“Hu” Non-Chinese
as They Appear in the Materials
from the Astana Graveyard at Turfan

by
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SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS
FOUNDED 1986

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ISSN
2157-9679 (print)   2157-9687 (online)

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“Hu” Non-Chinese as They Appear in the Materials from the Astana Graveyard at Turfan

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Translated by Valerie Hansen and Zhang Guangda 張廣達

Since ancient times the Chinese language has had different words for the various peoples of the north and the west that distinguished them from the main population of Han Chinese. These terms have varied over time. Before and after the unification of China in 221 B.C. the word “hu” 胡 referred exclusively to the Xiongnu, but during the Han dynasty usage broadened to include both the Xiongnu and other peoples of the north and the west. In the Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang dynasties the term “hu” came to refer to the people of deep eye-sockets and high noses who lived in the far western regions of modern China. Most of non-Chinese who appear in the Turfan records came from Sogdiana (the Persian-speaking region near modern Samarkand, in Uzbekistan), Tashkent, Tokharistan (Badakhshan in northern Afghanistan), Karashahr (Yanqi in Xinjiang), Kuche (also in Xinjiang), and the other small kingdoms south of the Tianshan Mountains in modern Xinjiang.¹

This article begins with a brief survey of artifacts that reveal how contemporary artisans depicted the non-Chinese. We will then divide the non-Chinese in Turfan into two groups: those residing there and those traveling through on business. The article proceeds in chronological order, starting with the fourth and fifth centuries, when many Chinese settlers arrived. The Gaochang Kingdom, although ruled by the local Qu family, embraced many Chinese customs and ruled from 500 to 640, when the invading Tang armies conquered Turfan. Finally we will examine several disputes involving non-Chinese both residing in and traveling through Turfan for what they reveal about the multicultural society that thrived at Turfan during the seventh and eighth centuries.
The Physical Appearance of “hu” Non-Chinese in Artifacts Excavated from Astana

Carved wood or mud figurines placed in tombs provide some sense of the physical appearance of “hu” non-Chinese. Many have deep eye sockets, high noses, and heavy beards, in contrast to Chinese figurines. Let us survey a few notable examples.

The earliest figures from the Astana graveyard, dating from the late fourth to the sixth centuries, are crude and of poor workmanship. Because the figurines are carved from wood, it is difficult to make out their facial features, which, like their clothing, are often drawn with a brush. Although the men shown in figure 12 wear robes of different length, one short, one long, both fasten their robes on the left side, a possible indication that they are non-Chinese. Still, nothing in their facial features marks them as non-Chinese.

By the time of the Tang dynasty the workmanship of the figurines improves so that they become more life-like, as we can see in the case of the two grooms from tomb number 206 at Astana, the grave of Zhang Xiong 張雄 (buried 633) and his wife (interred in 689). My judgment is that these figurines were buried in 689, along with a badly damaged painted horse and camel. Although the grooms are also damaged, they have been restored. They are both fifty-six centimeters tall, one with a green robe, one with a purple robe, both with the collar folded back to show the lining of their robes (figure 2 shows the groom with the green robe). Both wear tall black boots and a tall white pointed cap (modeled on felt caps worn in real life) with a red lining that has been turned up to form the brim. Their appearance and clothing mark them as representative “hu” non-Chinese.

Two mud busts from tomb 336 at Astana present another view of Sogdian merchants. Tomb 336, I have argued previously, is the secondary burial for the last king of the Gaochang kingdom, Qu Zhisheng 麗智盛. It can be dated on stylistic grounds to the period 690-704.
addition to four heavily damaged horses, the tomb also contained four grooms, two of whom are shown in figure 3). The groom on the left, with mustache, wears a white rounded cap with the brim upturned (in the shape of an upside-down bowl), while the other, with mustache and heavy beard, wears the often-seen black kerchief (jinze 帘子). Figure 4 shows a painted clay figurine of a groom who stands an imposing 1.10 m tall. Quite possibly an attendant of the deceased, who was buried between 713 and 755 in Astana tomb 216, the bearded groom also wears the black kerchief with a brown gown closing on the left, with overturned collar and narrow sleeves. Our final example, figure 5, may be the most interesting. A painted clay tomb guardian beast (86 cm tall, Tang dynasty) has a human face with distinctly non-Chinese eyebrows, nose, and heavy beard. He wears an unusual warrior’s helmet with a protuberance on top and has the body of a panther.

Non-Chinese “hu” as Seen in the Documents from the Astana Graveyard

Documentary materials offer a different perspective on the activities of non-Chinese “hu” in Turfan. Although the artifacts give us the illusion of seeing different non-Chinese merchants and grooms, we must remember that, because many of these artifacts were manufactured in China proper, they do not necessarily reflect the appearance of real non-Chinese residents in Turfan.

Because the non-Chinese residents in Turfan adopted Chinese names, it is not always easy to determine whether or not a given person is non-Chinese. This article uses two criteria to establish the presence of non-Chinese. On rare occasions, the word “hu” (non-Chinese) appears as an adjective describing someone.
Much more common is the use of certain family names used by non-Chinese. Some non-Chinese took the family names of the royal family of their kingdom: Ju 車 (indigenous Jushi rulers of Turfan), Long 龍 (Karashahr), and Bo 祐 or Bai 白 (Kuche). Other non-Chinese adopted the name of their original country as their last name: Luo 羅 (Tokharistan), Mu 穆 (Merv), Zhu 竹 or sometimes 竹 (India). Most of the non-Chinese in Turfan came from the region of Sogdiana and were referred to collectively as the nine clans of Zhaowu (Zhaowu jiuxing 昭武九姓). The exact number of Sogdian family names was not fixed as the Sogdians came from a number of places. The most common Sogdian surnames and their place of origin were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surname</th>
<th>Place of Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An 安</td>
<td>Bukhara (modern Bukhara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cao 曹</td>
<td>Kabudhan, Gubdan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He 何</td>
<td>Kushaniyah (north of the Zarafshan River)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kang 康</td>
<td>Samarkand (modern Samarkand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 米</td>
<td>Maimurgh (probably modern Urgut)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shi 史</td>
<td>Kesh (modern Shahrisabz)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shi 石</td>
<td>Shash or Chach (Tashkent)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given names provide another clue to non-Chinese identity. Because many of the non-Chinese used Chinese characters to transliterate their first names, their names do not look like Chinese names because they contain more than two syllables or because they use characters not usually used in names. Of course, those non-Chinese who were more familiar with Chinese ways often adopted names that are hard to distinguish from those of the Chinese.
Non-Chinese Residents in Turfan before Chinese Rule

The number of documents from the fourth and fifth centuries that survive is small, and many are fragmentary. Early name registers contain some family names that seem to be those of non-Chinese, such as Bo from Kuche, Zhu from India, and Ju of the indigenous Turfan rulers. Also appearing on these registers are some first names that do not seem Chinese, but whose nationality cannot be determined on the basis of the surname. The appearance of these names on name registers means that those named were either dispatched to “watch the sea” of the desert sands (shouhai 守海) or to serve as members of local army units, suggesting they were resident in Turfan.

More evidence about non-Chinese survives from the period of the Gaochang Kingdom (500-640). A name-register from Astana tomb 31, from circa 620, lists three people with the surname Kang (from Samarkand), seven people with the surname He (from Kushaniyah), two with the surname An (from Bukhara) and one with the surname Mu (from Merv), and at least twenty-eight with the surname Cao (from Kapītana). All of these non-Chinese belonged to the nine clans of Zhaowu from Sogdiana, but, unfortunately, because the end is torn, we cannot tell what these people were doing in Turfan.

The Gaochang kingdom collected a variety of taxes, one of which was called the treasury tax (zangqian 賰錢), a tax that appears to have been collected from local merchants. A fragmentary memorial, dating from sometime between 500 and 640, lists a few people who paid this tax. One person’s name appears twice: Long Zhezhinai 龍震之 who one time paid one bolt of “deva” (tipo 提婆) brocade that was converted to fifty coins and the second time three bolts of the same cloth, worth one hundred and fifty coins. The combination of the last name Long and the unusual first name suggests that Mr. Long came from Karashahr. The same list
places the characters "shanghu" 商胡 before the name of the merchant, Wo Yiyan 沃延. The term "shanghu" (literally, "merchant non-Chinese") referred to non-resident merchants in Gaochang, but, because the term does not precede Long Zhezhinai’s name, it seems probable that he, unlike Wo Yiyan, was registered as a householder based in Turfan.

Non-Chinese Residents in Turfan under Chinese Rule

Because no household registers survive from the period of the Gaochang kingdom, we cannot be certain that the Gaochang Kingdom actually had a system of household registration. We do know, though, that, in 640, when the Chinese conquered the kingdom, they were able to give an exact count of 37,700 people in 8,000 households with 4,300 horses. A declaration from 640 gives the name of one non-Chinese household head named An Kuzhiyan 安忽知延 and his two daughters. Another declaration in the group is missing the name of the household head, but it gives the family name of the wife of the household head as Zhang 張. It also lists the names of their six sons, two daughters-in-law, two daughters, one slave boy, and three female slaves. The two daughters-in-law are named Cao (from Kapūtanā and the six boys have characteristically non-Chinese names (such as Mosa 摩薩), suggesting they are non-Chinese. They appear to be the children of a non-Chinese father and a Chinese mother.

When the Tang dynasty implemented the equal field system in Turfan, each household was allotted a given amount of land, which could be adjusted if the household increased or decreased in size. One register-entry of land to be distributed shows that government officials could give land to both Chinese and non-Chinese households and they could take land away from both Chinese and non-Chinese households. Each section lists the area of the designated plots and specifies the owners of the neighboring plots to the east, west, south, and north and
concludes with the same formula: the land described on the right is to be taken from blank-person and given to blank-person to serve as his personal share land. Five non-Chinese last names appear on this land document: Shi 史, Mu 穆, Cao 曹, Shi 石, and He 何, all of whom belonged to the registered households of Turfan so we can assume they were permanent residents of Turfan. Other documents also list household heads with non-Chinese family names.16

A working draft of the register from Chonghua canton, Gaochang sub-prefecture, dated 707 lists the members of each household and the land allotted, but not yet actually distributed, to them.17 The incomplete section of the 707 list for Anle community 里 lists 23 households, two of whom have Chinese family names (Yin 隱 and Xiao 蕭), and 21 of whom have non-Chinese names. Of those 21, 19 are either Sogdians or their descendants with the last name Kang, An, He, and Shi. In addition two men have the family name Zhu 竹, a variant of Zhu 秫 (of Tianzhu), showing they were from India. Eight households from another unnamed 里 community, also on the 707 list, were also non-Chinese. Among these non-Chinese households are men listed who served as soldiers in the garrison militia system (weishi 衛士), who received an honorary xunguan 勳官 title for military service, who had served as ranked officials, and who were the sons of ranked officials. Clearly non-Chinese had access to some official positions.

Other documents reveal a variety of occupations followed by non-Chinese at Turfan before and during the periods of Chinese rule. Some were coppersmiths. Some were painters or master-painters. Some were leatherworkers. Some were iron-mongers. One man, Cao Tuoniao 曹駝鳥, whose curious name meant “ostrich,” was even a veterinarian.18
Traveling Non-Chinese merchants and their Commercial Activities before Chinese Rule

Particularly worthy of attention is the sole document from Astana written in Sogdian, which is the only document from the Astana graveyard in a non-Chinese language. This is a contract for the purchase of a slave-girl born in Turkic-speaking lands by a Chinese. Everyone else mentioned in the contract is Sogdian. The contract uses the Turkish title of the Gaochang king, showing that he was a vassal of the Western Turks at the time of the contract (639) as was most of Central Asia, including Sogdiana. Many records show that the people of Turfan received the Turkish king’s envoys. One of the most important documents about the merchants not resident in Turfan is the register of the “scale-fees” paid on goods in transit.¹⁹

Activities of Non-Chinese Merchants in Transit under Tang Rule

Tang law required that everyone traveling between different prefectures obtain a travel pass called a guosuo 過所, which listed all family members, servants, and animals traveling together. These documents provide special insight into the activities and trade routes of non-resident merchants, some of whom are called xingshenghu 興生胡. Nine applications for travel passes dated 685 survive in one tomb.²⁰ Of the nine groups, two are led by men bearing the surname Kang and one, He, suggesting they were Sogdian; two others are identified as coming from Tokharistan (吐火羅). Several explain that the travelers came east in order to trade, some intended to go on to the capital at Changan, and that they were unable to obtain the appropriate documentation in the western regions, (which were beyond Chinese control and did not have the appropriate offices). They were given travel passes once their guarantors had vouched that animals and slaves traveling with them were indeed the property of the merchants. They also guaranteed that the merchants were not dishonest and had committed no crimes. Some of the
guarantors, who bear Sogdian last names, are identified as full-fledged commoners (baixing 百姓) of Tingzhou (Beshbaliq), Yizhou (Qomul or Hami), Yanqi (Karashahr), and Gaochang (Turfan). Because these merchants were unable to speak Chinese, they used an interpreter, Zhai Nanipan, whose unusual trisyllabic name points to his foreign origins.

Sometimes merchants based in Turfan obtained travel passes from the authorities in other places to the east and the west. A Sogdian merchant named Shi Randian, who had the rank of Mobile Corps Commander (youji jiangjun 游擊將軍) and who was also a full-fledged commoner resident in Turfan, needed a travel pass to go to Guazhou (near Dunhuang) and Yizhou.21

A petition from a patrol station dated 733 suggests that the provisions of the law were strictly enforced.22 The patrol station detained a traveling merchant Shi from Kāshāna along with two zuoren laborers (perhaps a kind of indentured laborer), 200 sheep, 6 cattle, because of discrepancies on their travel pass. The Shi entourage was missing one “zuoren” laborer yet had one extra cow and one extra horse. Because the patrol station did not have the authority to emend travel passes, they sent the entire Shi entourage to the prefectural office at Turfan.

Following the 640 conquest of Turfan, the Tang dynasty established a market-supervisor’s office headed by an Assistant Market Director (shicheng 市丞). According to The Tang Code, all transactions involving the sale of animals or slaves required a market certificate issued by the market supervisor’s office. Two contracts involving non-Chinese merchants are especially important. The first for the sale of a camel is dated 673.23 The original owner was a non-resident merchant (xingsheng hu 興生胡) from Samarkand, and one of the guarantors was from the same country. Because the guarantors were not all present, the parties involved drew up a private contract in which they stated their intent to apply for a market certificate once everyone mentioned was present. The second contract dated 731 is a copy of a market certificate
for the purchase of a twelve-year-old female slave. Here, too, the seller is a non-resident merchant, this time from Maimurgh, whose name is Mi Lushan 米祿山. The names of five guarantors are given: four are non-Chinese residents of Turfan, while one is identified as a temporary resident (jizhu 委住).

Another term for Sogdian immigrants appears in a request for an official certificate of ownership by a man originally from Maimurgh. The man, named Mi Xunzhi 米循職 traveled from Tingzhou (Beiting) to Turfan in the company of two slaves, both with unorthodox names, one camel, and fifteen sheep. The officials honoring the request refer to Mi as a genmin 根民, literally a “root-person,” and by extension an immigrant who has put down roots.

Several Law Suits Involving non-Chinese under Chinese Rule

Because so many Central Asians lived in Turfan it was inevitable that disputes would arise, some of which ended up in the local courts. Let us examine four of the most interesting cases:

In 643 the non-Chinese He Shementuo 何射門拖 was implicated in the death of a visitor named Laifeng 來豐. The record is damaged, and the end is missing, but the facts of the case are clear: A person named Laifeng was forced to stay in Turfan because he fell ill and he was housed in the home of He Shementuo, which may have been an inn. Laifeng was given rations by local officials, who ordered his host Mr. He to provide his meals and medical care. Unfortunately Laifeng died, and his host Mr. He did not report the death within the stipulated time. The officials felt that his host had failed to take care of him or to provide for his medical needs and so was responsible for his death. The host testified that he had done everything within his power to take care of Laifeng and that he had sent for a doctor, but that he was not familiar with the
relevant provisions of the law and unable to provide the appropriate documentation. He was unaware of Laifeng’s pre-existing health condition, and he asked local officials to interrogate those people who had been staying in the same place as the deceased. He also asked the officials to send for the district head to testify. The outcome of the case is not recorded.

In the second case, a non-Chinese named Mo Hetu 莫贺吐 was interrogated about his involvement in the case of at least two runaway slaves who, sometime around 685, were apprehended in a household headed by a Sogdian named Kang. Mo Hetu, who seems to have known the runaway slaves, denied any knowledge of their flight. 26

The third case involved a non-Chinese merchant named Cao Lushan 曹禄山 who sued a Chinese merchant named Li Shaojin 李绍谨, a resident of Changan, in the court of Gaochang sub-prefecture, which passed the documents (dating to sometime between 665 and 673) on to the higher authorities of the Anxi Protectorate. 27 Cao testified that, in the preceding year, his brother Cao Yanyan 曹炎延 traveled together with Li and two more non-Chinese named Cao who also resided in Changan, to Gongyuecheng (Almaligh in the Yili River basin). Cao Lushan maintained that his brother had made a loan of 275 bolts of silk to Li and that they then traveled together to Kuche. His older brother brought an unspecified amount of silk, merchandise including bowls and Chinese-style saddles and clothing, with a value of two hundred bolts of silk. Li arrived in Kuche, but the older brother disappeared. Cao Lushan requested that Li pay him back the silk he had borrowed from his missing brother. Because the missing brother had possession of the contract, Li originally denied borrowing the silk and denied as well that they had traveled together to Kuche.

After several rounds of questioning, Cao Lushan produced two surprise witnesses: the men who had served as guarantors to the missing contract for the loan of the silk. Li was forced
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to admit he had borrowed the silk and he agreed to pay back the silk with interest. In this case the person bringing the suit and the witnesses were non-Chinese, while the person being sued was Chinese, and the court found in favor of the non-Chinese. Also worth notice is that the case involved both Chinese and non-Chinese merchants who were based in the capital of Changan.

The plaintiffs in the fourth case were two full-fledged commoners living in Turfan. When the eight-year-old son of the Shi family and the eight-year-old daughter of the Cao family were playing in front of the inn of Zhang Youhe, an ox-drawn cart crushed them. The cart was driven by a driver named Kang Shifen, who had been hired by a temporary resident (xingke) named Jin Chennu. Kang Shifen referred to himself as a full-fledged commoner of the Chumi tribe and explained that the cart was borrowed; that he was not versed in ox-driving, that the cart went out of control even though he tried his utmost to control it, and that he unintentionally wounded the children. He acknowledged that he had hurt the children but maintained that it had been accidental and that he had no intent of hurting them. He asked that he be punished according to the law. The judgment was that he was released into the custody of his guarantors and ordered to take care of the two wounded children for a period of fifty days as stipulated by *The Tang Code*. According to the law, if the wounded person died within the stipulated period, then the accused would be punished as a murderer. In this case, both the plaintiff and the defendant were non-Chinese. The Cao and Shi families were resident in Turfan, while the ox-driver Kang seems to have come from Samarkand although he referred to himself as a member of the Chumi tribe.
A Special Commodity of the Silk Road – Non-Chinese Slaves

We have already seen several instances in which non-Chinese slaves were traded as commodities, and I have written on this topic elsewhere. A name register dating to 690-705 sheds considerable light on the different social ranks in Turfan because it lists people who had evaded registration on the household registers. Although fragmentary, it lists 79 people who include 1 musician of inferior status (yueshi 樂事), 9 male and female personal retainers (buqu 部曲, kenu 客女), and 68 male and female slaves (nubi 奴婢), with one person uncertain. Strikingly, 61 of the people are listed as belonging to a single household, with no less than 20 under fifteen years of age. Some are still babies: two are only one year old and one is only two years old. Many have non-Chinese names.

What kind of a household was this? Why would they have evaded registration? What was their means of livelihood? Let me suggest that this household raised slaves for profit much as other households raised cattle for market. They may have given their slaves training or taught them Chinese, and they seem to have encouraged them to reproduce in order to raise their market value (the babies could well be the offspring of the slave women).

Concluding Thoughts

This article has only treated some of the many materials about non-Chinese found in the Astana graveyard. The earliest materials from the fourth and fifth centuries testify that the community of non-Chinese included the indigenous Jushi peoples as well as their neighbors from Karashahr, Kuche, and India. By the seventh and eighth centuries, the bearers of the Sogdian last names far outnumbered other non-Chinese. With the exception of a small number of
Tokharian merchants, it seems that everyone else was Sogdian. The merchandise they brought even included non-Chinese slaves, increasing their numbers further.

1 (Translators' note). The English version of Wu Zhen’s article is based on the paper he presented in New Haven at the Third Silk Road Conference at Yale University, July 10-12, 1998. We have omitted the material that overlapped with the other papers in this volume. The Chinese version of this paper appeared as “Asitana- Halahezhuo gumuqun kaogu ziliao zhong suojian de huren 阿斯塔那哈拉和極古墓群考古資料中所見的胡人,” Dunhuang Tulufan yanjiu 敦煌吐鲁番研究 4 (1999): 245-264. Interested readers may wish to consult that volume as well as Asia Major third series volume XI, part 2 (1998) and the April 1999 issue of Orientations for published versions of other papers from the conference.


3 Xinjiang Bowuguan 新疆博物馆, figure 122.


6 Xinjiang Bowuguan 新疆博物馆, figure 116.

7 Xinjiang Bowuguan 新疆博物馆, figure 126, from Astana tomb 224.


9 (Translators’ note). The Turfan documents have been published in two sets, both called Tulufan chutu wenshu 吐鲁番出土文書, both by Wenwu chubanshe in Beijing. All citations cite the ten-volume set of transcriptions and


11 Tulufan chutu wenshu: texts 2:207; Tulufan chutu wenshu: photos 1:206.

12 Jiu Tangshu 198:5295.

13 Tulufan chutu wenshu: texts 4:73, Tulufan chutu wenshu: photos 2:44.


18 Coppersmiths (Tulufan chutu wenshu: texts 7:452; photos 3:523); painters or master-painters (Tulufan chutu wenshu: texts 2:333-334, 4:16; Tulufan chutu wenshu: photos 1:282, 2:11; leatherworkers (Tulufan chutu wenshu: texts 1:120; Tulufan chutu wenshu: photos 2:11); iron-mongers (Tulufan chutu wenshu: texts 6:467; Tulufan chutu wenshu: photos 3:240); veterinarian (Tulufan chutu wenshu: texts 10:59; Tulufan chutu wenshu: photos 4:424).


25 Tulufan chutu wenshu: texts 7:8-9; Tulufan chutu wenshu: photos 3:306.


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31 (Translators' note). The rank of personal retainer was higher than that of a slave, but its bearer was still a member of the inferior classes, who included personal retainers, bondsmen, and slaves. See Wallace Johnson, The T'ang Code, Volume I General Principles (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) p. 28.
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Figure 1. Two wooden figurines, possibly of a non-Chinese servant (left) and his master (right). Excavated in 1975 from tombs 97 and 98 at Karakhoja. Height 19.3 cm (left), 21 cm (right).

Wu Zhen, "'Hu' Non-Chinese as They Appear in Materials from the Astana Graveyard at Turfan," *Sino-Platonic Papers* 119 (July, 2002)

Figure 2. Wooden figurine of a Sogdian groom, whose hands originally held a lead for a camel or a horse. Excavated in 1973 from tomb 206 at Astana. Height 56 cm.

After Xinjiang Bowuguan (1991) figure 122.
Wu Zhen, "‘Hu’ Non-Chinese as They Appear in Materials from the Astana Graveyard at Turfan," *Sino-Platonic Papers* 119 (July, 2002)

Figure 3. Two mud busts of Sogdian merchants. Excavated in 1960 from Astana tomb 336. Height 25.5 cm (left), 26.8 cm (right).

After Xinjiang Bowuguan 1975 figure 127.
Wu Zhen, "‘Hu’ Non-Chinese as They Appear in Materials from the Astana Graveyard at Turfan," *Sino-Platonic Papers* 119 (July, 2002)

Figure 4. Painted clay figurine of a Sogdian groom.

Excavated in 1972 from tomb 216. Height 1.10 m.

Figure 5. Clay tomb guardian with panther’s body and a human (non-Chinese) face. Excavated in 1972 from tomb 224 at Astana. Height 86 cm.

After Xinjiang Bowuguan (1991) figure 126.
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