu can be outlined as follows: a) the sun and the moon in front of the chest; b) a try square or a pair of compasses in one hand; c) legs terminating in tiger’s paws; d) a three-peaked cap for Fuxi; and e) wings, but not in all cases.

This brief description of the deities’ physical appearances and attributes clearly shows how strongly they are linked to the Han tradition from the Central Plain. Therefore, in order to further discuss the transmission of the iconographic and stylistic design from Han to the Wei Jin dynasties in the western periphery, let us first examine their Han counterparts.

Table 1: List of Fuxi Nirva tombs in the Gansu region

No.	Tomb / Excavation time	City	Location / Number	Objects	Composition / (not) intertwined tails	Dating	Source
1	Xincheng Tomb M1 嘉峪关新城M1墓 1972	Jiayuguan	Coffin cover (2)	Round objects	Horizontal; not intertwined	Wei and early Western Jin	Gansu sheng wenyuwei et al. 1985, 18, 23
2	Xincheng Tomb M13 嘉峪关新城M13墓 1979	Jiayuguan	Coffin cover (2)	Sun and moon + try square and pair of compasses	Horizontal; not intertwined	Wei and Western Jin	Jiayuguan shi wenyuwei guanlisuo 1982, 12
3	Xincheng Tomb in south grave area, 1998 嘉峪关新城南墓區墓	Jiayuguan	Coffin cover (1)	Sun and moon + try square and pair of compasses	Horizontal; intertwined	Wei Jin	Wang 2013, 60
4	Maozhuangzi tomb 毛莊子墓 2002	Jiayuguan	Coffin cover (2)	Male coffin: sun and moon Female coffin: try square and pair of compasses, below stars with the sun above and the moon below	Horizontal; intertwined Vertical; intertwined	Wei and early Western Jin	Kong et al. 2006, 76–77, 81
5	Yuquan Tomb M2 峪泉鎮墓 2011	Jiayuguan	Coffin cover (30 cm of upper part) (1)	Try square and pair of compasses (the sun and the moon due to damage unknown)	Horizontal, unknown owing to damage	Wei Jin	Wang 2013, 61
6	Dandanzitan Tomb 酒泉單墩子灘墓 1983/1988	Jiuquan	Coffin cover (1)	Sun and moon + try square and pair of compasses	Horizontal; not intertwined	Wei and Western Jin	Yue et al. 2003, 48; Jiuquan shi bowuguan 1998, 52
7	Sunjiashitan Tomb M1 孫家石灘墓 2005	Jiuquan	Coffin cover (2)	Sun and moon + try square and pair of compasses	Horizontal; intertwined	Wei Jin	Gansu sheng wenyuwei kaogu yanjiusuo 2017, 22–23, 25–26

No.	Tomb / Excavation time	City	Location / Number	Objects	Composition / (not) intertwined tails	Dating	Source
8	Sunjiashitan Tomb M3 孫家石灘墓 2005	Jiuquan	Coffin cover (2)	Sun and moon + try square and pair of compasses	Horizontal; intertwined (1), not intertwined (1)	Wei Jin	Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2017, 25, 27-28
9	Gaotai 2003 GNMI0, Nanhua 高台2003GNMI0墓(南華) 2003	Gaotai	Coffin cover (1)	Sun and moon + try square and pair of compasses (?)	Vertical; intertwined	Wei and early Western Jin	Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2005, 18, 28
10	Kushuikou M1 Tomb, Luotuocheng 苦水口M1墓(駱駝城) 1999	Gaotai	Zaojing ceiling (front room) (1)	Sun and moon + try square and pair of compasses	Vertical; intertwined	Wei and early Western Jin	Guo 2012, 55, 182-83
11	Luotuocheng Tomb in the southwest area 駱駝城墓西南地區 1994	Gaotai	Three bricks (front or middle room)	Sun and moon + try square and pair of compasses	Individual bricks; not intertwined	Wei and Western Jin	Shi 1997, 45, 48
12	Luotuocheng Tomb M2 駱駝城M2墓 2001	Gaotai	Eastern wall of the second room	Sun and moon + try square and pair of compasses	Horizontal	Wei and Western Jin	Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2003, 47
13	Xusanwan 1999Q3 Tomb 許三灣墓群1999Q3 1999	Gaotai	One brick (front room)	Niwa with a try square and the moon with a toad (human image)	One brick	Wei and early Western Jin	Guo 2012, 56-57, 183-84
14	Foyemiaowan tomb M1 佛爺廟灣墓M1 1991	Dunhuang	Zhaobi wall (at the top) (1)	Sun and moon + try square and pair of compasses	Two bricks, between Xiwangmu; not intertwined	Early Western Jin	Yin 2008, 98-99, 102-3, 105

The Iconographic and Stylistic Features of Fuxi and Nüwa in Han

Although the standard iconographical and visual mode of the two deities' representation that developed over time—with a human head and snake-like body, and holding specific objects in their hands—provides a structural framework that facilitates their identification, clear variations can be observed in their regional depictions. These were determined by geographical and chronological development, thus resulting in the evolution of the motif with its various local features.

On the basis of general classification and the typological approach, the Fuxi Nüwa motif can be categorized in two ways. While the first categorization is based on the physical appearance of their snake-like lower body, the second typifies the motif according to the attributes they usually hold in their hands. In the first approach, Fuxi and Nüwa can be divided into two types: a) individual figures arranged as a symmetrical pair; b) double figures depicted with intertwined snake-like bodies. In the late Western Han mural tombs in the Luoyang region, Fuxi and Nüwa are generally depicted as individual figures with long serpentine tails, each one occupying one of the two sides of the central ridge of the tomb chamber (Fig. 6). The type without interlacing tails is also seen, for example, on the pictorial stone from Tengzhou 滕州 in Shandong from the same period (Lai 2000, fig. 193). It was only from the middle period of Eastern Han dynasty onwards that the tails started to intertwine, with one of the best examples being seen in the depictions of the Shandong Wu Liang shrine 武梁祠 (Fig. 7). As well as being found in the Shandong/Jiangsu region, intertwined tails can also be commonly seen in Nanyang 南陽 in the present-day southern Henan and Sichuan regions; in the northern Henan and Shaanxi regions, by contrast, they are rarely depicted with intertwined tails. In the second approach, based on the standard attributes that they hold in their hands, Fuxi and Nüwa can be classified into four types: a)



Figure 6: Fuxi and Nüwa, Bu Qianqiu Tomb, Luoyang, Henan (After Huang 1996, 73).

Fuxi and Nüwa with the sun and the moon; b) Fuxi and Nüwa with a try square and a pair of compasses; c) Fuxi and Nüwa with the sun and the moon and a try square and a pair of compasses; and d) Fuxi and Nüwa with the auspicious longevity plant *lingzhi*.



Figure 7: Fuxi and Nüwa, Wu Liang shrine, Shandong (After Jiang 2000, fig. 49).

The first type of Fuxi and Nüwa, that is to say, with the sun and the moon, first appears in mural tombs of the Luoyang region in the period from the late Western Han to the early Eastern Han (Fig. 6). Furthermore, it can be also found in the area of Nanyang, and in the Shandong/Jiangsu, northern Shaanxi, and Sichuan/Chongqing regions. As demonstrated by Wang Yu (2018, 112), the motif appears to have spread from Luoyang to the southern Shandong and northern Jiangsu regions, as well as to northern Shaanxi and the more distant Sichuan/Chongqing regions, where it became particularly widespread during the later Eastern Han. The second type of Fuxi and Nüwa, with a try square and a pair of compasses, appears only in southern Shandong (Fig. 7), and only to a small extent. The third type, which is a combination of the first two types, must have developed in Shandong, as both the heavenly bodies and also the geometrical instruments are found separately linked to Fuxi and Nüwa (Fig. 8). It is most likely that the newly coined iconographic feature spread to distant regions of Sichuan/Chongqing, where it adorned the rear side of stone sarcophagi in the later Eastern Han period. As such, it further influenced the embellishment of stone sarcophagi in northern parts of Yunnan and Guizhou (Wang 2018, 111). The last type depicts Fuxi and Nüwa with the longevity mushroom *lingzhi* and is most frequently found in Nanyang. While some examples in Sichuan/Chongqing also bear a certain resemblance to *lingzhi*, others are found with forms that are mostly unrecognizable.

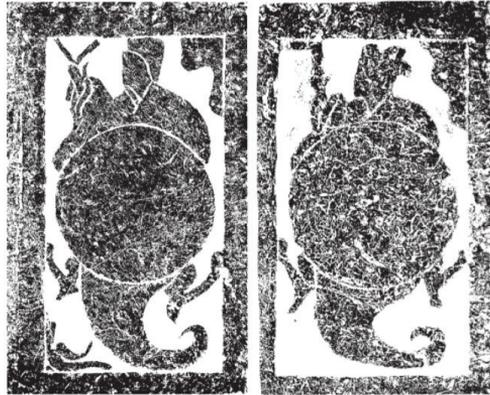


Figure 8: *Fuxi and Nüwa, Pictorial stones from Panjiatuan, Fei County, Shandong*
(After Jiao 2000, figs. 89 and 90).

Although the iconography of Fuxi and Nüwa is dominated by their attributes, a closer look reveals regional variations in their physical appearance. These secondary characteristics can be observed in the different shapes of the lower serpentine body, the appearance of the legs and wings, and the variations in the hats and hairstyles. A strong emphasis on the depiction of a thick lower serpentine body is evident in the Shandong region, which in some cases also witnessed the appearance of short legs along the upper part of the serpentine body (Figs. 8 and 14). In Henan Nanyang, the lower part is gradually transformed into a thinner winding tail with a particular emphasis on the legs, which become more massive and longer and take the form of three-toed animal paws and thus start to resemble the body of the dragon (Fig. 9). In northern Shaanxi, in the Dabaodang Tomb 大保當 dated to Eastern Han, this evolution extends to the legs gradually transforming into almost anthropomorphic form, leaving only the paws in the animal form, while the linkage to the snake image is transferred to a thin tail coming out of the legs (Fig. 10). Although such anthropomorphic imagery can also be seen in Sichuan,¹¹ an overview of other examples reveals a completely different development in southwestern China, where the craftsmen paid much more attention to presenting the serpentine tail, which extends into extremely thin interweaving tails, while the legs were significantly reduced (Fig. 11). All these variations reflect

11 Another interesting discovery is the stone sarcophagus from the Bishan Mandongpo Tomb M1 (璧山區蠻洞坡崖墓M1) in Chongqing with anthropomorphic images of both deities carved on the back of the stone sarcophagus. The linkage to serpentine imagery is revealed through two snakes heading towards the crotches of both deities (Lin et al. 2018). The image has been generally interpreted as a symbolic representation of reproduction and the wish of the tomb's owner for the prosperity of his descendants (Jia 2018, 42–44; Li 2011, 153).

the regional understanding of the origins of the couple and their connection with the animal world of the snake or dragon.

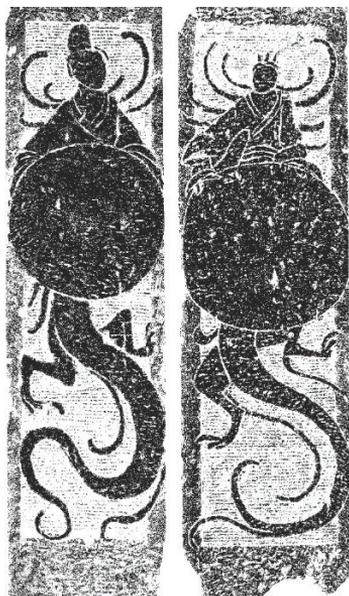
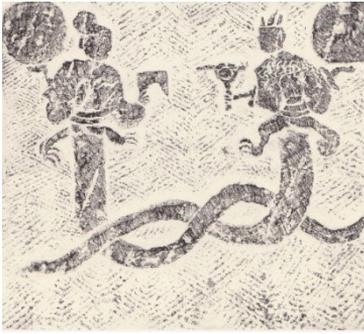


Figure 9: Fuxi and Nüwa, Qilin'gang Tomb, Nanyang, Henan (After Huang et al. 2008, 125).



Figure 10: Fuxi and Nüwa, Shenmu Dabaodang Tomb, Shaanxi (After Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo et al. 2001, plate 9).



11a



11b

Figure 11: Fuxi and Nüwa, Sichuan:

- a) *Rear side of stone sarcophagus no. 4, Hejiang Zhangjiagou Tomb M2, Sichuan
(After Gao 2000, fig. 180).*
- b) *Rear side of stone sarcophagus in Xinsheng Tomb M1, Pi County, Sichuan
(After Gao 2000, fig. 127).*

Another secondary characteristic that developed in the two deities' early evolutionary phase relates to their wings, which range from feathered wings protruding from their backs to more stylistically designed smaller quills emerging from their shoulders. One of the earliest examples is to be found in the late Western Han Xin'an 新安 Tomb from Luoyang (Fig. 12), depicted in the same compositional manner as the famous ones in the Luoyang Bu Qianqiu 卜千秋墓 and Qianjingtou 淺井頭墓 Tombs. Within the horizontal composition of the celestial kingdom on the central flat part of the ceiling, Fuxi and Nüwa stretch out their long snake-like tails to embrace disks which enclose a three-legged bird and a toad signifying the sun and the moon respectively. Although Fuxi and Nüwa are depicted without wings in the Bu Qianqiu and Qianjingtou Tombs, in the Xin'an tomb the large feathered wings spreading from the back have become one of the most representative elements, which in their later development become a more common part of the iconographical image, although less frequently found than the legs.

While the appearance of the wings has been interpreted as the remnant of the mythological paradigm that connected Fuxi to the Dongyi 東夷 tribe with a bird as their totemic identity (Li 1988, 41), other scholars believe that the phenomenon of feathering is not an isolated feature in Han art, as was the case with the image of the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu 西王母) and King Father of the East (Dongwanggong 東王公) at approximately the same time (Yang 1999, 70; Li 2011, 14). The addition of wings as a new element in the physical appearance of already existing mythological images would thus

correlate with the widespread notions of immortality and the immortal worlds. Immortals, who constitute an essential thread in Han funerary art, are likewise portrayed as feathered figures with dragon or snake tails, floating among clouds or climbing on mountains. The search for immortality reached its climax during the Han dynasty; by the middle of the Eastern Han dynasty, immortals were frequently found on ceilings, on pillars, or around doorways in the four main areas of tomb-relief production: Shandong/Jiangsu; Nanyang, province of Henan; Sichuan; and Shaanxi/Shanxi (Wallace 2011, 73). Fuxi and Nüwa in Han art are generally found among the motifs of the celestial world and are thus often flanked by immortals amidst cloudscaapes. Furthermore, examination of philosophical and mythological-literary sources has revealed a gradual transformation of the mythological images of Fuxi and Nüwa towards more abstract ideas of natural philosophy, in connection with which the divine pair represents the embodiment of the *yin yang* 陰陽 cosmic forces; as such, by weaving the warp and woof of the cosmos, they significantly contribute to the perpetual creation of the harmonic relations inside the cosmic visualization where the deceased could attain immortality.¹² As such, their linkage to various notions of immortality and immortals is seen in visual and textual sources, and could further explain the “featherization” of the two deities.



Figure 12: *Fuxi and Nüwa, Xin'an Tomb, Luoyang, Henan (After Shen 2006, 50).*

Although a single iconographic model was formed during the Han dynasty, variations in the representation of the secondary characteristics reflect not only the regional comprehension of the image and its requirements, but also variations

12 Symbolic interpretation of Han funerary art confirms the imbuing of these motifs with the theory of *yin yang wuxing* 陰陽五行, as already noted by Cheng Te-kun (Cheng 1957, 180). See also He 2002, 126–32; Wu 1987 and 1989; Vampelj Suhadolnik 2011.

observed within the same area. Such variations reflect the extreme adaptability of the motif, the self-consciousness of the Han artists in their representations and, furthermore, a vast repertoire of secondary characteristics to be selected by the artists and the tomb's owner. As such, the motif further reflects flexibility in the comprehension of the mythical creatures linked to the heavenly and immortal world and thus the overlapping of diverse notions or systems without distinct demarcations.

The Transmission of Iconographic and Stylistic Features from the Central Plains to the Western Periphery

The hybrid image of Fuxi and Nüwa not only continues to be present in the funerary art of the Gansu region in the period of the Wei and Western Jin dynasties but the popularity of the two deities even increases in comparison to their Han counterparts in the mural tombs. In 14 out of 31 Wei and Western Jin mural tombs in Gansu province,¹³ as many as 17 images of the divine pair and 4 individual images on separate bricks can be counted. In addition to these depictions on coffin covers and walls, visual representations of Fuxi Nüwa are also found on other materials such as pottery and hemp fabrics. The popularity of these images is clearly attested by a grey pottery pot decorated with the interlaced serpentine bodies and the images of the sun and the moon discovered by the Gansu Wuwei museum in 1982 (He 2001, 53) and by a piece of badly damaged hemp fabric with Fuxi and Nüwa excavated from Yuquan Tomb M2 (Wang 2013, 61).

Although Fuxi and Nüwa are generally characterized as being amongst the most common motifs found in Han grave art, they actually appear in only eight out of around seventy Han mural tombs.¹⁴ Bu Qianqiu Tomb 卜千秋, Qianjingtou Tomb 淺井頭, Xin'an Tomb 新安, Shaogou Tomb M61 燒溝, Yanshi Xincun Tomb 偃師

13 See note 7.

14 He Xilin (2001) in his statistical data listed 56 Han dynasty mural tombs that had been excavated by the end of the 20th century. Huang Peixian (2008) added another nine tombs, mostly new excavations since 2000. To this list, we should also add: a tomb in Yuncheng Wanrong County, Shanxi (2004, 山西運城萬榮縣壁畫墓) (Ding 2004), three Eastern Han tombs with murals, in Nanjiao street, Liaoyang (2004, 遼寧遼陽南郊街東漢壁畫墓); however, only one tomb (M1) contains more elaborate painted designs, while the other two tombs (M2 and M3) present only clouds and geometrical patterns (see Liaoning sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2008), a Western Han tomb with murals in Cuizhuyuan, Xi'an (2008, 西安曲江翠竹園西漢壁畫墓) (Xi'an shi wenwu baohu kaogusuo 2010), and Qushuhao Tomb from Jingbian county in Shaanxi (2015, 陝西靖邊縣楊橋畔渠數壕東漢壁畫墓) (Shaanxi sheng kaogu yuanjiuyuan 2017). See also Vampelj Suhadolnik 2014, 42–44.

辛村, Beijiao shiyouzhan Tomb 北郊石油站 (all in Luoyang), Houyinshan Tomb¹⁵ 後銀山 (in Liangshan 梁山, Shandong), and Qushuhao Tomb 渠数壕 in the county of Jingbian 靖邊 in Shaanxi.¹⁶ Most of them are located in the city of Luoyang and are dated as originating from the late Western Han to the early Eastern Han period. The basic characteristics of their depiction can be summarized as follows: a) half human and half serpent figures; b) closely linked to the sun with a crow and moon with a toad;¹⁷ c) tails not intertwined; d) both either on the ceiling or upper part of the walls; and e) in juxtaposition with various spiritual creatures.

Objects in Fuxi Nüwa's Hands and Differences with Han Mural Tombs

While the sun and the moon are the predominant attributes in Han mural tombs, in the Gansu area their dominance is diminished by the presence of the other two attributes: a try square and a pair of compasses. The artisans commonly depicted the divine couple embracing the sun with a bird and the moon with a toad in front of their chests and each holding the square or the compasses in their other hand.¹⁸ Furthermore, after having never been depicted with interlaced tails in Han mural tombs, in the Gansu region their tails started to intertwine. However, these two

15 There is only one image with snake-like tail depicted on the western wall of the front room; however, the inscription Fuxi 伏羲 clearly defined the image as the Chinese indigenous deity Fuxi (Guan 1955, 44).

16 In a recently excavated tomb (2015) in Shaanxi, Fuxi and Nüwa appear among a rich depiction of the celestial world with an accurate astronomical chart with four palaces (*sigong* 四宫) and twenty-eight lunar lodges (*ershiba xiu* 二十八宿), depicted on the dome-shaped vault. The inscriptions Fuxi 伏羲 and Nüwa 女娲 at the top of the heads of two images with human upper part and long curving tail with black dots leave no doubts about the identification of both figures (Shaanxi sheng kaogu yuanjiuyuan 2017, 22).

17 Except for the depiction in the Qushuhao Tomb, in which the divine couple is paired with both attributes (the sun/moon and the try square/compasses) and the image with snake-like tail in the Houyinshan Tomb in Shandong without any objects in hands, but by inscription clearly defined as Fuxi (Guan 1955, 44); in all other examples, Fuxi and Nüwa are portrayed only with the sun and the moon. They either embrace them with their long tails or grasp them in hands.

18 The only exceptions are depictions on the female and male coffins in the Xincheng Tomb M1 and on the male coffin in the Maozhuangzi Tomb, both in Jiayuguan, where they are depicted only with the round discs in front of the chest. According to the excavation report on the Xincheng tombs, the two discs most probably represent the sun and the moon; however, the images inside the discs have been damaged and could not be clearly recognizable (Gansu sheng wenwudui et al. 1985, 18). The sun and the moon on the male coffin in the Maozhuangzi Tomb are also extremely simplified with few lines and hardly recognizable; however a part of their imagery remains, while a try square and a pair of compasses entirely disappear from their iconography. Furthermore, on individual bricks, Fuxi and Nüwa hold the sun and the moon in their hands and not in front of the stomach, while on the female coffin in the Maozhuangzi tomb the sun and the moon are portrayed below both deities as part of the larger stellar composition.

features were surely not a Gansu innovation, as they are also commonly seen in Han pictorial stone and brick tombs, indicating that a strong influence must have come from the carved images on stones and bricks. The most famous Han example comes from the western wall of the Wu Liang shrine in Shandong province, where Fuxi and Nüwa are part of a series of portraits of ancient sovereigns (Fig. 7). They are depicted with interlocking serpentine lower bodies, which are covered with scales. The figure on the right, clearly designated as Fuxi by the inscription, raises a try square with his right hand. Owing to the damage to the left-hand side of the image it is not possible to see the pair of compasses, which however is clearly depicted on other similar figures discovered at the Wu family shrines at the same location.

With regard to the geometrical tools designed to facilitate the drawing of straight lines and circles, *Huainanzi* records (He 1998, 158–59): “The east is wood. Its god is Tai Hao. His assistant is Gou Mang. He grasps the compass and governs spring.”¹⁹ The Eastern Han commentator Gao You 高誘 continues with an explanation, namely, that the god Tai Hao was the cognomen for Fuxi. Tai Hao is thus the main deity of the east, assisted by Gou Mang, who holds the compass and governs springs. As discussed by Wu Hung (1989, 160–61), Fuxi appears as the instructor and leader of the human race, as a kind of an interjacent figure between the divine and the human sphere, transferring cosmic patterns to human society. With numerous advanced inventions, he led people from a state of unconsciousness to an era of greater progress and better life. He taught them how to make a variety of tools and instruments, invented nets and showed them the arts of fishing and hunting, created the first records, defined the calendar system, invented the first musical instruments, and according to one version even invented fire. Among all these merits, the invention of divination through the Eight Trigrams (*bagua* 八卦) brought him the greatest glory and the most fulsome praise from later authors. This being the case, a try square in his hand symbolizes his ability to regulate the world.

By contrast, according to the sixth chapter of the *Huainanzi* (He 1998, 479), the goddess Nüwa repaired cosmic damage by patching the blue sky with gemstones of five colours and by using the legs of a giant turtle to replace the damaged pillars, thus rescuing the world and the entire cosmos from ruin. Accordingly, the pair of the compasses in her hand was presumably intended to symbolize her saving role in the heavens. The fact the two deities often hold devices used for the drawing and designing of straight lines or square and round forms thus constitutes a further allusion to their role in the creation of cosmic space—a round heaven and a square earth—and to their domination over both cosmic domains. While this

19 東方，木也，其帝太皞，其佐句芒，執規而治春。The English translation is from Major (1993, 70).

textual tradition would lead one to expect the try square to be attributed to Fuxi and the pair of compasses to Nüwa, *Huainanzi* assigns the compasses to Fuxi to enable him to govern the eastern part of the sky and control the wooden phase. This kind of interchangeability is also present in their visual representation, where Fuxi and Nüwa take turns holding the pair of compasses and the try square, as is the case in Han art and consistently continues to be so in the province of Gansu.²⁰

Shandong Regional Style and its Influence

Both the new features (a try square / a pair of compasses and the interlacement of their tails) commonly seen in Gansu (as compared to their Han counterparts from Luoyang) had already evolved in the Shandong area during the Eastern Han dynasty and spread to surrounding areas. Xin Lixang (2000), in his comprehensive work on Han pictorial stones, has discussed their cross-regional influence and developmental pattern. He categorized the manufacturing of pictorial stones in terms of five regions,²¹ among which, in late Eastern Han, the Shandong region style was the most influential and spread to a large geographical region stretching from western Shanxi and northern Shaanxi to south of the Changjiang River. On this basis, I would argue that the Shandong regional style also spread to the western periphery and became the model for the depiction of Fuxi and Nüwa in the Gansu region, where it further evolved into a unique pattern of iconographic collections of all attributes and other physical features, as seen in local variations which were likewise mostly influenced by the Shandong pattern in late Eastern Han.

Although the first horizontal type in Gansu region can be easily associated with the horizontal depiction of the heavenly kingdom in the Luoyang tombs in the late Western Han and Xin Mang periods, the attributes and physical features distinguish them from the Luoyang depictions. While in Luoyang the sun and the moon are portrayed as two separate objects next to Fuxi in Nüwa, in Gansu they are integrated into the consistent image of the divine couple by being given a fixed position in front of the chest, with the deities being seen grasping a try square or a pair of compasses. This combined iconographical imagery did not appear in

20 In ten examples, Fuxi is associated with a pair of compasses, while in six examples he holds a try square. The intertwined image of both deities in the 2003 GNM10 Tomb in Gaotai portrayed on the inner side of the coffin cover was substantially subjected to stylization. The snake-like body and objects in their hands are presented merely with a flow of strokes, which might represent the geometrical tools, the longevity plant *lingzhi* or even some other unrecognizable objects. The object in Nuwa's hand slightly resembles the pair of compasses; thus, considering the fact that in all other examples they hold the pair of compasses and try square, I have interpreted them as geometrical tools as well.

21 The five regions are: Shandong and neighbouring regions, Southwestern Henan with Nanyang as its centre, Northern Shaanxi and Western Shanxi, Sichuan and Northern Yunnan, and Luoyang with its surroundings (Xin 2000, 13–15).

Luoyang but, as discussed earlier, most probably evolved in the Shandong region before spreading to other Chinese territories (Wang 2018, 110). It became particularly widespread on the rear of stone sarcophagi in the Sichuan and Chongqing regions. However, in Sichuan the sun and the moon are not portrayed in front of the chest, but are generally lifted up with the hands, while the try square and pair of compasses would often take different forms such as a long stick, knife or flag, or other mostly unrecognizable forms (Figs. 11 and 13). In addition, the practice of depicting the two deities, which are repeatedly seen leaning against each other, embracing or even kissing, with longer and thinner tails as compared with other regional variations clearly reflects the fact that the Sichuan style deviated from the standard scheme and continued to present highly distinctive local characteristics not seen in the Gansu region.

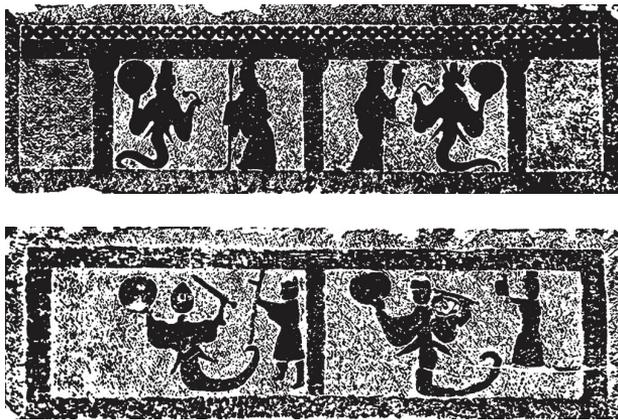


Figure 13: *Fuxi and Nüwa on the stone sarcophagus, Bishan, Chongqing, Sichuan*
(After Wang 2018, 111, figs. 4 and 5).

By contrast, examples from the Shandong region from the late Eastern Han feature almost the same compositional scheme, iconographic elements, and physical characteristics as in Gansu; see, for example, Fuxi Nüwa on the *zaojing* in the rear chamber of the Panjiatuan Tomb 潘家疃 from Fei 费 County (Fig. 8), on pillars in the Wubaizhuang Tomb 吳白莊 in Linyi 臨沂 district (Fig. 14), and on the pictorial stone unearthed from the Shandong Linyi Automobil Technical School 臨沂汽車技校 (Fig. 15). In all these examples, Fuxi and Nüwa embrace the sun and the moon in front of their chests and hold either a try square or a pair of compasses in one of their hands. This was clearly inherited in the western periphery and is in evidence in nearly all Fuxi-Nüwa images.²² Even though the position of

22 See also note 18.

the sun and the moon varies in Han depictions,²³ in Gansu the location of the sun and the moon is fixed to the same position in front of the chest. The only exception is the third type of four individual images, as discussed above.



*Figure 14: Fuxi and Nüwa, Wubaizhuang Tomb, Linyi, Shandong
(After Jiao 2000, left: fig. 19, right: fig. 23).*



*Figure 15: Fuxi, pictorial stone unearthed from Linyi Automobile Technical School, Shandong
(After Jiao 2000, 39).*

23 The deities variously embrace them with their longish snake-like tail, hold them in their hands at both sides, raise them above their heads, or embrace them in front of the chest. For further discussion on different arrangements of the sun and the moon next to Fuxi-Nüwa image see Zhao (2019).

Furthermore, similarity in the composition of intertwined serpentine tails can be observed between the vertical composition of Fuxi and Nüwa on the female coffin cover in the Maozhuangzi Tomb in Jiayuguan (Fig. 3a) and on the Wu Liang wall carvings (Fig. 7). Shown with a stylishly shaped face, pointed eyebrows, and moustache in the form of a *ba* 八 character, Fuxi turns towards Nüwa, who is portrayed with elegant curves suggesting the roundness of her feminine face. They both wear short robes with wide sleeves and, just like their counterparts in Wu Liang shrine, grasp a try square and a pair of compasses. Further resemblance is apparent in their lower serpentine tails, which are in both cases covered by scales. It is as if the craftsmen in Gansu were very familiar with this pattern in Shandong and attempted to realize the same composition, iconography, and style on the coffin cover, with the only difference being the shape of Fuxi's cap.

A particularly strong resemblance—in compositional scheme and physical appearance—can also be observed between the Wubaizhuang Tomb in Linyi, Shandong (Fig. 14) and the depiction of Fuxi and Nüwa on the *zaojing* of Kushuikou Tomb M1 in Luotuocheng in Gansu (Fig. 16). This time, even the caps on the heads are similar, as in Wubaizhuang Tomb Fuxi is wearing the three-peaked hat. This could confirm that the shape of the Fuxi's hat in Gansu also originated in the Shandong/Jiangsu and surrounding areas and subsequently spread to Gansu, Sichuan and other remote areas. Not only do both figures accord iconographically, but their similarity is also reflected in the compositional design. With their right hands they grasp a pair of compasses in a similar manner, while the sun rises from the waists in just the same way. At the same time, the legs take the form of tiger paws; which are accorded greater importance and developed more elaborately in the Gansu area.

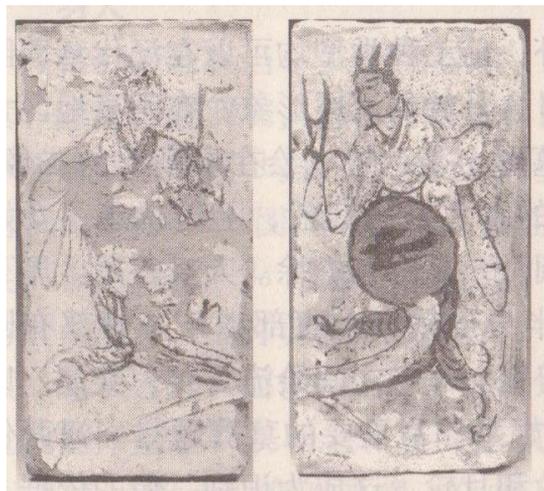


Figure 16: Fuxi and Nüwa, Kushuikou Tomb M1 in Luotuocheng, Gaotai, Gansu (After Guo 2012, 183).

Development of a Unique Pattern in the Gansu Region

This visual correlation confirms that the figures of Fuxi and Nüwa in the Gansu area inherited the classical Shandong pattern—the sun and the moon in front of the chest, one holding a try square and the other a pair of compasses, the three-peaked hat on Fuxi and tiger’s paws on both—and that this was further elaborated into a unique pattern distinctive to the Gansu region. While in the Shandong region the three-peaked hat and the tiger’s paws do not appear consistently—even in the same tomb the artisans do not follow the same depiction style, see for example the depiction of Fuxi with legs and Nüwa without in the Wubaizhuang Tomb in Shandong (Fig. 14)—in the Gansu region the tiger’s paw and the three-peaked hat became a common feature in all three types of depiction.

Except for two vertical compositions (one on the female coffin cover in the Mao-zhuangzi Tomb, and the other in 2003 GNM10 Tomb in Gaotai, also on the coffin cover) and three examples in the horizontal composition in the Sunjiashitan Tomb, all other examples feature the two legs extended to either side of the serpentine body. If the visual effect in Jiayuguan is still focused on the winding serpentine tail, in vertical depictions in Gaotai (Figs. 2 and 16) legs that were previously shorter have been transformed into stronger limbs with vertical stripes on them, further emphasizing the similarity with tiger’s paws. Two paws, one outstretched and the other with the heel raised from the ground, create a sense of movement that is especially discernible in the third type of Fuxi Nüwa image in Gansu. This kind of feeling of movement cannot be traced back to the conventional representations of Fuxi and Nüwa in Han and must have been the result of adaptation to the construction style of brick tombs in Gansu.

During the Eastern Han Fuxi was commonly shown wearing a cap in the form of a *jinxianguan* 進賢冠, a formal headdress usually worn by officials (Li 2011, 152), also seen in the Wu Liang shrine. In Gansu, the cap had the shape of a three-peaked mountain—the so-called “mountain-like hat” (*shanzixing guan* 山字形冠) with three peaks protruding above the head. In the course of time it evolved into the most recognizable feature of Fuxi in the western periphery.²⁴ Wu Hung (1989, 118–19) has discussed the Han understanding of the Kunlun mountain 崑崙山, its visual and textual description in the form of three peaks, and its connection with Xiwangmu, the greatest deity of the immortal Western paradise. In the East Sea, a similar notion was extended to the Sanshen mountain 三神山, which was composed of three peaks: Fanghu 方壺, Yingzhou 瀛洲, and Penglai 蓬萊. Some scholars therefore believe that the source of the mountain-like hat on the mythological

24 It appears in all but one case, seen in the image of Fuxi in the Xincheng Tomb M1, Jiayuguan.

figures²⁵ must be related to the legend of the Kunlun and Sanshen Mountains, and must thus symbolize the immortal fairyland (He 2008). This would perfectly correspond to the funerary context of Fuxi's frequent depiction among swirling clouds on coffin covers in the Gansu region. On the contrary, on the wall carvings in the Wu Liang shrine, Fuxi and Nüwa are depicted among eleven ancient sovereigns. Fuxi appears at the beginning as the first leader and as a kind of instructor for all other rulers and for all humankind. Therefore, the official crown is more appropriate for this role as it further confirms his leading role in the human world.

As argued, the Gansu Fuxi Nüwa image was patterned on the Shandong model, but it also embraced other certain elements and concepts drawn together during Han and thus evolved its own unique pattern. One such element is also that of wings (Fig. 1c), which appear in some cases in Gansu but are rarely seen in Shandong. An iconographic conglomeration of all attributes thus developed into a single image, which became a unique regional pattern representative of the multi-dynamic processes of cultural transmission. Mass migration from various parts of the Chinese territory to the Hexi corridor at the end of the Han dynasty led to the transmission of local versions of individual cultural ideas and customs through various channels. Various forms of cultural information transfer that took place vertically between generations (parent-offspring relationship), horizontally between members of the same generation, and obliquely via the various mechanisms of social learning led to a specifically "unique pattern of cumulative cultural evolution" (Tomasello 2009, 45).²⁶ Turning to the visual vocabulary and iconographic representations, such a unique pattern is hence reflected in a combined canonized representation of the two indigenous deities made up of all the individual visual attributes which appear separately in Han art in regional variations. In the theory of cultural transmission known as "heterogeneity" (polymorphism) (Cavalli-Sforza et al. 1982, 20), in the context of visual vocabulary we may justifiably talk of iconographic polymorphism, as clearly evidenced by the case study of Fuxi and Nüwa in the Gansu region. To further strengthen our arguments, we should also look into the migration processes during and after the Han dynasty.

Migration and Regional Connections

Hanshu 漢書 (*History of the Western Han*) records the Chinese military achievements "west of the [Yellow] river" (Hexi 河西) against Xiongnu and the gradual establishment of four new commanderies in what is now the province of Gansu: Jiuquan, the first to be established, was followed by Zhang Ye, Dunhuang, and

25 During the Eastern Han with the formation of the Xiwangmu's counterpart, the mountain-like hat is often associated with Dongwangong.

26 For the theory of cultural transmission see Schönplflug (2009) and Cavalli-Sforza et al. (1982).

Wuwei.²⁷ These four commanderies later developed into flourishing centres and became some of the most desired destinations for refugees seeking to escape decades of disorder, calamities, and famine towards the end of the Han dynasty and after its collapse.

There were two massive waves of migration to the Hexi Corridor. The first was part of the expansionist strategy policy of Han Wudi (r. 141–87 BCE) in accordance with the principle “move people to fill in”²⁸ (徙民以實之), that is to say, to fill the empty frontier commanderies in order to open up new lands and expand the irrigation system. These four commanderies primarily functioned as the basis for further military operations in the west with the specific aim of diminishing the power of Xiongnu by “cutting off their right arm”²⁹ and thus separating the powerful Qiang tribe of the Chuo Qiang 婁羌 from the Xiongnu. The “Treatise of Geography” in *Hanshu* further elucidates the Han purpose of splitting the southern Qiang tribe from Xiongnu and informs us about the new settlers arriving in the western area. They were poor lower-class people from the Guandong 關東 region, mainly persons who had committed crimes of excessive revenge or had little or no filial obedience.³⁰ Although it was not mandatory to move to the western area, they were encouraged to do so by being granted noble titles and a certain degree of financial support granted (Sun 2011, 133). Dispatching warriors to serve in distant expeditions, where they were required to farm the conquered land to provide food for the army and to expand the agricultural land in the famous *tuntian* 屯田 state-promoted system, additionally increased the number of Han immigrants, whose population rose to 280,211 immigrants registered in 71,270 households by the end of the Western Han.³¹ Although the population statistics in *Hanshu* are most likely incomplete and exclude provisional military officials, soldiers, prisoners, and some other ordinary inhabitants, the high number clearly testifies to the high proportion of residents resulting from the migration policy. It is also clearly noted that people migrated from the Guandong region, which historically refers to the region east of Hangu pass 函谷關 and Yao mountain 嶠山 located in what is now the city of Lingbao 靈寶市 in between the cities of Luoyang and Xi’an and extending over much of what are now the provinces of Shanxi, Henan, Hebei, and Shandong.

27 See, for example “Wudi ji” 武帝記 (“Annals of Emperor Wu”), “Dili zhi” 地理志 (“Treatise on Geography”), and “Xiyu zhuan” 西域傳 (“Records of the Western Regions”) of the *Hanshu*.

28 *Hanshu*, “Wudi ji” 武帝記 (“Annals of Emperor Wu”): 乃分武威、酒泉地置張掖、敦煌郡，徙民以實之 (Ban 1962, 189).

29 *Hanshu*, “Wei Xian zhuan” 韋賢傳 (“Biography of Wei Xian”): 起敦煌、酒泉、張掖，以高婁羌，裂匈奴之右肩 (Ban 1962, 3126).

30 *Hanshu*, “Dili zhi” 地理志 (“Treatise of Geography”): 自武威以西，本匈奴昆邪王、休屠王地，武帝時攘之，初置四郡，以通西域，高絕南羌、匈奴。其民或以關東下貧，或以報怨過當，或以諄逆亡道，家屬徙焉 (Ban 1962, 1644–45).

31 *Hanshu*, “Dili zhi” (Ban 1962, 1612–14).

The second large wave of migration came during the turmoil towards the end of the Han dynasty and after the Yongjia disorder 永嘉之亂 (310–312). This time the migration process was not organized and initiated by the government but, rather, was a spontaneous phenomenon resulting from war, destruction, and hunger forcing people to search for better living conditions. In addition to migrating to the south in search of new abodes, these people also saw a logical alternative in the western periphery, which with its long migration history was already a region with stable economic and cultural foundations. Moreover, the migrants were not solely military officials, generals, soldiers, prisoners, or people of lower social status: on the contrary, the inner core of the migration populace was formed by wealthy and influential families. Once they had settled down, members of their families were appointed to official positions at various levels. The relevant official records of the time, which abound in high praise for these regions, indicate that cultural and social activities were carried on at a high level in the western territory.³²

Sun Yan (2011, 137–38), in research on the Han and Jin family background from the Hexi corridor, shows that the western nobility engaged in a wide range of the academic and scholarly activities; during the Wei-Jin periods, this ennobled class consisted of the descendants of officials or criminals from the first wave of migrations who had settled in this area and became local aristocrats and influential persons, and of wealthy recent immigrants who had migrated to escape the political instability in their home country after the Han. They were mostly engaged in the study of Confucian classics and their commentaries and apocryphal text tradition, and thus had a good command of classics and history. Moreover, some of them—members of Suo 索 and Fan 汎 families—also studied astronomy, divination, calendar-making, and cosmology based on the cosmic forces *yin* and *yang*, incantation and magic. Their scholarly engagement clearly reflects their intellectual tendencies, which were founded on the Western Han scholarly tradition of *yin yang wuxing* 陰陽五行 cosmology and related issues in the central plain. Such cosmological notions and ideas were transmitted to the funerary context of the time and were continued in the western periphery. To return to the subject of the present article, one of the common motifs with which they attempted to embody the universal pair of *yin yang* was the depiction of Fuxi and Nüwa and their attributes, the popularity of which (as demonstrated earlier) was increasing in the west. The popularity of these figures and the iconographic conglomeration of all their attributes into a single image not only suggest that they had a role related to the afterlife, but also indicates the desire of migrants to maintain close contact with their traditional culture, transmitted vertically through several generations

32 See *Hanshu*, “Dili zhi”; *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (*Book of the Later Han*), “Kong Feng zhuan” 孔奮傳 (“Biography of Kong Fen”); *Weishu* 魏書 (*History of the Northern Wei*), “Hu Sou zhuan” 胡叟傳 (“Biography of Hu Sou”).

and horizontally among peers who might have just recently migrated from the Guandong region to the west.

The lack of evidence regarding the more precise origins of the migrants makes it difficult to entirely reconstruct the migration waves, but biographies of influential persons in official historical records sometimes reveal ancestral lineage of wealthy and influential local clans in the Hexi corridor, such as the Yang 楊 of Huayin³³ 華陰 (modern city of Weinan 渭南 in Shaanxi), the Duan 段 of Tianshui³⁴ 天水 from southeastern Gansu, the Dou 竇 of Fufeng³⁵ 扶風 in northwestern Shaanxi, or the Yin 陰 of Nanyang³⁶ 南陽 in southern Henan, to mention only a few. Furthermore, some of the Dunhuang manuscripts discovered in the Dunhuang library cave in the early 20th century also record prominent local clans and their genealogies, such as the the Zhai 翟 of Dunhuang, the Yin 陰 of Wuwei, the Suo 索 of Julu 巨鹿 and the Zhang 張 of Qinghe 清河 (both from modern Xingtai city 邢台 in southern Hebei), the Yan 閻 of Taiyuan 太原 (modern Taiyuan in central Shanxi), the Cao 曹 of Qiaojun 譙郡 (modern Bozhou 亳州 in northwestern Anhui), the Fan 汎 of Jibei 濟北 (modern Shandong).³⁷ Therefore, on the basis of these documents it can be seen that the majority of the migrants came from the Guanzhong 關中 plain and the Guandong 關東 region, that is from the surroundings of these areas in what is now Tianshui in the easternmost part of Gansu, the cities of Baoji (Fufeng), Xianyang, Xi'an, and Weinan (Hua Yin) in Shaanxi, from Taiyuan in central Shanxi, Xingtai in southern Hebei, Nanyang (Xinye) in southern Henan, and Bozhou and other places in northern Anhui, and also from western Shandong, at that time under the jurisdiction of the Jibei commandery. In addition to having arrived from the surrounding areas of the Han capitals Chang'an and Luoyang, it is evident that many migrants not only came from the provinces bordering the Shandong province but also directly from it.

Of particular interest are the Fan 汎 and Zhang 張 families from Dunhuang and Wuwei respectively. The ancestors of both families can be traced back to the surroundings of what is now Shandong province. In Dunhuang manuscript S1889, "Dunhuang Fanshi renwu zhuan" 敦煌汎氏人物傳 ("The Genealogy of the Fan Clan of Dunhuang"), we find that the Fan clan arrived in Dunhuang from Luxian

33 See *Hanshu*, "Yang Yun zhuan" 楊惲傳 ("Biography of Yang Yun").

34 See *Hou Hanshu*, "Duan Jiong zhuan" 段熲傳 ("Biography of Duan Jiong").

35 See *Hou Hanshu*, "Dou Rong zhuan" 竇融傳 ("Biography of Dou Rong").

36 See *Jinshu* 晉書 (*Book of Jin*), "Liang Wuzhao wang Li Xuansheng zhuan" 涼武昭王李玄盛傳 ("Biography of Li Xuansheng, king Wuzhao of Liang").

37 For the introduction to Dunhuang manuscripts and its local prominent clans see Jiang (1992). For the analysis of the Han and Jin family background see also Sun (2011, 132–46).

盧縣 of Jibei 濟北 in 28 BCE.³⁸ Jibei was a regional commandery with its seat at Lu, which historically denotes the area to the northeast of present-day Pingyin County 平陰縣, south of Changqing 長清, located to the southwest of what is now the city of Jinan 濟南, the capital of Shandong province (Xiong 2017, 292). A group of Western Han Jibei royal tombs have been found in the vicinity of the Jinan city in the Changqing district,³⁹ reflecting the rich history of the Han Jibei kingdom/commandery in this region.

The lineage of the prominent statesman and governor of Liangzhou Zhang Gui 張軌 (215–314) also originates in the vicinity of the Shandong area. According to his biography in *Jinsbu*, he was from Wushi 烏氏 in Anding 安定 (modern Pingliang 平涼, Gansu) and was the seventeenth-generation descendant of the Western Han Changshan Jing king Zhang Er 常山景王張耳.⁴⁰ His father was Zhang Wen 張溫, who was an official at the court notable for having been responsible for “sumptuous repasts”. The *Shiliuguo Chunqiu* 十六春秋國別傳 provides even richer information about his ancestors. His grandfather is supposed to have been Zhang Lie 張烈, who was prefect of the county magistracy in Waihuang⁴¹ 外黃, which is now Minquan County 民權縣 northwest of Shangqiu 商丘, bordering on Shandong province to the east.⁴²

If this is correct, the cases of the Fan and Zhang Gui families manifest the dynamic regional connections between the central territory of what is now in the provinces of Shandong and eastern Henan and the western periphery in the Gansu region. As they possessed a mastery of the classical Confucian learning and practised the virtue of filial piety, both of which were passed on from generation to generation, they must certainly have been aware of the trends in the artistic and architectural design of that region’s tombs, which were thus further transmitted to the west and expanded into the local funerary customs. In addition, many migrants came from the immediate surrounding areas, which in the late Eastern Han were already under the influence of the Shandong production of carved pictorial stones and their iconographic-stylistic design. The unique pattern of Fuxi and Nüwa based on the Shandong model is hence a logical continuation of such migration flows.

38 自濟北盧縣，徙居敦煌，代代相生遂為敦煌望族 (Yang 1997, 159). See also Lin et al. 2009, 53.

39 For the archaeological report see Shandong daxue kaoguxi et al. 1997.

40 *Jinsbu*, “Zhang Gui zhuan” 張軌傳 (“Biography of Zhang Gui”): 張軌字士彥，安定烏氏人，漢常山景王耳十七代孫也 ... 父溫，為太官令 (Fang 1974, 2221).

41 *Shiliuguo Chunqiu biezhuān* 十六春秋國別傳, “Qian Liang lu” 前涼錄 (“Records of Former Liang”): 張軌，字士彥，安定烏氏人，漢常山王耳十七世孫。祖烈，魏外黃令，父溫，太官令。(Chinese text project).

42 *Henan tongjian* 河南通鑑, Xihan 西漢 (2001).

Distinction between the Centre and Western Periphery

Finally, the distinctions between the centre and western periphery in the appearance of the two deities' images should not be left unmentioned. The strategic position of the Hexi district not only produced a lively artistic exchange between central China and Gansu province, but also accounts for its role as a major gateway between China and the Central Asian regions. In her research on early Buddhist art in China and Central Asia, Marlyn Martin Rhie (1999) shows a close connection between this region and foreign states, especially in the years 265–290, which is known to be the most prosperous period of the unified Western Jin Dynasty. Such foreign influences can be seen in the Maozhuangzi Tomb (male coffin cover) and Sunjiashitan Tomb (female coffin cover), both in Jiayuguan. Iconographic components of Fuxi Nüwa imagery are the same as in all other examples, the main distinction appearing in the depiction of their face characteristics and cloths. The large eyes clearly indicate that some foreign influences must have been at work. Furthermore, the abundance of folds in the Maozhuangzi Tomb hints at the drapery formulation known from Buddhist art.

While in two examples foreign influences have come to bear on the stylistic design of the divine couple, the main difference is not seen in the depiction but, rather, in the change of location. During the Han dynasty, Fuxi and Nüwa are generally depicted on the ceiling and upper parts of the walls or on the main and side pillars of the tomb's door. In Gansu, 14 out of 17 Fuxi-Nüwa depictions appear on the inner side of the wooden coffin cover. This location seems to have been particularly popular in the Jiayuguan/Jiuquan region, as all but one appear in this district. In a slightly later period, in the Gaotai region around 160 km to the east of Jiayuguan, the divine couple returns to the chamber walls. The occurrence of Fuxi and Nüwa on the coffin cover can be traced back to the middle period of the Eastern Han Dynasty onwards, being particularly abundant in Sichuan region, mostly on the rear side of the stone sarcophagi.⁴³ However, their appearance differs considerably from the depictions in the Gansu province, and at the same time repeatedly hints at showing intimacy, which can hardly be perceived in the Gansu representations.

It is furthermore interesting to notice that the motifs that are related to the immortal paradise and the journey of the soul were moved to the *zhaobi* wall, while the motifs whose role was to weave the net of the cosmos and other observable celestial bodies who would contribute to the creation of the outer cosmos moved nearer to the body of a deceased and, to be more specific, to the coffin cover. In addition to Fuxi and Nüwa, Xiwangmu and Dongwangong, that is to say, another divine pair commonly seen in Han art representing *yin* and *yang* forces, also appear on the coffin cover. Examples can be seen in the Xincheng Tombs M6 and

43 For the cliff tombs and decorated stone sarcophagi from Sichuan see Elias (2019).

M13.⁴⁴ Moreover, in the Sunjiashitan Tomb M3 孫家石灘 in Jiuquan from the early Western Jin period we can even see the depiction of stars, the sun, and the moon on the inner side of the coffin cover (Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2005, 32). What does this change mean? Does it reflect a different understanding of roles of the two deities and thus of the entire cosmic representation? While the symbolic representation of these images is beyond the scope of this paper, the subject certainly needs further examination.

Conclusion

This case study of Fuxi and Nüwa in the Wei and Western Jin mural tombs in the Gansu area, based on comparative iconographic-stylistic analysis and textual research into the origins of the migrants, reveals a unique pattern based on an iconographic conglomeration of all attributes and other physical characteristics, which was gradually built on the understanding of images by the migrants and their descendants from Shandong and surrounding regions from central plains. The general characteristics of Fuxi-Nüwa image in the Gansu region are therefore the sun with a bird and the moon with a toad in front of their chests, a try square and a pair of compasses in one of their hands, the three-peaked hat on Fuxi's head, tiger's paws, and in some examples wings. This being the case, they show a close connection with the compositional, iconographic and stylistic design of Fuxi and Nüwa in the Shandong area and neighbouring countries.

The Shandong influence is certainly not an isolated phenomenon. It is also revealed in many other scenes and motifs in tombs such as the harvest, piles of grains, resting cows and bulls, or depictions of the tomb's owner. As Zheng Yan (2002, 163) has already observed, similar depictions of the harvest scene or farming and the depiction of tomb's owner are seen in the Shandong Yi'nán tomb discovered in 1954 in the village of Beizhai 北寨 and Dunhuang Foyemiaowan Tomb M37. Auspicious omens arranged in nine layers of four images on the *zhao-bi* wall in Foyemiaowan Tomb M133 are also well represented on the ceiling of the Wu Liang shrine in Shandong, while the frequent depiction of figures with an ox or cock head and human body in the Xincheng and Foyemiaowan tombs can likewise be traced back to the southwest region of Shandong (Zheng 2002, 162). This gives further evidence for the spreading of the Shandong pattern not only to surrounding provinces but also to the more remote borders, as has been clearly revealed by the case study of Fuxi and Nüwa.

44 For Xincheng Tomb M1 see the archaeological report on eight Xincheng tombs in Jiayuguan (Gansu sheng wenwudui et al. 1985, 18, 23), for Xincheng Tomb M13 see the archaeological report on tombs nos. 12 and 13 (Jiayuguan shi wenwu guanlisuo 1982, 12).

Furthermore, the transfer process in which the cultural information was carried geographically from centre to periphery, and also handed down from one generation to the next, lead to emergence of a “composite” style of both indigenous deities, which apart from typical Shandong elements also incorporated other regional variations (wings, larger legs, tiger’s paws). The image of Fuxi and Nüwa, based on the Shandong model, thus evolved into an iconographic tradition of its own.

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