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The Excavation of a Mural Tomb of the Liao to Jin Dynasties in Xuanhua District, Zhangjiakou City, Hebei Province

Cultural Relics Administration of Xuanhua District,
Zhangjiakou City

A

damaged mural tomb was discovered in the foothills north of the ancient town of Xuanhua in the Xuanhua District, Zhangjiakou City, Hebei Province in April 2013. The

coordinates of the tomb are 40° 38'41.4" N, 115° 02'17.9" E; it is located approximately one kilometer from the group of mural tombs of the Liao Dynasty at Xiabali Village in Xuanhua District^[1] (Figure 1). Roughly 18 meters west of this tomb is another one of the same kind discovered in May 2006.^[2] Since the site is crisscrossed with gullies, resulting in severe erosion, no indication of covering soil was observed. Since the tomb was already exposed when it was first discovered, the cover stone was found displaced. The Cultural Relics Preservation Office of Xuanhua District, Zhangjiakou City immediately carried out a rescue excavation and implemented preservative relocation. Since this tomb had previously been looted, few burial artifacts were unearthed, except for the exquisite mural. The excavation is briefly described as follows.

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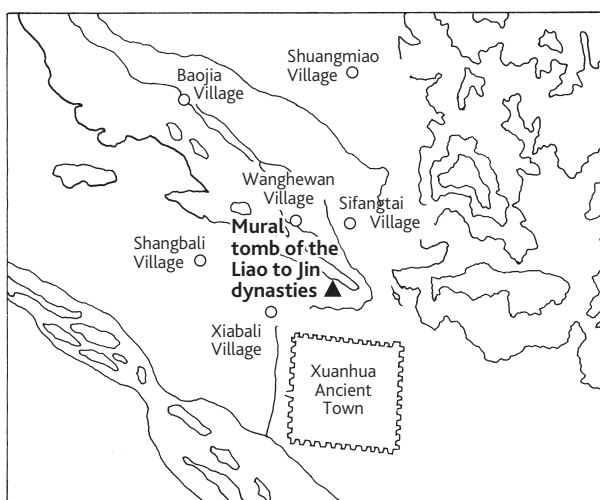


Figure 1: Location map of the tomb



BURIAL STYLE

The burial chamber of this tomb is located approximately 3 m below the ground surface. An earthen pit was first dug before it was lined with stone slabs. There is no ramp. The tomb is rectangular, and measures 1.43 m east-to-west, 0.85 m north-to-south and 1 m high; it is oriented at 165 degrees. The slabs on the four sides measure between 0.14 m and 0.17 m thick; the stone slab at the bottom of the tomb measures 1.97 m long, 1.1 m wide and 0.22 m thick. The cover stone measures 1.75 m long, 1.2 m wide and 0.2 m thick. Lime plaster 0.5 centimeters thick is applied as a base layer to the surface of the stone slabs on the four sides, and murals are painted atop the plaster (Figure 2).

MURALS

(A) East Wall

The mural on the east wall consists of seven human figures, a wooden table and some vessels, forming a scene of tea and wine preparation (Figure 3). At the center of a timber-frame building with *dougong*-bracket sets, camel-hump-shaped supports and king posts, there is a tall square crimson table with horizontal ties between the legs of the table, and three columns on each of the ties connecting them to the bottom of the table surface (Figure 4). Ten items (or sets of items) are placed on the table, including *pan*-plates, *wan*-bowls, *zhan*-cups, *bei*-cups, spoons and *zhihu*-ewers.

Seven people stand behind the table. Even though they are each performing a task, they are also cooperating with one another (Figure 23). The first from the left has a long round face, a wide forehead, thin eyebrows, round eyes, a small mustache, long sideburns, and a long and thin goatee; he wears a black folded hat with entwined flaps, a long umber round-collared robe with a black inner jacket, a crimson waistband with a yellow belt plaque and a pair of white pointy boots. He is holding a round yellow tray with an everted rim close to his chest with both

hands, and a small yellow *zhan*-cup sits inside the tray. The second person from the left has a square face, thick brows, wide eyes, slightly puffy cheeks and a short mustache. He wears a black folded hat with entwined flaps on his head, a long crimson round-collared robe and an umber inner jacket. He bends forward slightly with his hands hanging by his midriff, holding a stack of two small yellow *wan*-bowls. These two attendants belong to one group: the one holding the tray looks sideways and listens intently; the one holding the *wan*-bowls hunches over and whispers, showing deference (Figure 5).

The third person from the left has a long round face, thick brows, wide eyes, a straight nose, a small mouth, a small mustache and long sideburns. He wears a black folded hat with entwined flaps, a long black round-collared robe, a yellow inner jacket, a crimson waistband with a yellow belt plaque, and a pair of white pointy boots. He holds an outward facing chicken-drumstick-shaped elongated *ping*-vase with both hands at his chest. The fourth person from the left has a round face, wide eyes, a straight nose, a small mouth, a small mustache and long sideburns. He wears a black folded hat with entwined flaps, a long blue round-collared robe and a crimson inner jacket. It appears that he is gesturing with his hands. The fifth person from the left has a long round face, straight brows, elongated eyes, a hooked nose, thick lips, a small mustache, long sideburns, and a long and thin goatee. He wears a black folded hat with entwined flaps, a long umber round-collared robe, a black inner jacket, a crimson waistband with a yellow belt plaque, and a pair of white pointy boots. He is holding a yellow-glazed cup stand to his chest with both hands. These three attendants belong to one group. The one holding the drumstick-shaped *ping*-vase leans forward, looks downward to the side and tilts his head to listen. The one holding the cup stand appears at ease and gazes forward. The one behind him gesturing with his hands moves his body closer and sticks his head out, his eyebrows raised



Figure 2: View of the tomb

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in the middle, and turns to converse with the one holding the cup stand, while pointing his index finger at the one with the *ping*-vase (Figure 6).

The sixth person from the left has a chubby round face, thick brows, wide eyes, a slightly parted mouth, a small mustache, a long and thick goatee, and a sturdy build. He wears a black folded hat with elongated and straight wing-like flaps, a long red round-collared robe and an umber inner jacket, and he is looking backward and downward. The seventh person from the left has thick brows, elongated eyes, a small mouth and a small mustache. His face is emaciated, and he has a small build. He wears a black folded hat with entwined flaps, a long black robe, an umber inner jacket, a crimson waistband adorned with rectangular pieces of white jade, and a red sash that falls from his waistband onto his left



Figure 3: East wall mural



Figure 4: East wall mural (detail)



Figure 5: East wall mural (detail)



hip. He also wears a pair of white pointy boots. He holds a drumstick-shaped *ping*-vase to his chest with both hands; the lid of the vessel has not been removed, and there are black markings on it. These two people belong to one group. The red-robed official gazes backward, while the attendant with the *ping*-vase hunches slightly forward, in a gesture to offer wine (Figure 7).

(B) South Wall

The mural on the south wall consists of seven human figures, two animals and a red double door

(Figure 8). The mural shows a timber-frame building with *dougong*-bracket sets, camel-hump-shaped supports and king posts. On the left are three attendants who, respectively, are holding something in both hands, walking briskly, and standing at ease. This appears to be a meal delivery scene. On the right,



Figure 6: East wall mural (detail)

“the old man and the golden rooster,” “the young maiden and the jade dog,” and “the two-headed hu-

man figure” are painted to the left, to the right, and above the red double door, respectively.^[3]



Looking at the three attendants on the left, the first from the left has wide eyes, a round nose and a small mouth. A soft black cloth is wrapped around his head and knotted at the forehead. He wears a long blue cross-collared garment, a crimson inner jacket, the front and back of which are tucked in at the waist, and two

Figure 7: East wall mural (detail)



Figure 8: South wall mural

waistbands tied together that drop freely at his midriff. It appears that he is wearing white tights, showing strong and defined leg muscles, and a pair of round-toed shoes are strapped across the instep. His head turns to the left, and he is holding a round lacquer tray to his chest; his pose is that of someone moving forward while looking backward. The tray is black on the outside and red inside, and there is a pink object on it. The

second person from the left has a chubby round face, bulging eyes, short brows, big ears, a small mustache



Figure 9: South wall mural (detail)



and long sideburns. His mouth is opened slightly, and he has a young look. A soft black cloth is wrapped



and narrow white pants. He has a bulging stomach and stoops. His hands are placed on a round tray on

Figure 10: South wall mural (detail)

around his head. He wears a long black garment and a crimson inner jacket with its front tucked in at the midriff and its back flying in the air. A white sash drapes from his left hip. It appears he is wearing white tights and a pair of round-toed shoes strapped across the instep. He leans forward slightly, clutching a yellow rectangular *he*-box with both hands, and he looks nervous. The *he*-box has a trapezoidal roof-shaped top and a girdled base with *kunmen*-ogee arches. The third person from the left has a square face, flat brows, small and elongated eyes gazing downward, a small mouth, and a small mustache with long sideburns, and he looks older [than the other two attendants]. He has a soft black cloth wrapped around his head, and he wears a long crimson garment, a white inner jacket and narrow white pants. He has a bulging stomach and stoops. His hands are placed on a round tray on top of his head, and he is standing and taking a rest. The items on the tray, shaped into a small hump, are covered with a black cloth with its corners dangling from the tray (Figure 9).

A red double door with two black decorative cylinders on the *men'e*-lintel is painted in the middle of the right half of the mural. There are three rows of black door nails on every door, five in the first row,

Figure 11: South wall mural (detail)



six or seven in the second and third rows. There is a set of black door knocker rings in the middle of the door where the two sides of the door meet and close. An old man with thin brows, a high nose, prominent cheek bones, a small mustache, and a long thin goatee below the chin is painted to the left of the door. A soft black cloth is wrapped around his head and knotted at the front. He is wearing a long green round-collared robe, a crimson inner jacket, and a sash around his waist. He hunches and stoops with his legs slightly bent. He is holding a stick with a hook on top. Painted at the feet of the old man is a rooster with bulging eyes, a pointed beak, a long tail, yellow-green feathers, and an upright comb with raised feathers (Figures 10 and 11). A young maiden is painted to the right of the door. She has flat brows, gentle eyes, a rounded nose, a small mouth, large ears and a mellow face. She wears her hair in two chignons, one on each side by her ears, each decorated with a red ribbon. She wears a wide blue cross-collared robe with big sleeves and black lining, a crimson inner jacket, and a crimson skirt on the outside, with a green silk stole trailing along the floor. She clasps her hands together between bent arms, and behind her head is a yellow halo. Painted at the feet of the young maiden is a small white dog, with round eyes, a long snout,



Figure 12: South wall mural (detail)



Figure 13: South wall mural (detail)



Figure 14: South wall mural (detail)

floppy ears and a curly tail, in a prostrate position (Figures 12 and 13).

A two-headed human figure is painted on the *men'e*-lintel. The two heads are both male, one younger and one older, lying with their heads in opposite directions. Their torso is wrapped in crimson,



Figure 15: West wall mural



Figure 16: West wall mural (detail)

blue and green clothing. The younger one has a long round face, thin brows, elongated eyes, a tall nose, a small mustache and a plump face. He wears a soft black cloth around the head and a round-collared garment. The older one has a wide forehead, short brows, round eyes, a small mustache, and a pointed chin with a short goatee. He also wears a soft black cloth around the head, as well as a cross-collared garment (Figure 14).



(C) West Wall

The mural on the west wall consists of five musicians and one dancer (Figure 15). Inside a timber-



Figure 17: West wall mural (detail)



Figure 18: West wall mural (detail)

ing the *sheng*-pipe; one is playing the flute; one is playing the *bili*-pipe; one is playing the clappers; one is playing the waist drum; and there is also a girl who is dancing. These six figures form a miscellaneous performance scene with the dancer at the center (Figures 16-18).

The first figure

frame building with *dougong*-bracket sets, camel-hump-shaped supports and king posts, there stand six people, each with a task at hand – one person is play-

from the left in the back row is the person playing the *sheng*-pipe. He has a round face with winged eyes, puffed up cheeks, a small mustache and long



Figure 19: North wall mural



sideburns. He wears a black folded hat with curled flaps on his head; a long black round-collared robe; a crimson inner jacket; crimson, brown and blue underclothes visible through an opening at his hip; a crimson waistband with a yellow belt plaque; and a pair of white pointy boots. He presses his hands on the *sheng*-pipe with the mouthpiece placed in his mouth. The *sheng*-pipe is yellowish-green and the mouthpiece is curved, thin and long.

The second person from the left is the person playing the flute. He has a chubby round face with sideburns, and a rotund and strong physique. He wears a black folded hat with curled flaps, a long yellow round-collared robe, a white inner jacket and a waistband. His arms are raised to hold his flute and his lips are laid over the mouth hole so it appears that he is blowing into the flute.

The third person from the left is the one playing the *bili*-pipe. He has a square face with thin eyebrows and wide eyes, and he gazes with his eyebrows raised in the middle. He has a chubby face and a big and tall build. He wears a black folded hat with curled flaps, a long brown round-collared robe, a crimson inner jacket and a crimson waistband. His arms extend forward to hold the *bili*-pipe, while his mouth holds the reed. He purses his lips like he is blowing.

The fourth person from the left is the one playing the clappers. He has a wide forehead, a small round mouth, a pointed chin, sideburns and a full face. His head is wrapped in a soft crimson cloth, and he has neck-length hair. He wears a blue cross-collared top and a white inner jacket. His arms are raised in order to support the bottom of the clappers, which are played by beating the instrument.

The fifth person from the left is the waist drum player. He has a long round face, thin brows, wide eyes, curly sideburns, a chubby face, and a big and tall build. He wears a black folded hat with curled flaps, a long green round-collared robe, a crimson inner jacket with its front lifted and tucked in at the midriff, crimson sleeve protectors, and a pair of

white pointy boots. The waist drum is tied at the waist with two straps. The narrow waist of the drum is decorated with black belt plaques that drape to the knees. A wide crimson waist sash hangs from the midriff. His left arm is extended to the front of his chest, and his right hand is holding a small stick used to beat the drum.

In the front row there is a dancing girl with a round face, thick brows, big eyes and a plump physique. She is wearing two chignons, one on each side by her ears. She wears a green cross-collared garment paired with a crimson, long-sleeved, parallel-breasted, cropped top tied with a ribbon at the chest, and a red, striped, pleated skirt. She stoops forward, and her left hand extends upward from her chest, throwing her sleeve forward; her right hand is positioned behind her at the hem of her dress, throwing the right sleeve behind her. Her left leg kicks forward and lands on pointed toes, while her right leg kicks backward.

(D) North Wall

The mural on the north wall is a portrait of wealth made up of gold bars, jade *bi*-discs, chests and sacks, as well as a painted screen and a long table (Figures 19-21). Inside a timber-frame building with *dougong*-bracket sets, camel-hump-shaped supports and king posts, a few long solid tables are placed at the front. They are painted yellow on the tabletop and green over the body. Two jade *bi*-discs with hooked patterns are staggered one on top of the other on the table. There is a gray rag next to them that looks like a sack, and under it is a red cloth wrapper. There is a gray sack full of things behind the jade *bi*-discs that is fastened with a string. Behind the table and to the right of it are two lidded rectangular chests, one black and one red, one placed before the other. The corners and sides of the chests are wrapped with yellow metal mounts. There is a yellow metal petal-shaped ornament at the center on the lid of the red chest, on top of which a yellow rectangular letterbox is placed. Above the letterbox are gold bars and golden boards



Figure 20: North wall mural (detail)
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Figure 21: North wall mural (detail)
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inside a red cloth wrapper. The cloth wrapper has been undone and it drapes from the bottom of the letterbox. The red chest leans against a yellow sack fastened with a blue string. Behind the chests are two painted screens divided by column lines. Their subject matter is the same – both screens are painted with green landscape rocks, behind which are branches with red flower buds.

GRAVE GOODS

Since the tomb had previously been looted, only one jade ornament was unearthed from the filling dirt in the burial chamber. The ornament has an oval ring shape; it is flat on one side, and slightly bulging on the other. It looks like a belt ornament. It is pure white with a fine texture and high luster. It measures 3 cm long, 2 cm wide and 0.3 cm thick. Its hole measures



1.7 cm long and 0.5 cm wide (Figure 22). In addition to this jade piece, a small amount of cremated remains was also found in the filling dirt.

CONCLUSIONS

The pictorial elements of the murals, including portrayals of tea preparation, wine preparation, music and dance performances, old man and young maiden, rooster and dog, and two-headed human figure, have all been found in the group of mural tombs of the Liao Dynasty at Xiabali Village in Xuanhua District of Zhangjiakou City. This type of earthen pit tomb with stone slabs has also been found in the vicinity, such as Tomb M2 at the site of Nanxin Village in Haidian District of Beijing Municipality dated to the Zhenyuan reign period of the Jin Dynasty (1153–1156 CE), which is made of six stone slabs, one on each side.^[4] Based on these observations, this tomb should be dated to sometime between the late Liao and the mid-Jin dynasties.

The murals in this tomb are rich, and the pictorial elements between walls are interconnected. The old man and the young maiden, the rooster and the dog, and the two-headed human figure portrayed on the south wall also appear in Tombs M2 and M5 of Locus I of the Liao mural tombs at Xiabali Village, where the murals also appear above and on both sides of the tomb entrance. In this particular tomb, the old man and the young maiden, and the rooster and the dog, are placed on two sides of the red door, and the two-headed human figure is placed above the door, suggesting that the red door is the entrance to the tomb. Objects such as the screen paintings, the gold bars and the jade *bi*-discs painted on the north wall constitute an imaginary space of wealth inside the tomb. It is positioned directly opposite the “entrance” and is the visual focus of the tomb. Scenes of tea preparation, wine preparation and miscellaneous music and dance performances are painted on the east and west walls. Among the Liao Dynasty tomb murals in



Figure 22: Jade ornament

Xuanhua District, Zhangjiakou City, the themes of tea and wine preparation and miscellaneous music and dance performances are a consistent combination. Outside Xuanhua District, Zhangjiakou City, in places such as Zhuolu County, Hebei Province, Datong and Shuozhou cities, Shanxi Province, and Ongniot Banner, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Liao tombs with murals portraying miscellaneous music and dance performances are also found, and all of these scenes relate closely to scenes of tea preparation and meal delivery.^[5] Research has suggested that “the spatial connection between the miscellaneous music and dance performance scenes and the tea preparation scene inside the Liao tombs in Xuanhua District, Zhangjiakou City is closely related to the rituals of *saishen* [providing music and dance entertainment to deities] and *gongzhan* [making offerings of food, wine and tea] in the shrines and temples of folk beliefs. These two subjects form imaginary ritual spaces for offering entertainment and libations to the deceased in the tomb.”^[6] A scene of three attendants running eastward to deliver food is portrayed on the south wall. Scenes of tea preparation and wine preparation are commonly associated with the scene of food preparation inside the Liao tombs in Xuanhua District, Zhangjiakou City, and in this particular tomb, a



Figure 23: East wall mural (detail)

food preparation scene is portrayed in addition to scenes of tea and wine preparation. Even though they are shown on separate walls adjacent to each other, they still represent a unified artistic entity.

No epitaph was found in this tomb, but based on the scenes of tea and wine preparation and of miscellaneous music and dance performances, and on

the portrayal of wealth, as well as on the pure white color and the fine texture of the jade ornament found inside the tomb, the occupant must have possessed considerable social status and wealth.

Even though the tomb had been looted, its murals remain invaluable for the study of the social life and art history of the Liao to Jin Dynasties.

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