

四川博物館
THE
SZECHWAN MUSEUM

單刊之一

Occasional Papers No. 1.

The Discovery and Excavation
of the Royal Tomb of
Wang Chien

by

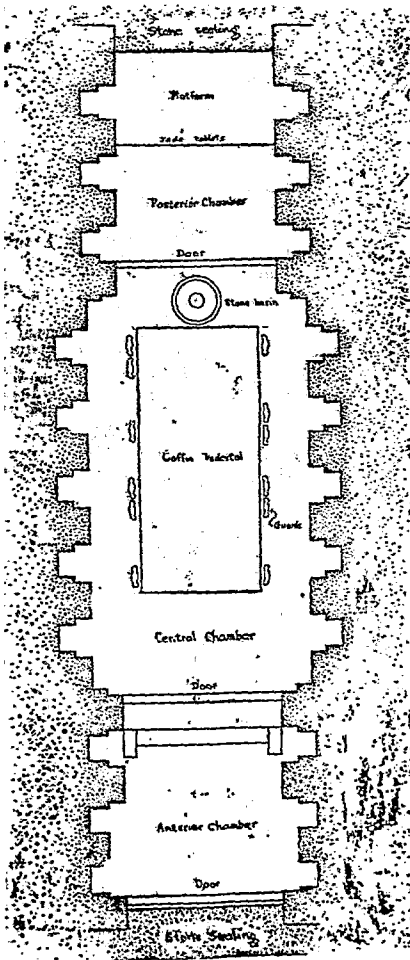
Han-yi Fêng

(Reprinted from
Quarterly Bulletin of Chinese Bibliography
N. S. Vol. 4, Nos. 1-2, p. 1-11.)

成都
中華民國三十三年
1944, Chengtu

119
K87885
1

THE MOTAL TOMB OF WANG CHEN



Sketch plan
of the
interior
of the
tomb

(Drawn by Mr.
Yang Yu-Jen
Szechwan Museum)



3 1760 0618 1

THE ROYAL TOMB OF WANG CH'EN



2. →
Statue of
the
Emperor



↑
L
The frontal of the
coffin pedestal.
The dancers and
musicians and two
of the guards carry-
ing the pedestal
can be seen. From
this picture one
can get a general
view of the tomb.



← 3.
One of the
musicians
playing
the drum.

4. →
One of the
armour-clad
guards.



The above photographs were taken by Mr. Mo Chung-chiang, Society for Research in Chinese Architecture

Discovery and Excavation
of the
Yung Ling 永陵
The Royal Tomb of Wang Chien 王建

847—918 A. D.

by

HAN-YI FENG 馮漢驥

As one travels along the Chengtu plain, he will notice hundreds of artificial mounds breaking the monotony of a featureless landscape. Some of these mounds are of tremendous size amounting to fifteen or more meters in height and hundreds of meters in circumference. Except a very few, all of them are burial tumuli ranging from the fifth or fourth centuries B. C. down to modern times. As no other monumental vestiges survive the ravages of human and natural agencies outside the tombs, their identity is as a rule entirely lost. The local people simply call them hillocks or royal tombs. Many of them are considered to be important. *feng-shui* 風水¹ to the locality and people are forbidden to move earth from them. The Yung Ling is only one of these mounds.

In historical records and local tradition the Yung Ling is called the Chin-t'ai 琴台 and supposed to be the site of the house of the celebrated poet Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju 司馬相如 (200—118 B. C.) of the Former Han dynasty, a native of Chengtu. Chin-t'ai means literally "lute-platform", i. e., a place for playing the lute, and, in an extended sense, the site of the residence of the poet. It began to be mentioned in historical records around the fifth century A. D., and became a place of great poetical interest from the Tang dynasty onwards, perhaps because of the romantic episodes in the life of the poet. But

* Published by permission of the Editorial Committee, Chin-t'ai Excavation works.

** Director, Szechwan Museum, Chengtu.

¹ literally, wind and water, i. e., geomancy

how the Yung Ling lost its identity and was mistaken for the Chin-t'ai is a question still waiting to be solved. The two places were distinct during the Southern Sung dynasty (1127—1279 A. D.) as the historical records clearly show. After the Yuan dynasty only the Chin-t'ai was mentioned in most cases, but not the Yung Ling. The reason is probably the proximity of the two places, as both are in the western suburb of Chengtu. As the Chin-t'ai was apparently a smaller mound and may be levelled to the ground and entirely lost, people gradually began to point to the much higher and bigger Yung Ling mound as the Chin-t'ai.

Before describing the discovery and excavation of the royal tomb, it would be proper to give a short biography of the emperor himself as a historical introduction. Wang Chien was a native of Hsiang-ch'eng 項城 in modern Honan province.² He was of humble ancestry and born in 847 A.D. He was tall in stature with a commanding appearance. As a young man, he became a desperado. Once a monk remonstrated with him saying: "A young man of your noble appearance, why not do something worthwhile instead of being a scourge to the land!" He was much moved by the rebuke and enlisted in the army. Owing to his gallantry and ability, he won quick promotions. When the notorious rebel Huang Chao 黃巢 sacked the T'ang capital in 880 A.D., the Emperor Hsi-tsung 僖宗 (874-888) fled to Chengtu, and Wang Chien and four others led a small army to his protection. The emperor was much pleased and made him one of the commanders of the imperial guards. When Hsi-tsung fled again from his capital in 885 A.D., Wang Chien led him through the flames of the burning suspension paths 棧道 to Hsing yuan 興元 (modern Han-chung in southern Shensi). On this account he was made the governor of Pi-chow 壁州刺史 and later the commissioner for defence of Li-chow 利州防禦使 both in northern Szechwan. At this time the great T'ang dynasty was drawing to its end and the local warlords were fighting among each other, while the T'ang emperor was powerless to do anything about it. Within a period of twenty years, Wang Chien conquered the whole of Szechwan and parts of Shensi, Kansu, and Kweichow for himself. In 903 A.D. the T'ang emperor Chao-tsung 昭宗 (889-904) made him King of Shu 蜀王. When Chu Wen 朱溫 (907-912), founder of the short Liang dynasty (907-922), murdered Chao-tsung in 904 A.D., practically ending the T'ang dynasty, Wang Chien declared himself Emperor of Shu (Szechwan) in 907 A.D.

China proper was in great turmoil during this time, but Szechwan

2. Some records state that he was a native of Wu-yang 舞陽, which is not far from 項城.

prospered and enjoyed considerable peace under Wang Chien's able administration. Many people from other parts of China fled to Szechwan as a place of refuge. Although Wang Chien had practically no education himself, he was a great patron of literature and art. He was also a great admirer of T'ang-court life and remained loyal to the T'ang régime until its very end. Most of the men he used and trusted were old officials from the T'ang court who came to him from North China. Wang Chien ruled as emperor of Szechwan for twelve years and died in 918 A.D. at the age of seventy-two. He was succeeded by his son Wang Yen 王衍, who was conquered by the Later T'ang dynasty in 925 A.D. From the date of Wang Chien's first entry into Szechwan in 887 A.D. down to 925 A.D., the kingdom which he founded lasted only thirty-seven years.

The Yung Ling is only about half a mile outside the old west gate of the present city wall of Chengtu. The mound is about fifteen meters high at present, but originally it might have been a little higher as there has been a considerable amount of erosion during the last thousand years. The diameter is about seventy-five meters and it is circumscribed with stone blocks about two meters high. It is situated between two rivulets and is orientated directly to the south. The rivulet at the front curves in toward the royal tomb to form a semicircle, which is of great geomantic significance. Originally there were stone obelisks, horses, lions, tigers and armed guards standing in front of the tomb. But none of these are in existence to-day. According to the records, there were temples dedicated to the emperor beside the royal tomb and they were still standing during the Southern Sung period. On the walls were mural paintings executed by well-known artists of the time.

The writer first made a rough reconnaissance of the site during the winter of 1937. At that time nearly one-third of the mound-earth had been removed by the road builders of Chengtu. A little examination led him to believe that it was not the Chin-t'ai at all but a large tomb. Pottery sherds of the corded type, stamp-ornamented bricks, ornamented tile fronts were found in abundance in the exposed parts of the tumulus. Even well glazed pottery of the Liu-li-ch'ang 琉璃廠 and Chung-yao 川窑 types, reputed wares of the T'ang and Sung periods, were also found among them. It was quite evident that the date of the site could not be earlier than the T'ang dynasty.

During the fall of 1939, the Paochi-Tientsui Railway Construction Office began to build a large air-raid dugout under the mound. At the west end of this dugout the workers struck a brick wall. After being informed about its discovery, the writer went immediately to examine it. The bricks were of very

THE ROYAL TOMB OF WANG CHIEN

large size without any decoration or inscription. Although the exposed part of the wall was only two square meters, it further convinced the writer that it was a tomb. The writer explained the importance of the discovery to the engineer in charge of the work, and asked him to fill up the pit again until we are ready to make further excavations.

After the establishment of the Szechwan Museum in the spring of 1941 by the Szechwan Provincial Government in cooperation with the National Szechwan University, preliminary preparations were made for the excavation of the site. During this interval, prominent archaeologists were invited to examine the site, such as Dr. Li Chi 李濟, Chief of the Archaeological Division of the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, and Dr. G. D. Wu 吳金鼎 of the same institution. After preliminary explorations, full excavation work was started on September 15, 1942, first with the help of Dr. T. K. Cheng 鄭德坤 and Mr. M. C. Lin 林名均 of the West China Union University Museum. Later with the assistance accorded by the Academia Sinica and the National Central Museum, excavation work was expanded during the spring of 1943. Dr. G. D. Wu was invited to serve as field director. The whole excavation work was finished by the end of September, 1943.

The royal tomb is roughly rectangular in shape and divided into three chambers with the anterior and posterior chambers slightly smaller than the central one. The whole structure is formed by a series of thirteen double arches of red sandstone, and covered with stone slabs between. The anterior chamber is 5.4m. by 4.4m. and 5.8m. high at the key-stone. At the entrance is a huge red lacquered wooden door, lavishly ornamented with gilded bronze work. Outside the door was sealed with red sandstone blocks weighing hundreds of pounds each. Outside the stone sealing is another sealing of large burned bricks. The whole sealing is about three meters in thickness.

About three meters behind the front door in the anterior chamber are three steps leading to the main floor. Then there is another door partitioning the anterior and central chambers. The door is somewhat similar to the front door. There were perhaps ornamental fittings in the anterior chamber, presumably wood carvings and draperies, as the traces of these fittings are clearly visible on the two side walls. There is now nothing left in this chamber except a few gilded bronze and iron rings presumably handles of a large box. Other things were either removed by the tomb robbers or decayed.

The central chamber is the burial chamber. It is 11 meters by 6 meters and 6.35 meters at the highest point of the arches. The pedestal for the coffin is built approximately in the middle of the floor but slightly to the rear. It is

7.45 meters by 3.35 meters and .84 meters in height and carried by twelve gold armour-clad guards. Only the trunks of the guards are above the floor as if they are carrying the whole weight. The guards are about two-thirds life-size. They are arranged six on the east side and six on the west but not in symmetrical groups.

The lower edge of the pedestal walls are carved in lotus flowers and the upper edge in dragon designs. The edges protrude out slightly from the walls. The central row of the pedestal walls are panels of female musicians sculptured in deep relief except the rear wall which is carved in large lotus flowers. There are ten musicians on the east and ten on the west walls, two musicians and two dancers on the front wall, making altogether twenty-four panels.

The top of the pedestal is surfaced with fine white marble but in the centre it is intersticed with green marble to make an agreeable design. The coffin is placed immediately on the top. What the coffin was exactly like, it is now impossible to tell as it was made of wood and has entirely decayed. What now remains are only the large gilded bronze rings and corner plates attached to the different layers of the coffin and sometimes the lacquer surface. From all the available evidence it seems that the coffin rested on another wooden platform of four successive series of balustrades, one higher than the other. The outer coffin, which is called *kuo* 槨 was in the form of a pavilion, with doors on the two long ends. These two small doors are elaborately decorated with gilded bronze plates and bosses, just as on the two large chamber doors. Inside this outer coffin is placed the coffin itself, which is approximately 2.82 meters by .84 meter.

Immediately behind the pedestal is a large grey sandstone basin 1.13 meters in diameter and .44 meter deep placed on a brick pedestal of irregular shape. It is plain and of rough workmanship. Inside the basin is placed a red sandstone disc .36 meter in diameter and .17 meter thick. On this stone disc is placed a large brown glazed pottery basin. In it are placed two green-glazed porcelaneous lamps.

Behind the stone basin is the third door partitioning the central and posterior chambers. Its construction and ornamentation are similar to the other two doors. The posterior chamber is 5.3 meters by 4.4 meters and 5.5 meters high. The rear wall of the chamber is formed by the rear sealing of stone blocks which are more than three meters thick. The rear part of the chamber rose to a platform extending to the whole width of the chamber, 4.4 meters by 2.6 meters and .78 meter high. The frontal of the platform is divided into three panels. The central panel shows a circling dragon, the other two

panels are carved with a lion in each. The upper edge of the frontal shows two dragons playing with a pearl. All are in relief.

At the outer edge of the platform are placed the two sets of Jade Tablets 玉册, dedicated to the emperor. They are placed end to end and extending the whole width of the platform. Each set consists of fifty-three tablets 簡. The first and last tablets of each set are 330mm long, 105mm wide and 15mm thick, with polychrome painting of a warrior clad in gold armour. These are really a few of the earliest Chinese polychrome paintings extant. The other tablets are of uniform size, 330mm long, 32mm wide and 20mm thick. Each tablet is perforated horizontally at each end, and silver threads put through them connect the whole set. On the first set of fifty-three tablets is inscribed the imperial eulogical essay 哀册; on the second set is inscribed the essay offering the posthumous title 謚册. The inscribed characters are gilded and of very fine calligraphy. Each set is placed in a long black lacquered wooden box. The covers of the boxes are elaborately ornamented with phoenix and lion designs of silver and gold plates.

At the rear of the platform and right in the center is placed the sitting statue of the emperor. It is about two-thirds life-size and sculptured in fine red sandstone. The emperor is seated on a stool of semilunar shape with legs hanging down; i. e., just like us moderns. This is quite unconventional of the time as chairs and stools had not come into common use during the Tang period. He should have been seated on the floor as the other musicians. This shows that the adoption of the use of chairs in China may first have come as an aristocratic custom. There may have been a wooden shrine with curtains over the statue, but they were all decayed except for a few brass and iron nails left. Originally the statue was painted, perhaps with dragon designs on the robes, but only a few traces of the colors (white, red, green) are left.

Before the statue is placed a double box holding the great jade seal bearing the posthumous title 高祖神武聖文孝德明惠皇帝謚寶; the jade disc 璧, and other things emblematic of the emperor. The outer box is 67cm square and 20cm high. The inner box is 60cm square and 15cm high. These measurements can only be taken as approximate as the boxes have been disturbed, and the wooden parts entirely decayed. They are mostly taken from the edge and corner plate fittings, silver decorations, and from lacquer traces on the mud. There may be warpings and distortions.

The boxes are varnished with black lacquer and lavishly decorated with gilded silver engravings. Take, for example, the cover of the outer box. On the center is a gilded silver plate with phoenixes finely engraved on it. On the two sides are two warriors each holding an axe. They are also engraved on

gilded silver plate. Other parts of the box are also fully studded with decorations.

The seal, the jade disc and other things are put in the inner box. The seal is 119 x 118mm and 35mm thick. The handle is of animal design and 73mm high. The seal belt 經 has been rotted away with only the jade tips and silver buckles remaining. The jade disc is 95mm in diameter and engraved in dragon and phoenix designs. Other things are still under study. As the box and its contents had been originally disturbed, their exact relative positions cannot be exactly ascertained.

In all three chambers the ceiling and arches were painted sky blue and the walls were painted crimson. In the central chamber and directly above the coffin was hung a great canopy. The frames of the canopy were made of wood and at certain parts reinforced with iron and with an iron cross top. The whole thing was covered with fine fabric, lacquered, painted and gilded. It can be seen from the impressions made by certain fallen parts preserved in the mud. The hanging chain and hook are still in position on the ceiling.

When the tomb was first opened, four-fifths of it was filled with mud which flowed in annually from the crevices in the front during the summer rains. These crevices are vestiges of the holes opened by the early robbers and not properly sealed later. The strata in the mud are clearly visible. Each stratum represents a big rain but not an annum.

The foregoing is a brief description of the inside of the tomb as it was first uncovered. It is evident that the construction of the tomb as a whole is rather simple and the grave furnitures scanty. The poverty of grave furniture may be explained by robbery. All those considered valuable at that time, such as gold, silver, pearls, precious stones, porcelains, and even bronzes must have been removed from the tomb. However, a few valuables are left over, including among them a large jade belt (consisting of seven large jade plaques finely carved in dragon designs), a large silver pot weighing about a pound and finely engraved, two small embossed silver boxes probably for holding cosmetics, a small silver pig, embossed and finely engraved, a large silver scratcher, a silver bowl, etc. All these must have been taken from the coffin and left by the robbers.

When was the tomb robbed? We can only conjecture. Most probably not more than ten years after it was first buried, i. e., between 925 to 933 A. D. The founder of the succeeding local kingdom, Meng Chih-hsiang, 孟知祥 of Later Shu 後蜀, issued an order to repair the tomb in 933 A. D. which showed that the tomb had already been pilfered by that time.

There is another perplexing problem which cannot be solved at present,

i. e., no skeletal remains have been found in the coffin or in other parts of the tomb. So certain people suspect that this tomb was only a dummy. But from the other finds (such as the jade tablets, seals, disc, etc.) it cannot simply be a dummy and must be a real tomb. Moreover, more than thirty pounds of mercury were found in the coffin which tallies exactly with the ancient traditions. The skeleton might have been entirely decayed, as it is our experience that most Han and T'ang and even Ming tombs are without any skeletal remains in them in the Chengtu plain. As it had been robbed not long after it had been buried, the body might have been removed by the robbers.

Before we close, it would be appropriate to discuss a few points about the significance of the excavation. There are hundreds of imperial tombs in China but none of them has been scientifically opened (except the Yin tombs in Anyang excavated by the Academia Sinica, which really belong to a different category). This excavation is really the first of its kind ever undertaken in Chinese archaeology. So it is beset with many difficulties as well as with possibilities.

It is well known that all emperors were buried with a very elaborate ritual but what was inside the tomb is a profound secret which had never been revealed. This was especially true of the T'ang emperors.* Now this excavation at last reveals some of the secrets of the burial customs of the T'ang emperors. There are several reasons for us to take this position. First, since Wang Chien declared himself emperor, his successor and subjects must bury him as an emperor when he died. Secondly, the men whom Wang Chien used were mostly officials of the old T'ang regime who came to Szechwan as refugees. These people were familiar with T'ang court ritualism. So in Wang Chien's burial, the use of T'ang ritualism was to be expected. Thirdly, what have been recovered tally perfectly well with the meagre notices occasionally noted down in the historical records, e. g., the jade tablets and the seal. From these facts, we think it is reasonable to infer that the tomb was built probably according to the T'ang imperial tombs. Although it was robbed and disturbed, only the movable things, especially the valuable objects, were affected. As to its historical value and its structure as a whole, its value is still very great. The most important finds are the jade tablets, the jade seal and the

3. The T'ang emperors' burial ceremonies were forbidden to be discussed at the time, so very little was recorded about them. 唐書·禮志：李義府許敬宗以為凶事非臣子所宜言，遂去其禮制一篇，由是天子凶禮闕焉。至國有大故，則皆臨時采摭附比以從事，事已則諱而不傳，故後世無考焉。

sculptures. We know the *tsie* 册 and the *pao* 寶⁴ are inseparable paraphernalia of all imperial burial ceremonies since Han times, but no one had ever seen them except those very fortunate few who were actually present at these ceremonies. So what they look like and how they are made, no one actually knows. The present finds serve as the only specimens scientifically recovered.

Historically and artistically, the sculptures are of greater value. We know that practically ninety-nine percent of all the sculptures found in Szechwan are Buddhist. The earliest ones date from fifth century A. D. These sculptures show essentially the Gandhara influence and as circumscribed by their subject-matter, they exhibit very little artistic creative quality. The sculptures in the tomb are different. They are really the only non-religious sculptures ever discovered in Szechwan and have even no peer in other parts of China. The female musicians and dancers are executed in the most lively and realistic way, i. e., the artist can bring his imagination and ability into full play. The same can also be said of the armoured guards. Even the statue of the emperor, although a portraiture of a realistic, austere and formal kind, exhibits the artist's superb ability in execution. It tallies very well with the description in the historical records, with heavy brows, deep set eyes, straight nose, high malars and thin lips.

Many of the other finds are still under study. The results cannot be stated exactly at present. For example, the structure of the tomb itself is a monumental piece of architecture and it is now under expert study at the Society for Research in Chinese Architecture.

means the seal bearing the posthumous title.

