

Evolution of the “Crescent Guard” in Chinese Swords



Gong Jian

Abstract Iron and steel arms appeared in China during the late Warring States while guards on Han dynasty *jian* (double-edged sword) mainly continued Warring States designs. Single-edged ring-pommel sword (*huanshoudao*) which appeared during the same period did not have a guard. During the Jin dynasty, a type of V-shape sword guard appeared, which continued into the Southern and Northern dynasties. In the Tang dynasty, on the one hand, arms design continued Northern Zhou and Sui trends; at the same time, it absorbed Turkic and Sassanid influences from the west, which gave rise to a unique Tang sword aesthetic. From then on, V-shape guards started to gain popularity in China. Developments of this style were to have a major influence on sword guard designs during the Song, as well as among the Mongols and Tibetans until it finally attained the familiar form of zoomorphic guard during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Keyword Crescent · *Bazi* · Guard · sword guard (*jiange*) · Sword aesthetic · Tang · Song · Dynasty · Tibetan · Mongol

During the Tang dynasty, weapon design mainly followed the form of the preceding Northern Zhou and Sui dynasties. As the Sui and Tang entered a golden age, cultural exchanges with the west led to the development of a “Western region style,” which in turn gave rise to a new aesthetic in Tang swords. A new type of guard in the shape of the Chinese character of “eight (*ba*)” (*bazi* guard) appeared in the Dunhuang frescoes. This sword guard type continued to develop and ultimately had a significant influence on sword designs during the Song, as well as in Mongolia and Tibet, and eventually evolved into the familiar zoomorphic types in the Ming and Qing dynasties.

G. Jian (✉)
Hubei Institute of Fine Arts, Wuhan, China
e-mail: zsbkbj@qq.com

© The Author(s) 2023
H. Chao et al. (eds.), *Martial Culture and Historical Martial Arts in Europe and Asia*,
Martial Studies 2, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-2037-0_5

151

1 Sword Guards in the Tang Dynasty

In the Northern and Southern dynasties, double-edged swords (*jian*) had already withdrawn from the battlefield. The army used a straight, single-edged sword (*zhidao*), which was without a guard and whose blade design followed the style of the Han dynasty. The combat action of Han's ring-pommel swords (*huanshoudao*) was relatively simple, which mainly relied on slashing and cutting, with limited thrusting applications. Most early ring-pommel swords did not have guards, as they were not seen in Han dynasty frescoes and stone reliefs, nor testified in archaeological finds (Peng 2018, 163). Due to the scarcity of material evidence, we know very little about sword form and design of the Northern and Southern dynasties. However, a ring-pommel sword discovered in the Northern Zhou tomb of the Shangzhuguo Captain General (*Shangzhuguo/Zhuguo da jiangjun*) Li Xian and his wife is described as follows, "The hilt is silver-coated. The single-edged blade is heavily rusted and cannot be pulled from the scabbard. The scabbard is wooden with brown lacquer on the surface. Its lower part (locket) is covered with silver and attached with two ear-like silver holds (Han 1985, 14)." The Central Plains absorbed this style from the Sassanid Empire which gave rise to the Northern Zhou sword.

In the Sui and Tang periods, sword guards started to appear. A single-edged sword (*hengdao*) found in an imperial tomb at Mang Shan, north of Luoyang, Henan Province, in 1929, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art ("the Met") in New York in the United States, is a typical example. This type of guard is also seen in private collections in China (See Fig. 5.1a, b). This guarded design continued into the late Tang, as seen in the Dunhuang frescoes. In the Mogao Grottoes Cave 057, there is a drawing of a Tang sword on the western wall in the front chamber (See Fig. 5.2), which has the same style as the sword in the Met (Digital Dunhuang website 2010).

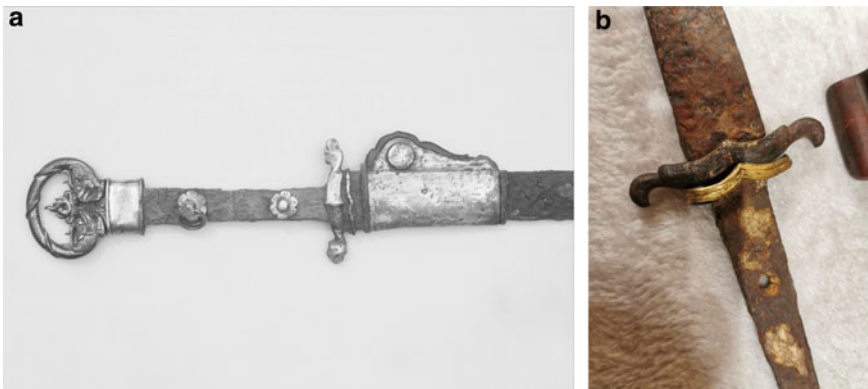


Fig. 5.1 Examples of Tang sword guards



Fig. 5.2 Hilt of a Tang sword (western wall, front chamber, Mogao Grottoes Cave No.057) (Collection of the Dunhuang Academy China)

In the Tang dynasty, sword guards began to proliferate after the Wu Zhou period. Ringless *guishou* pommels started to appear on swords which often had a diamond-shaped guard (*guishou* refers to the pointed part of the jade tablet, which is a traditional Chinese ritual vessel). A mural in a tomb chamber in Taiyuan from the Wu Zhou period clearly illustrates such a style (See Fig. 5.3). As a matter of fact, this diamond-shaped guard not only appears in frescoes but is also seen in the tomb guardians of imperial Tang burial sites. Early Tang tomb warriors hold guardless, ring-pommel ceremonial long swords. After the mid-Tang, ceremonial swords carried by tomb guardians started to have guards, mainly in two types: diamond-shaped guard; and a guard with cloud-shaped quillons and a relatively flat middle section. The sword held by the stone sculptural figure within the tomb of the Emperor Suzong of Tang (711–762) is a classic example of the latter (see Fig. 5.4).

Between the early to mid-Tang period, sword design underwent significant changes as a result of the Tang’s expansion into the Western Regions. Under the open and inclusive rule of the Tang dynasty, the Tang started to appropriate the style of the Western Regions in an extensive manner. In general, Tang swords either had a ring pommel or *guishou* pommel. The guard tended to have a diamond shape, the scabbard usually had a single carrying ring or double studs, while the chape had a deep socket with an arced bottom. Diamond-shaped guards first appeared on the



Fig. 5.3 A Tang sword from the Wu Zhou period (Xu 2012, 102)

Fig. 5.4 Tomb figure in the Jianling Mausoleum of the Emperor Suzong of Tang (Developed by Eric Suen; derived from “Gong Jian: Evolution of the ‘Crescent Guard’ in Chinese Swords” www.sohu.com)



swords of the Sogdians and the Turks. In the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Museum (Xinjiang Museum), a Turkic warrior stone statue holds a sword with just such a guard design (See Fig. 5.5). Being active in the Western Regions at the same time, Sogdian sword guards also had a diamond shape as well. On a silver plate of Sogdian warriors (Anikova Plate) in the State Hermitage Museum of Russia, marks of diamond-shaped sword guards can be clearly noted (See Fig. 5.6). Tang smiths absorbed and applied this design on their swords, which later had a profound effect on sword designs of the Liao dynasty and Japan. The “*kara-tachi* sword with glided silver fittings and inlay”, preserved in the Shōsō-in Repository in Japan, is an excellent example of such a design, as Japan appropriated and indigenized the Tang long sword (*Tang dadao*) (See Fig. 5.7). The crucial difference between Japan’s *kara-tachi* (or *Tang dadao*) and that of the Tang is the function of the guards. Japanese swords are designed to cut and to stop the enemy’s blade while Tang swords are made for

Fig. 5.5 Example of a Turkic warrior stone statue (Collection of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Museum)



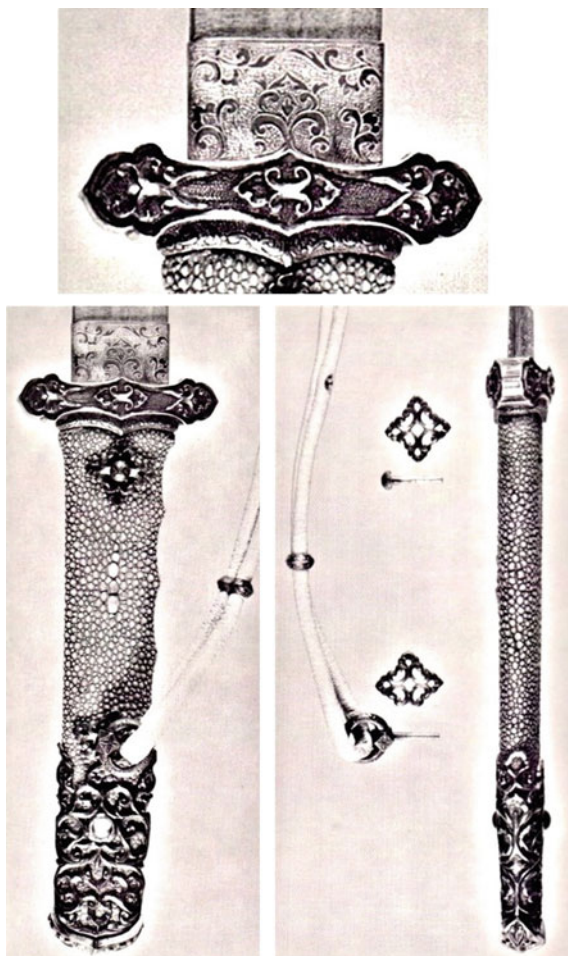
Fig. 5.6 A silver plate showing two opposing Sogdian warriors (Smirnov 1909)



thrusting, where the guard served to prevent the hand from slipping (Fu 2000, 43). This provided the foundation upon which Japanese sword guards developed during the Heian period.

Besides the diamond-shaped guards, *bazi* guards were also used in the Tang dynasty. This style started to appear extensively in the Dunhuang murals and silk paintings from the mid-Tang until the end of the dynasty. From the Five Dynasties onward, this type of guard started to become popular throughout the Central Plains, while variants evolved from this. “The Mourning Princes from Various Kingdoms,” a mural in the Mogao Grottoes Cave 158 dated to the mid-Tang era, which depicts the moment of Shakyamuni’s death, contains a striking scene where the princes from various kingdoms in the Western Regions expressed their extreme grief by “cutting off their ears and noses” and “stabbing their chest and disemboweling.” In fact, “cutting off their ears and noses” was a mourning custom among the Sogdians in Central Asia and the Western Regions, and among the *hu* in the Northern China, which was well-known and accepted by the Chinese during the Sui and Tang dynasties. The practice of “stabbing their chest and disemboweling” was related to esoteric Zoroastrian practices in the Sogdian communities (Rong and Zhang 2004, 47). In the southern wing of the MIHO Museum, “Mourning,” one of the eleven stone reliefs arranged in the funerary couch, depicts how six Sogdians and five Turks slash their faces and cut their ears while laying the deceased to rest, proving that such a funerary custom existed in Sogdian and Turkic communities, as corroborated by academic research in China (Lei 2003, 95–104). The Dunhuang Cave 158 was created during Tibetan rule from 756 to 781 and later repaired during the Western Xia. In the “Mourning Princes from Various Kingdoms,” a prince at the bottom right corner of the mural is piercing his chest with a sword. His sword has a *bazi* guard with straight quillons

Fig. 5.7 A *kara-tachi* sword with gilded silver fittings and inlay (Collection of the Shōsō-in Repository)



and a ridged middle section (See Fig. 5.8). On the left side of the mural, a prince with his back to the fresco and his head wrapped in a turban also wears a sword by his waist. Although the hilt is somewhat obscure, we may clearly discern it has a *bazi* guard. Unlike the previous sword design, this one has straight quillons with a completely flat middle section, while its scabbard is bound with metal along the edges. The Mogao Cave 061 is a cave of a dedicatory nature (*gongde ku*) built by Cao Yuanzhong and his wife. Cao was a military commissioner (*jiedushi*) of the Return to Righteousness Army (*guiyi jun*) in the tenth century. The family temple was created in the Five Dynasties period, while modifications were made on the murals during the Song dynasty. In the paintings on the eastern wall of the main chamber, warriors hold long swords that have *bazi* guards with relatively straight quillons (See Figs. 5.9 and 5.10).



Fig. 5.8 The painting “Mourning Princes from Various Kingdoms” (Mogao Grottoes Cave No.158) (Collection of Dunhuang Academy China)

The silk paintings of the Tang dynasty in the Buddhist Scripture Cave (*cangjing dong*), now in the British Museum and Musée Guimet, contain a large number of drawings of the Eleven-headed Guanyin (*shiyimian guanyin*) and Heavenly Kings (*tianwang xiang*). The Eleven-headed Guanyin in the British Museum dates to the period between 701 and 850, while the date of the Heavenly Kings in the Musée Guimet is unclear. However, judging from its composition, it should not be later than the Five Dynasties period. In the groups of Dunhuang paintings in the Musée Guimet

主室东壁



Fig. 5.9 The sword style used by the Return to Righteousness Army in Dunhuang 1 (Mogao Grottoes Cave No. 061) (Collection of Dunhuang Academy China)

(E01162), Saraswati holds a long sword with a slightly curved crescent guard and a ring attached to the pommel (See Fig. 5.13). The swords held by Guanyin and the Heavenly Kings in Dunhuang’s silk drawings also have *bazi* guards with straight quillons (See Figs. 5.11 and 5.12).

By this time, the two Tang guard forms had reached a mature development. Diamond-shaped guards with Turkic and Sogdian characteristics began to emerge in the Wu Zhou period and gradually disappeared in the late Tang. Based on known



Fig. 5.10 The sword style used by the Return to Righteousness Army in Dunhuang 2 (Mogao Grottoes Cave No. 061) (Collection of Dunhuang Academy China)

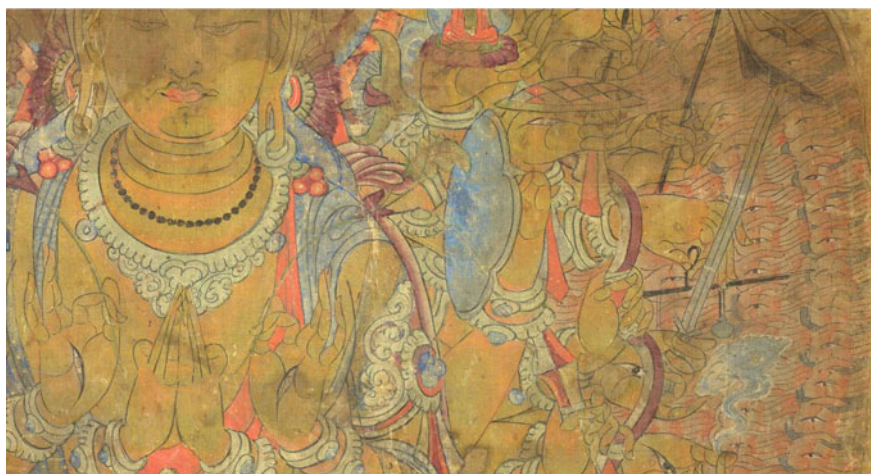


Fig. 5.11 *Bazi* guard from the painting of the Eleven-headed Guanyin (Collection of the British Museum) © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved



Fig. 5.12 *Bazi* guard from a late Tang painting of the Heavenly King



Fig. 5.13 Note the Crescent guard of the long sword held by Saraswati on a Dunhuang silk drawing (Collection of the Musée Guimet)

specimens, this exotic guard design is mainly associated with *dao* (mainly single-edged swords) rather than *jian* (mainly double-edged swords). This style of guard did not develop in the Central Plains region and disappeared after the fall of the Tang empire.

The *bazi* guard design that started to appear in Dunhuang murals and silk paintings rather suddenly from the mid-Tang seems to have been a new design from those

already in use in the Central Plains. It became dominant in the late Tang, as evinced by its frequency in the Dunhuang paintings. This new sword style usually has a ring-hilt construction. The straight-quillon *bazi* guard design in the Dunhuang frescoes and silk paintings is consistent with a specimen in my personal collection (See Fig. 5.14a, b). The blade is approximately 4 cm wide beneath the hilt, tapering quite sharply to 2.5 cm before the triangular tip, which contrasts markedly with later Chinese swords, which tend to taper more gradually. Song swords generally have broader and thicker blades with a less obvious taper. This sword has straight quillons with a slightly enlarged upper portion toward the hilt, with a ridge on the outward-facing side of the guard, while the inside is flat. The grip is similar to a Han sword and is of a fine and standardized craftsmanship. This sword is an archetypal example of the new *bazi* guard design that appeared in murals and silk paintings in the late Tang.

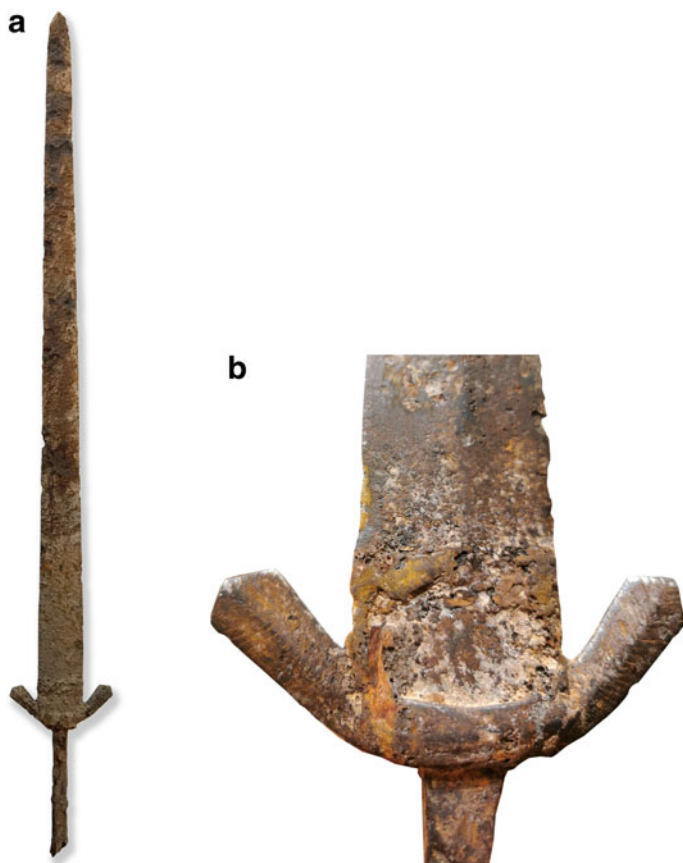


Fig. 5.14 Tang dynasty sword excavated in Mianyang, Sichuan Province

2 Development of Sword Guards from the Five Dynasties to the Song

The *bazi* guard did not disappear with the demise of the Tang dynasty. Instead, it spread widely across the Central Plains. As the Central Plains entered the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms periods new forms of *bazi* guards appeared, whose quillons gradually assumed a more rounded shape until they formed a continuous curve to resemble a crescent moon, although in some designs the guard retains a ridge in the middle. In Shaanxi Province, the Mausoleum of Li Maozhen (the King of Qin during the Tang dynasty) in Baoji county, fifteen groups of thirty-four stone statues are arrayed along the path toward the mausoleum (*shendao*). The warriors among the stone carvings hold long swords with a ringed *ruyi* hilt design, while the guards are in the crescent moon shape (See Fig. 5.15). Li Maozhen’s Mausoleum was built in 920. Li was elevated to the position of military commissioner (*jiedushi*) of the Fengxiang Longyou region for his role in guarding the Emperor Xizong of Tang. After the end of Tang dynasty, Li refused to submit to the Later Liang and continued to adopt the Emperor Ai of Tang’s regnal name *Tianyou*, and was enfeoffed as the King of Qin by the Later Tang. The warriors standing next to the gate of the Qinling Mausoleum of Li Bian, the founding emperor of the Southern Tang, also hold swords with identical crescent guards that also have a sharp convex middle like the ones in the King of Qin’s Mausoleum (See Fig. 5.16). The long sword clenched by the Azure Dragon Warrior (*Qinglong wushi*) at the entrance of a Five Dynasties mausoleum also has a crescent guard, though it did not have a sharp convex in the middle (see Fig. 5.17).

Stone statues and paintings from the Northern Song dynasty give us more clues on the form of Song sword guards. The stone figures of the Yongyu Mausoleum of the Emperor Shenzong of Song hold long swords with *ruyi* pattern ring hilts, which are decorated with floral carvings beneath the ring pommel. A rope passes through the ring and is tied to the figure’s left hand. The sword guard has a slightly curved edge and a ridge in the middle (See Fig. 5.18). The Northern Song painting “Procession of Immortals Paying Homage to the Primordial” by Wu Zongyuan depicts eighty-seven immortals. Next to or above each deity, a rectangular title box indicates his or her name and identity. In this painting, one can clearly see that “The Mighty King of Swords” (*Weijian Shenwang*) carries a sword with a crescent guard and *ruyi* pattern ring hilt. “The Evil Breaker” (*Poxie Lishi*) on the left also holds a long sword with a *ruyi* pattern ring hilt. The sword guards of the two deities do not have a ridge (See Fig. 5.19) (Deng 2013, 96). This type of guard continues to be seen in Southern Song paintings. In “The Four Generals of Restoration” (*Zhongxing sijiang*), it is apparent that the attendants of Han Shizhong and Yue Fei wear swords with *ruyi* hilt design and their sword guards are of the *bazi* or crescent type (Zhu 2006, 3–9). The sheath chamber has a metal binding edge and is decorated with sheet metal from the throat to the lower ring. On the two sides of the sheet metal, the *ruyi* pattern was engraved from the lower ring to the tip. The middle section of the scabbard is decorated with sheet metal on which wavy patterns are engraved. The chape is a tubular-shaped



Fig. 5.15 Tomb relief in the Mausoleum of the King of Qin, Li Maozhen. Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (Developed by Eric Suen; derived from “Gong Jian: Evolution of the ‘Crescent Guard’ in Chinese Swords” www.sohu.com)

metal. Double rings are attached for wearing the sword on the waist (See Figs. 5.20 and 5.21). In the Cleveland Museum of Art, the “Ink Treasure of Wu Daozi” (*Daozi mobao*) album, originally untitled, is a sketchbook of ink drawings about the Daoist mural themes on paper. Although the album was created by the “Painter Sage” Wu Daozi during the Tang, it might have been dated and reproduced in the Song dynasty. Published in the early twentieth century, this album’s content can be divided into three parts: “Homage to the Highest Power (*Zhushen chaoye tu*),” “Painting of Scenes of the Hells (*Diyu bianxiang tu*),” and “Searching the Mountains for Demons (*Soushan tu*).” In the painting “Searching the Mountains for Demons,” the god Erlang (*erlang shen*) and his subordinate generals (*pijiang*) hold long swords with *bazi* guards and crescent guards, respectively (See Fig. 5.22).

Fig. 5.16 Stone relief in the Qinling Mausoleum of the first Southern Tang emperor Li Bian. Five Dynasties period (Developed by Eric Suen; derived from “Gong Jian: Evolution of the ‘Crescent Guard’ in Chinese Swords” www.sohu.com)



These paintings and stone reliefs indicate the widespread nature of *bazi* and crescent guards in the Five Dynasties and the Northern and Southern Song dynasties. They further suggest that the Song army made extensive use of such sword guards, which may be found in the collections of Gong Jian (the author), Tie Chui, and Lan Ding. My own sword came from Nanjing (See Fig. 5.23). A typical sword of this period has a broad and thick blade, which fits the description, “thick ridged short blade, quite convenient for military use”, in the *Complete Essentials for the Military Classics (Wujing zongyao)* (Zeng et al. 2017, 212). Its guard is of the typical crescent type except it does not have a ridge in the middle. The grip and the guard are detached. The Northern Song sword guard in Mr. Tie Chui’s collection came from Jiangxi Province. The guard is bronze while the hilt and the crescent guard are made in one piece, with swirl patterns under the cross-guard which is inscribed with the



Fig. 5.17 Detail on a stone relief in Wang Chuzhi's tomb showing a sword held by a warrior (Developed by Eric Suen; derived from "Gong Jian: Evolution of the 'Crescent Guard' in Chinese Swords" www.sohu.com)

words, “*Xuanhe yisi*” (the seventh year in the Emperor Huizong’s reign in the Song dynasty, 1125) (See Fig. 5.24). This is the only known Northern Song sword guard that carries such an inscription and supports the claim that “swords are decorated with silver, chalcopyrite, and copper”, as recorded in the *Complete Essentials for the Military Classics* (Tuo Tuo/Toqto’a et al. 2013, 2522). Mr. Lan Ding’s specimen is from Hangzhou. Engraved with gold spiral patterns, the sword guard has a narrow crescent shape, with fine quillons, and is of exceptional quality (See Fig. 5.25). In the same period, Western Xia swords also use *bazi* guards. Swords from Western Xia commanded a good reputation and were much valued in the Song, being collected by the imperial court, while the *History of Song* (*Song shi*) records that, on one occasion, “the emperor Qinzong took off the Xia sword he was wearing and gave it to Wan Lun as a gift (Tuo Tuo/Toqto’a et al. 2005, 8069).” Among all the Western Xia swords that have been excavated, the one from the Western Xia royal tomb, which has a round, crescent guard, is the most representative. Yet, crescent guard is not the only form of Western Xia sword guard, as shown by the colorful warrior painting at the tomb entrance of the M2 Tomb of the Western Xia in the Western suburbs forest farm of Wuwei (*Gansu Wuwei Xijiao linchang Xixiamu*), discovered in 1977 in Gansu Province. In this painting, the warrior carries a sword with a classic *bazi* guard (See Fig. 5.26).

All the iconographic and material evidence from murals, stone reliefs, artifacts, etcetera, show that during the Song period the crescent guard mainly appears south of



Fig. 5.18 Tomb stone statue in the Yongyu Mausoleum of the Emperor Shenzong of the Song dynasty (Developed by Eric Suen; derived from “Gong Jian: Evolution of the ‘Crescent Guard’ in Chinese Swords” www.sohu.com)

the Yellow River, with Hebei being the northernmost location of any such archaeological discovery. Since the northwestern regions were primarily controlled by Western Xia, this suggests that the distribution of crescent guards is concentrated in areas effectively controlled by Northern Song, Southern Song, and Western Xia. It also tells us that in the Central Plains the *bazi* guard of the Tang dynasty continued to evolve and that during Northern and Southern Song the straight-quillon *bazi* guard and crescent guard existed side by side, until the later Southern Song period when a new type of peach-shaped guard became dominant and replaced the crescent guard.



Fig. 5.19 Crescent moon guard held by the Mighty King of Swords in the painting “Procession of Immortals Paying Homage to the Primordial” (*Chaoyuan xianzhang tu*) by Wu Zongyuan during the Northern Song dynasty

However, this guard type did not have an impact on weaponry in Liao and Jin, which in general carried the nomadic style of North Asia.

Crescent guards were not only preserved in the Central Plains but also in Tibetan areas, as shown in the two Tibetan swords below (See Figs. 5.27 and 5.28), whose pommels have kept the *guishou* design of the Tang and Liao periods, while their guards are of the crescent form. This type of hilt design could be explained in two possible ways: direct inheritance from the late Tang sword design, or it could have been introduced into this area in the Yuan period.

Fig. 5.20 Portrait of Han Shizhong’s attendant, from “The Four Generals of Restoration” (*Zhongxing sijiang tu*) by Liu Songnian, Southern Song dynasty (Collection of the National Museum of China)



3 Guard Development in the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties

The rise of the Mongols brought about the Mongol-Jin War which lasted twenty years. In 1234, the Mongols formed an alliance with the Song and invaded Cai Province (*Caizhou*). Jin was defeated and its dynasty came to an end. In 1260, Kublai Khan became the Great Khan. Eight years later, the Mongol empire began its invasion of the Song in 1268. In 1271, Kublai Khan founded the Yuan dynasty. In 1279, the Yuan army finally crushed Chinese resistance and ended the Song dynasty. As the Mongols continued their push to the south they adopted the crescent guard of the Central Plains. Figure 5.29 shows a new form of crescent guard that emerged during the Song-Yuan transition (See Fig. 5.29). The once pronounced central ridge now gives way to motifs of mythical animals. This example provides important material evidence for the transformation from the crescent guard to a new design that carries zoomorphic motifs. Continuation of Song crescent guard designs during the Yuan can, however, be observed in water and land paintings (*shuilu hua*) in Shanxi region,

Fig. 5.21 Detail showing the sword carried by Liu Guangshi's attendant, from "The Four Generals of Restoration" (*Zhongxing sijiang tu*) by Liu Songnian, Southern Song dynasty (Collection of the National Museum of China)



including the representation of a Yuan sword with crescent guard in a mural in the Yongle Palace (or the Palace of Eternal Jollity) in Ruicheng, Shanxi Province (See Fig. 5.30). The long sword held by Virūlhaka (King of the South and Growth) in the Cloud Platform of Juyong Pass (*Juyong guan*) in Beijing also shows an evolved type of crescent guard (See Fig. 5.31). In addition, a number of extant Yuan swords have a relatively simple crescent guard, which is a simplified design of the original type.

Crescent guard slowly lost its mainstream position after the Yuan dynasty as it gave way to three derived types. The first type is characterized by a mythical beast in the center of the guard. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, the mythical beast became increasingly elaborate and detailed, as it now assumed a dragon's head and a jackal's body, symbolizing a warrior deity skilled at combat. Later, this motif was appropriated by civilians and eventually became the origin of zoomorphic-shaped guards on Longquan swords (*longquan jian*). The second type was the result of crescent guard's evolution with the addition of wing quillons under the influence of dragon veneration, i.e., the appearance of the dragon motif, which was the most common decorative motif on sword guards during the Ming and Qing periods. This type can be



Fig. 5.22 A section of the painting “Ink Treasure of Wu Daozi” (*Daozi mobao*) (Collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art)

seen in swords or scabbards used by both the imperial court and civilians, and eventually spread to Central Asia, where it exerted an influence on sword guard design (Peng 2015, 79). During the Ming-Qing transition, Nurhaci was given a sword by the Ming court when he received his title as “the General of Dragon and Tiger” (*Longhu jiangjun*), which is now in the Shenyang Imperial Palace Museum. The pommel of this sword is covered with persimmon calyx pattern and carries the inscription, “The Heavenly Official confers its blessing” (*tianguan cifu*). The two “wings” of its guard (which are the quillons) bear a dragon head on each end, tilted toward the blade (See

Fig. 5.23 Song dynasty sword (Collection of the author)



Fig. 5.32). The third type shows a widening in the middle where the ridge is replaced with *ruyi* pattern. This kind of sword guard abounds in the water and landscape paintings in the Yuan-Ming periods (See Fig. 5.33), and is known as the “big turkey tail” guard (*da yunzhi jiange*) in the Ming dynasty. It, too, can be regarded as a type that is derived from the *bazi* or crescent guard. In the Qing dynasty, zoomorphic guards became mainstream. During this period, the direction of the two quillons of the guards also changed. A close examination reveals that the direction of the two wings was either in the upward or downward position (See Figs. 5.34 and 5.35), an interesting extension of the old *bazi* and crescent guard designs.

4 Influence on Neighboring States and Cultures

China has always been an important cultural center in Asia before the eighteenth century. It had a profound influence on neighboring countries, not only in terms of cultural development but also in the military domain. In the Mongol Yuan dynasty, Chinese sword guard types spread to Central Asia. For example, the Met has a jade sword guard of the Timurid dynasty from the fourteenth to fifteenth century

Fig. 5.24 Song dynasty sword inscribed with the characters “*Xuanhe yisi*” (Collection of Tie Chui)



(02.18.765) (See Fig. 5.36). Its overall shape takes the form of a crescent, while its quillons are carved into two Mongol-style dragon motifs. As the Timurid dynasty was ruled by Turkified Mongols, its cultural DNA carried strong Mongolian features. This type of guard was probably brought to Central Asia during the Mongol conquest of the west or at a time when the Ilkhanate was still a satellite khanate of the Yuan dynasty. In fact, we can also find traces of the crescent guard on Japanese swords. For example, a seventeenth-century sword dedicated to the Yasaka Shrine (*Yasaka jinja*); its pommel with gold plating is a continuation of the Tang *guishou* design, while its guard is a transformation of the crescent guard. Another example is Korea’s Sanyin sword, which has a lily-shaped guard, which in fact is also derived from the crescent guard. Last but not least, Vietnamese sword guards also faithfully preserve the style of Qing’s Longquan sword (See Fig. 5.37).

Fig. 5.25 Southern Song sword (Collection of Lan Ding)



5 Conclusion

Since the straight-quillon *bazi* guard first appeared in the mid-Tang period, it gradually evolved into the crescent guard, which became the most prevalent sword guard type in the Five Dynasties and Northern Song, used for all double and single-edged swords. However, this style started to decline in the Southern Song until it eventually became exclusive for *jian* mounts. In the Yuan dynasty, this type of guard still maintained the Song style, until a new form of design with a mythical beast dominating the middle section began to emerge in the late Yuan and early Ming, which later evolved into zoomorphic guards. This latter type continued to evolve throughout the Ming, while variations in the quillons gradually developed. During the Yuan and Ming, this type of guard spread to neighboring areas, including Central Asia, Japan, and Vietnam. Zoomorphic guards became the mainstream design in Chinese swords in the Qing dynasty. Along with the end of the cold weapon era, crescent sword guards had completely lost their evolutionary *raison d'être*.

Although the inheritance and development of the five-thousand-year-old Chinese civilization have endured many ordeals, the secret codes of its civilization are hidden in extant ancient manuscripts, murals, statues, and objects, like so many scattered

Fig. 5.26 Wood panel painting showing a Western Xia warrior wearing a sword (Yang 2000)



pearls. Discovering these codes has always been a core mission in examining Chinese civilization which, despite the passage of millennia, has left deep imprints on the axis of time. Through a painstaking analysis of murals, statues, and ancient swords, the author has attempted to string the pearls together, to present a clearer picture on the evolution of the crescent guard, and to remind ourselves that the glorious civilization of the ancient Tang has never vanished, only passed on in other forms.

Fig. 5.27 A Tibetan sword of the twelfth–thirteenth century 1 (Collection of the author)



Fig. 5.28 A Tibetan sword of the twelfth–thirteenth centuries 2 (Collection of the author)





Fig. 5.29 *Bazi* sword guard decorated with a zoomorphic motif from the Yuan dynasty (Collection of Tie Chui)

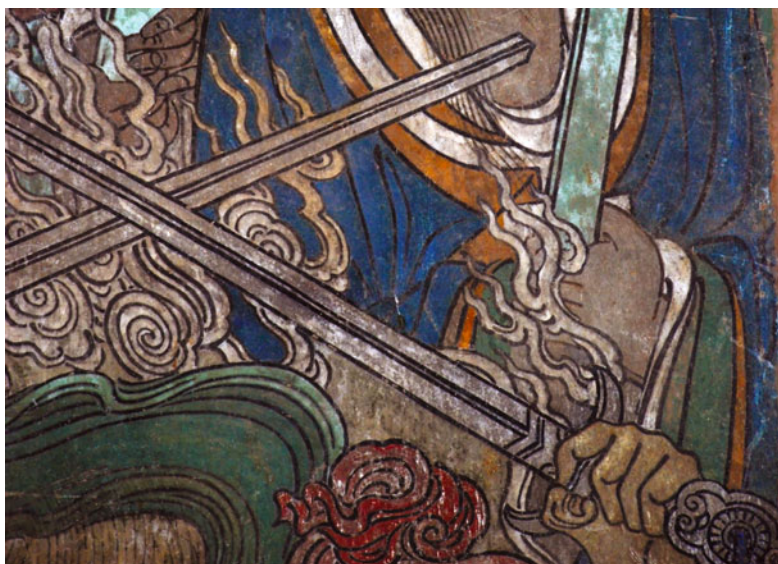


Fig. 5.30 Detail from a mural in the Yongle Palace from the Yuan dynasty



Fig. 5.31 Stone relief on the Cloud Platform of the Juyong Pass produced during the Yuan dynasty



Fig. 5.32 The sword of the General of Dragon and Tiger, which was conferred on Nurhaci (Collection of the Shenyang Imperial Palace/Mukden Palace)

Fig. 5.33 Sword guard from the early Ming dynasty (Collection of Tie Chui)



Fig. 5.34 Qing dynasty sword guard 1 (Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art)



Fig. 5.35 Qing dynasty sword guard 2 (Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art)



Fig. 5.36 The jade sword guard of the duo-dragon motif produced during the Timurid dynasty (Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art)



Fig. 5.37 The sword guard of a Vietnamese sword (Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art)



References

- Deng Q 邓乔彬. (2013) *Deng Qiaobin xueshu wenji dishijuan: Songhua yu hualun* 邓乔彬学术文集第十卷:宋画与画论 [Academic essay collection of Deng Qiaobin (volume 10): The paintings during Song dynasty and painting theory]. Anhui shifan daxue chubanshe 安徽师范大学出版社, Wuhu
- Digital Dunhuang 数字敦煌 (2010) Mogao grottoes cave 057 (Early Tang dynasty (618–712 CE)). <https://www.e-dunhuang.com/cave/10.0001/0001.0001.0057>
- Fu Y 傅芸子 (2000) *Zhengcangyuan kaogu ji: baichuan ji* 正仓院考古记:白川集 [Archaeological records of Shōsō-in repository: Collection of Shirakawa]. Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe 辽宁教育出版社, Shenyang
- Han Z 韩兆民 (1985) Ningxia Guyuan Beizhou Li Xian fufumu fajue jianbao 宁夏固原北周李贤夫妇墓发掘简报 [A brief report on the tomb excavation of Li Xian and his wife of the Northern Zhou dynasty in Guyuan, Ningxia]. *Wenwu* 文物 [Cultural Relics] 1(11):1–20
- Lei W 雷闻 (2003) Ge'er limian yu cixin poufu: Cong Dunhuang 158 ku beibi niepan bian wangzi ju'ai tu shuoqi 割耳鬓面与刺心剖腹——从敦煌158窟北壁涅槃变王子举哀图说起 [Cutting off ears and noses and stabbing the chest and disemboweling: Discussion on the painting “Nirvana and the Mourning Princes from Various Kingdoms” on the north wall of the Mogao Grottoes Cave No.158]. *Zhongguo dianji yu wenhua* 中国典籍与文化 [Chinese Classics Cult] 4(2003):95–104
- Peng 彭鹏 (2015) Jin'ge tiema zhong de fangcun jinghua: Zhongguo daojian zhi daoixin, jiangeshangjian 金戈铁马中的方寸精华——中国刀剑之刀鐔、剑格赏鉴 [The essence of shining spears and armored horses: The appreciation of Chinese sword guards]. *Shoucang paimai* 收藏·拍卖 [Collect Auction] 1, 9:78–85

- P Peng 彭鹏 (2018) Zhongguo daojian zhi jiange daoixin de zaoxing yanbian 中国刀剑之剑格、刀鐔的造型演变 [The evolution of the style of guards in Chinese swords]. Zhongguo minzu bolan 中国民族博览 [China National Exhibition] 1, 6:163–164
- Rong X 荣新江, Zhang Z 张志清 eds (2004) Cong Sama'ergan dao Chang'an: Suterren zai Zhongguo de wenhua yiji 从撒马尔干到长安:粟特人在中国的文化遗迹 [From Samarkand to Chang'an: The cultural relics of the Sogdians in China]. Beijing tushuguan chubanshe 北京图书馆出版社, Beijing
- Tuo Tuo/Toqto'a 脱脱 [Yuan dynasty] et al. (eds) (2005) Song shi 宋史 [History of Song], fascicle 25. Jilin renmin chubanshe 吉林人民出版社, Changchun
- Tuo Tuo/Toqto'a 脱脱 [Yuan dynasty] et al. (eds) (2013) Song shi: Wang Lun liezhuan 宋史·王伦列传 [History of Song: Biography of Wang Lun], fascicle 371, book 130. Zhonghua shuju 中华书局, Beijing
- Xu Guangji 许光冀. 2012. Zhongguo chutu bishua quanji 中国出土壁画全集 [Collection of unearthed murals in China]. Kexue chubanshe 科学出版社, Beijing
- Yang F 杨福 (ed) (2000) Gansu Wuwei Xixia erhaomu mubanhua 甘肃武威西夏二号墓木板画 [The woodblock paintings unearthed at the M2 tomb of the Western Xia dynasty in Wuwei, Gansu Province]. Chongqing chubanshe 重庆出版社, Chongqing
- Zeng G 曾公亮 [Song dynasty] et al. (2017) Wujing zongyao 武经总要 [Complete essentials for the military classics], edited by Chen Jianzhong 陈建中 and Huang Mingzhen 黄明珍, vol 1, chapter 13. The Commercial Press 商务印书馆, Beijing
- Zhu M 朱敏 (ed) (2006) Zhongguo guojia bowuguan guancang wenwu yanjiu congshu: huihua juan: lishi hua 中国国家博物馆馆藏文物研究丛书:绘画卷:历史画 [Collection of research on cultural relics of the National Museum of China series: Painting scrolls: Historical paintings]. Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, Shanghai

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

