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CHINESE EDITION Part of a phoenix crown from the reign of Emperor Wanli of the Ming Dynasty, decorated with bird feathers, pearls and gemstones, and featuring golden dragon designs, housed in the Palace Museum in Beijing

COVER
IMAGES

ENGLISH EDITION Part of a peach tree bonsai with an enamel pot decorated with traditional Chinese art from the Qing Dynasty, housed in the Palace Museum in Beijing

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a wooden-handled archaeological trowel, digging through a mound of brown soil. The trowel's metal blade is partially visible, cutting into the earth. The background is a soft-focus view of the soil and the hand.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH REVEALS THE ANCIENT CAPITAL'S EVOLUTION

Translated by Wang Wei

Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi

Photos by Pu Feng, Zhang Xin, Wang Xibao, Wang Yuanzheng

Today, countless people remain intrigued by the history of ancient Beijing. Questions abound: “How did Beijing evolve into a grand city throughout antiquity?” “What were the earliest Beijing inhabitants like?” “Precisely where was the earliest location of Beijing?” and “How did Beijing ascend as a dynastic capital over 800 years ago?”

Archaeological research has been instrumental in addressing these inquiries. In 1921, Swedish archaeologist Johan Gunnar Andersson (1874–1960) unearthed an ancient human tooth at Zhoukoudian in Beijing, marking a pivotal moment in the city’s modern archaeology.

Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasised that each archaeological discovery extends the country’s historical timeline, enhancing credibility, enriching connotations and enlivening historical scenes. Understanding history deeply relies on archaeological research. The hundred-year history of archaeological exploration in Beijing bears immense significance, offering a robust scientific foundation for investigating human origins, Beijing’s civilisation and urban development, and the evolution of the capital across different eras.



A Puzzle-



Before the recent archaeological revelations of the Jin Dynasty's (1115–1234) Zhongdu (Central Capital) ruins emerged, the origins of Beijing as a national capital remained shrouded in mystery. However, on September 28, 2023, the National Cultural Heritage Administration unveiled the latest advancements from the China Archaeology Initiative's four major projects. Notably, the newest archaeological find—the remnants of grand imperial structures from the Jin Dynasty's Central Capital—fundamentally updated the public's perception of Beijing's role as a capital city.

◀ A bronze seated dragon unearthed from the ruins of the Central Capital's Da'an Hall

In 1153, during the reign of Wanyan Liang, the Jin Dynasty's fourth emperor (reign: 1149–1161), the decision to shift the capital from Shangjing (present-day Acheng, Harbin) to Yanjing (present-day Beijing) was made. Yanjing was designated as the "Central Capital" by the emperor, marking the initiation of Beijing's role as a capital. Nearly 870 years later, the public's fascination with uncovering the true essence of the Central Capital intensifies, fostering a yearning for this enigmatic city of the past. Today, archaeologists meticulously examine every discovered fragment in the ruins, striving to reconstruct its original appearance, drawing insights from descriptions detailed in historical records.

The Jin Dynasty, established by Jurchen nobles hailing from beyond the Great Wall, faced harsh living conditions. For them, Bianliang (now Kaifeng), the capital of the Northern Song Dynasty (AD 960–1127), held an allure akin to paradise, invoking boundless longing. As early as 1127, before the fall of the Northern Song Dynasty, Jin Dynasty artists were dispatched to Bianliang, meticulously depicting the city's layout, sparing no detail in their renderings of each brick and tile. Wanyan Liang, an admirer of Han culture, meticulously studied Bianliang's layout from his library numerous times before deciding to establish the Central Capital.

Under Wanyan Liang's decree, numerous artisans and craftspeople were

rallied for the construction of the Central Capital. This new city, fashioned after Bianliang, swiftly emerged. Historical records describe it as a well-organised and expansive square, encased by three layers of city walls. The city boasted a symmetrical layout along its central axis, encompassing city gates and an imperial palace at its heart. Streets, alleys and neighbourhoods were precisely ordered, while imperial gardens were crafted around water elements. This grand and majestic design positioned the Central Capital as unmatched in northern China during its time.

However, the Jin Dynasty's governance was not as enduring as the newly erected city. Following the move to the



Resolving Game

Central Capital, the dynasty grappled with persistent internal conflicts and external threats. By 1215, the Mongol cavalry's invasion engulfed the city, ending Beijing's first tenure as a capital. Sadly, after merely 62 years, the city was consumed by the flames of warfare and destroyed.

The design of the Central Capital incorporated elements from city layouts of the Liao (AD 916–1125) and Song (AD 960–1279) dynasties, profoundly influencing subsequent Yuan (1271–1368) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties. This made it an illustrious gem in the urban development annals of ancient China. Each relic discovered within the Central Capital holds immense historical significance, prompting its inclusion as a key project under the China Archaeology Initiative in 2021. Remarkable achievements predated this, including the identification of its specific location in 1958, excavations of Da'an Hall and Water Gate ruins in 1990, the uncovering of a military camp in 2010 and Yuzao Pond in 2012, as well as the excavation of Wanquan Temple ruins in 2015 and 2020.

More than 800 years ago, the Central Capital was laid out in a square shape, encompassing a perimeter of about 18,690 metres. Each side of the city walls featured three gates, each named with profound and elegant connotations such as Xuanyao ("to brilliantly shine") and Jingfeng ("auspicious wind"), revealing the Jurchen's admiration for Song culture. Its design drew inspiration from the layout of the Northern Song Dynasty's capital, positioning the imperial palace at its heart and arranging other structures symmetrically along the central axis.

Today, when discussing ancient Beijing, the public typically recalls the Yuan, Ming and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. However, ongoing discoveries of urban details from the Central Capital are shedding new light on the city's origins as a capital. The city's inception is merely one among many puzzles waiting to be solved through archaeological research. Ever since the accidental discovery of the first fossilised ancient human tooth in Beijing's Zhoukoudian, this grand puzzle-solving journey has been continuously unfolding.



▲ A museum focusing on the origin of the Central Capital



Ruins of the Central Capital's Water Gate





An Accidental Discovery

Many significant archaeological discoveries have been stumbled upon by chance. Archaeologist Qi Dongfang expressed in his work *Journey into the Sea of Death*: “I don’t know why, but history has lost you; in an ancient dream, I saw you; I came to know you by accident.”

The city’s modern archaeological journey spanning a century hinges on a fortuitous discovery—an accidental encounter between Andersson and a tooth fossil of “Peking Man” (*Homo erectus pekinensis*) at Zhoukoudian in 1921. Andersson’s diary from that year encapsulates his anticipation: “I have a prediction that the remains of human ancestors lie there, and the only purpose of mine now is to find them.” This “there” re-

ferred to Zhoukoudian, situated in today’s Beijing’s Fangshan District, about 50 kilometres southwest of Central Beijing. Fangshan’s geography, characterised by the rolling Taihang Mountains, vast North China Plain and winding rivers, provided a warm, inviting climate and a picturesque natural setting. Around 700,000 years ago, Peking Man demonstrated their intelligence by choosing to settle in this area.

To uncover the ancestral remains, Andersson began his archaeological exploration at Dragon Bone Hill in Zhoukoudian, marking the inception of excavations in the area. Reflecting on history plays a pivotal role in progress, and the genesis of Beijing’s archaeological quest—the birthplace of Peking Man—remains etched in memory. In 1927, Canadian palaeoanthropologist Davidson Black (1884–1934) bestowed the name *Sinanthropus pekinensis* upon an excavated ancient human lower left molar, later commonly recognised as Peking Man. A total of 27 sites, once inhabited by Peking Man and bearing traces of their existence, have been identified, unearthed and catalogued. Among these, Locality 1, famously known as Ape Man Cave, earned its designation after palaeontologist Pei Wenzhong (1904–1982) unearthed the initial Peking Man skullcap there in 1929.

Over a century ago, the notion of humans evolving from apes began gaining widespread recognition. In the 1920s, the understanding of human evolution was limited, and the associated theories were viewed as somewhat speculative until the discovery of the Peking Man skullcap at Zhoukoudian. This find served as a pivotal clue in unravelling the mystery surrounding the origins of modern humans.

The significance of the discovery of Peking Man extends far beyond advancing the exploration of human evolution or heralding the dawn of Chinese palaeoanthropology. It stands as a cornerstone of the ancient city’s magnificent development, casting its brilliance across China and beyond. The site was inscribed on the *UNESCO World Heritage List* in December 1987.



A bust of Peking Man exhibited at the Zhoukoudian Site Museum



The First Exhibition Hall at the Zhoukoudian Site Museum



The Models of "Peking Man" skulls displayed at the Zhoukoudian Site Museum

Before one sets foot at the Peking Man Site in Zhoukoudian, questions about their hunting methods, the crafting of their earliest jewellery, their customs for farewelling loved ones and even how they first kindled fire to illuminate the dawn of human civilisation may arise. The displayed stone tools, animal fossils, ornaments, tombs and remnants of ancient fires vividly showcase the diverse and vibrant lives of Peking Man. Exploring this prehistoric civilisation at Zhoukoudian unveils the rich tapestry of ancient life, hinting that beneath the soil of this ancient capital, countless more treasures and revelations await discovery.

Travelling Back Along the Timeline

The recent archaeological findings have shed light on the origins of Beijing and unveiled its extensive and diverse history.

For over 2,000 years before becoming the Central Capital of the Jin Dynasty, Beijing held prominence as one of the major northern cities. Through tireless efforts over several decades, archaeologists worked diligently at the ruins of the Western Zhou Dynasty's Yan Capital in Liulihe, aiming to unearth the early story behind Beijing's origin. In 2021, the discovery of a cultural relic added a captivating chapter to this enthralling narrative.

After the careful cleaning of the relic, known as *you*, a bronze vessel used for holding alcohol, distinct inscriptions

became visible on its lid's inner wall and the main body's bottom. The excitement among experts soared upon deciphering these markings, roughly indicating "Duke Shao built the city wall and later held a banquet at his Palace." Thirty-five years prior, at the same site, the discovery of *Ke he* and *Ke lei*, two bronze vessels adorned with inscriptions (reading: "asking Marquis Ke to govern Yan, his father Duke Shao's enfeoffment"), became revered national treasures in the city's history. These inscriptions discovered within a span of 35 years unequivocally affirm a significant event chronicled in the *Notes to Records of the Grand Historian* by Sima Zhen (AD 679–732). They validate the establishment of the vassal state Yan by

King Wu (reign: 1046–1043 BC) of the Zhou Dynasty (11th century–256 BC) in what is modern-day Beijing, and the subsequent grant of the State of Yan to Duke Shao. The vessel inscriptions now provide undeniable physical evidence of Beijing's origins, dating back over 3,000 years. Thus, the ruins of the Western Zhou Dynasty's Yan Capital in Liulihe, the earliest known ancient city in present-day Beijing, stand as the veritable source of the city's origins.

After decades of excavation, the origins of Beijing's foundation have become increasingly apparent. The sprawling ruins reveal not just a palace area and living quarters but also encompass workshops and burial sites.



Inscriptions are visible on the inner wall of a bronzeware lid, unearthed from the ruins of the Western Zhou Dynasty's Yan Capital in Beijing's Liulihe.



1929

The unearthing of the first Peking Man skullcap at Zhoukoudian propelled Chinese archaeology onto the global stage.

1977

The excavation at Liujiahe, Pinggu unearthed iron weapons from the Shang Dynasty (16th century–11th century BC), marking early instances of iron usage in China.

1986

Beijing saw the unearthing of national treasures—bronze vessels (*Ke* and *Ke lei*)—from the Yan Capital Site of the Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century–771 BC) in Liulihe.

1998

The excavation of the tomb of Yelü Zhu (1221–1285), a prime minister of the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), unveiled one of Beijing's best-preserved Yuan Dynasty tombs.

2001

The discovery of the Donghulin Ruins in Mentougou provided evidence of China's earliest cultivation of millet and proso millet.

2013

The tomb of Liu Ji (AD 757–810), a Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907) military governor, surfaced in Fangshan, enriching the tapestry of Beijing's history.

2016

The revealing of the Luxian County's seat from the Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) in the Beijing Municipal Administrative Centre shed light on the size and layout of northern China's county seats during that time.

1974

The year revealed the tomb of Liu Jian, a prince of the Western Han Dynasty (220 BC–AD 8) in Fengtai, showcasing China's *huangchangticou* style in ancient tombs.

1984

Sculptures dating back 6,000–7,500 years were discovered at the Shangzhai Ruins in Pinggu.

1990

The decade of discoveries continued with the rediscovery of the ruins of the Jin Dynasty's Central Capital's Imperial City, revealing Da'an Hall and the monumental Water Gate.

2000

A significant Han Dynasty tomb on Laoshan Hill in Shijingshan was discovered, and was among the city's major archaeological findings between 1980 and 2000.

2006

Further enriching the historical narrative, a trial excavation of Jin Dynasty imperial tombs in Fangshan occurred.

2014

The discovery of extensive Liao Dynasty iron smelting clusters in Dazhuangke, Yanqing, marked China's inaugural find of this kind from that era.

2020–2022

The Central Capital Ruins in You'anmen yielded large architectural foundations, representing the first uncovering of a palace-style complex within its archaeological exploration.





Archaeology is the First Step

Archaeological research marks just the initial phase in uncovering the history of Beijing. As more expansive settlements, city foundations, majestic palaces and diverse dynasty tombs are unearthed, archaeologists' sentiments have shifted from elation to a burgeoning concern for these ancient remnants. These substantial sites, owing to their size, historical significance and far-reaching impact, demand not only public exposure but also meticulous care and consideration. The focus now shifts to preserving, utilising and presenting these relics to rejuvenate their relevance in modern life, posing a significant challenge for archaeologists.

Following extensive deliberation on this matter, a comprehensive solution has emerged: the integration of prominent ruins into urban landscapes by establishing archaeological site parks, museums, verdant spaces, hiking trails and curated landscapes. The National Cultural Heritage Administration introduced the *Management Measures for National Archaeological Site Parks (Trial Edition)* in 2009, stipulating the creation of parks to safeguard these sites while intertwining their preservation and contemporary utilisation. This initiative heralded the inception of national archaeological site parks. Subsequently, in 2010, the announcement and launch of the initial national archaeological site parks and their associated projects by the National Cultural Heritage Administration piqued public interest in the development of these crucial spaces.

In 2022, the ruins of the Western Zhou Yan Capital in Liulihe joined the ranks of developing National Archaeological Site Parks, as declared by the National Cultural Heritage Administration in its fourth listing. Following the Yuanmingyuan National Archaeological Site Park and the Zhoukoudian National Archaeological Site Park, this inclusion signifies another significant archaeological site from Beijing being recognised among the esteemed national-level archaeological site parks.

After being listed, the development of Liulihe National Archaeological Site Park has surged forward. The planning phase is now in motion. Encompassing around 3.37 square kilometres, this upcoming park intends to feature four distinct areas: the ruins of the Western Zhou Dynasty Yan Capital, cemetery zones, agricultural and forestry landscapes, and comprehensive service areas. Additionally, three museums are slated for construction within the park: the Archaeological Exhibition and Experience Hall, Beijing Archaeological Museum and Liulihe Ruins Museum. Accompanying these will be the establishment of the Beijing International Archaeological Workstation. The region dedicated to the Yan Capital's ruins will showcase remnants of city walls, moats, palace structures, sacrificial areas and cemeteries, while offering a cultural tourism complex blending relic protection, cultural industry development, leisure tourism, sports activities and urban image exhibitions. Guo Jingning, director of the Beijing Archaeological Research Institute, emphasised that regardless of its construction, such a park is designed to connect the public with history, a vital aspect for both understanding Beijing's past and shaping its future. Safeguarding heritage is fundamental to a city's future success, and Beijing's archaeological endeavours are pivotal in elevating the city to become a cultural nucleus for the nation.

Archaeological excavations are the cardinal markers within Beijing's historical framework, akin to axes in a coordinate system. They serve as pivotal reference points, illuminating the intricate tapestry of the city's evolution as an ancient capital.

Over 2,000 years ago, the historian Sima Qian (145–86 BC) documented in his *Records of the Grand Historian* that Yan was enfeoffed to Duke Shao, marking a crucial milestone in the city of Beijing's origin. Since 1921, Beijing has seen remarkable discoveries, not only astounding the world but also stretching the timeline of its civilisation back to 700,000 years ago.

Coordinate System

Along this long history are significant milestones in human civilisation. Roughly 500,000 years ago, the use of fire by ancient inhabitants in Zhoukoudian, part of today's Beijing, marked an early global instance of this crucial development. The Donghulin people's cultivation of millet around 10,000 years ago established Beijing as one of China's earliest farming regions, shaping its role as a cradle of civilisation. Notably, the late Neolithic period around 5,000 years ago witnessed cultural advancements in sites like Zhenjiangying. Peking Man, originating from Zhoukoudian, later left from their caves and settled down on plains.

Around 3,000 years ago, the establishment of the State of Yan's capital in Liulihe signalled the onset of Beijing's urban civilisation. Over 2,000 years ago, Beijing emerged as a significant administrative centre during the Qin and Han dynasties, solidifying its importance in northern China. A millennium ago, it was part of Youzhou, a crucial military stronghold along the Tang Dynasty's northern frontier. Finally, around 800 years ago, the Jin Dynasty's relocation of its capital to Beijing, followed by the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties establishing their capitals in the city, cemented its pivotal role as the nation's capital.

▼ A diorama depicts Upper Cave Man hunting.







EXPLORING THE HISTORY OF BEIJING'S STAPLE FOODS

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos by Li Muyi, Zhou Mingxing

In 2017, during an archaeological excavation at the former Luxian County seat's 3rd Zone T1254, within the Beijing Municipal Administration Centre in Tongzhou District, an unexpected discovery disrupted the serene ambiance of the site. Uncovered was a carbonised layer, measuring roughly four square metres, suggesting the previous storage of cereals in this area. However, the significance of this seemingly ordinary layer concealed an astonishing secret that none could have foreseen at the time. The remnants retrieved from this layer have been conclusively identified as carbonised seeds of rice, millet, proso millet, wheat and soybean.

In the context of Beijing, evidence strongly indicates that the cultivation of these five cereals has roots stretching back over 2,000 years, offering a glimpse into the city's profound cultural heritage and extensive timeline. The ongoing investigations into Beijing's origins persist in illuminating its history. Meticulously examining and analysing these seeds, buried beneath layers of time, holds the promise of unravelling fresh discoveries and insights, enriching our contemporary understanding of this ancient city.

Legendary Origin of Millet



For many residents of Beijing, their day commences with a steaming bowl of golden millet congee. It is a simple start that possibly echoes the roots of the city's civilisation, tracing back to a humble grain of millet.

In contemporary China, millet is commonly known as *xiaomi*, translated as "minor rice." However, ancient Chinese literature provided distinct names for this grain: *su* for millet and *shu* for proso millet, representing two different species. The folklore surrounding millet's discovery credits the Yan Emperor, a legendary figure in Chinese history, with its introduction. As the population under the Yan Emperor's leadership expanded, relying solely on hunting and gathering became increasingly challenging to sustain daily food needs. To address this pressing issue, the chief embarked on an exhaustive quest for new food sources. During this arduous journey, a pivotal moment arose when a red bird dropped a solitary grain of cereal from its beak. Recognising its significance, the chief planted the grain in a field. According to legend, those who consumed this miraculous grain experienced extraordinary longevity, a tale vividly documented in Wang Jia's (died in AD 390) *Record of Heretofore Lost Works*. The chief shared the knowledge of cultivating this newfound grain, marking the inception of millet as a staple crop in ancient China. Despite the allure of this captivating legend, the focus of public attention has largely shifted towards archaeological findings related to millet. These discoveries hold a profound significance in unravelling the historical and agricultural aspects of ancient Chinese civilisation. The blend of folklore and tangible historical evidence enriches our understanding of millet's pivotal role in ancient Chinese culture and sustenance practices.

Arriving at the north bank of the Qingshui River in



Donghulin Village, Zhaitang Town, Mentougou District, one can proceed westwards along a small canal next to National Highway 109, ascending the northern slope to an archaeological site. In 1966, Hao Shougang, a student from Peking University, made a significant discovery in this village. While villagers tended their fields, they uncovered three human skeletons, along with snail shell necklaces, bone bracelets and stone tools. Upon hearing this, experts from the Chinese Academy of Science's Institute of Vertebrate Palaeontology and Palaeoanthropology swiftly arrived to conduct further excavations. Among the discoveries, archaeologists were particularly intrigued by a small cache of carbonised plant seeds. Only seeds charred by fire can be preserved, while others decay and integrate into the soil. These charred plant seeds mark a new insight into the origins of Beijing's ancient civilisation.

The carbonised seeds found at Donghulin have been positively identified as intact grains of millet and proso millet. These discoveries suggest that around 11,000 to 9,000 years ago, during the early Neolithic Age, the ancient Chinese ancestors residing in what is now Beijing were among the earliest cultivators of these two cereal species in northern China. The Donghulin people's cultivation of millet and proso millet over 10,000 years ago likely stemmed from their resilience in drought conditions, in addition to their delightful taste and sticky texture when cooked. Throughout history, dishes prepared with millet and proso millet have remained popular in Beijing. A prime example is the traditional Beijing snack, *miancha*, crafted by cooking millet into a paste and dressing it with sesame sauce and salt. To make authentic *miancha*, the paste should retain a thickness without scorching, allowing it to be relished with the sesame sauce. In the past, some locals

believed the proper way to savour a bowl of *miancha* involved swirling it in a circular motion while enjoying the aroma of sesame sauce and millet. However, today, such practices are no longer considered appropriate by table etiquette standards.

The extensive historical evolution has rendered it challenging to pinpoint precisely when *xiaomi* superseded *su* and *shu* as the nickname for these cereals among Beijing residents. This term encapsulates the fond sentiment that the city's inhabitants hold for these grains. Ancient Chinese beliefs held that food was the sustenance of life. It was *su* and *shu* that laid the material groundwork for the State of Yan (1044–222 BC) and the subsequent dynasties established in Beijing. These cereals played a pivotal role in sustaining the city's development. As time progressed, more charred remains of these cereals have been unearthed across Beijing, tracing the city's extensive history spanning thousands of years, from sites like Donghulin to the Yan Capital of the Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century–771 BC) in Liulihe and the Luxian County seat in Tongzhou.

In traditional Beijing cuisine, cereals have held a prominent position for ages. However, millet and proso millet no longer retain the same significance in contemporary society. Whether it is a simple bowl of millet congee, a slice of yellow millet cold cake or millet-stewed sea cucumber, these cereals fail to capture the modern palate as they did for Chinese ancestors millennia ago. Unlike the diverse range of popular wheat-based dishes, millet requires a better nutritional pairing with other ingredients to appeal to contemporary tastes. Often labelled as a coarse cereal, its culinary standing has waned over time, eclipsed by the increasing popularity of more delectable wheat-based fare.



R

Present-day Beijingers exhibit a diverse array of cooking methods for wheat, employing techniques such as steaming, frying and boiling. One enduring culinary tradition among locals involves the consumption of noodles, with a particularly popular variant featuring noodles served with fried soybean paste. In the selection of soybean paste for this dish, Beijing natives often turn to Liubiju, a time-honoured food producer in the capital city. To enhance the flavour,

streaky pork is typically incorporated during the frying process. The choice of accompanying vegetables varies with the season, ranging from radishes and cabbage to green beans and cucumbers. However, the true essence of this dish lies in the meticulous preparation of the noodle dough. Beijing natives take pride in crafting noodles that are characterised by their whiteness, thinness, smoothness and chewiness. This culinary expertise not only reflects a cultural heritage passed

ising

down through generations but also showcases the locals' imagination and skill in mastering the authentic art of this particular dish. While China boasts a rich array of wheat-based dishes that hold a significant place in its culinary repertoire, the methods of processing and creating



Wheat being harvested in Beijing's Daxing

W

wheat-based foods emerged relatively late compared to other grains.

As early as 4,000 BC, wheat made its way to China from West Asia, finding significant cultivation in northern regions during the Shang (16th century–11th century BC) and Zhou (11th century–256 BC) dynasties. However, despite over a millennium passing, wheat's prominence in northern China could not rival that of millet and proso millet. In Beijing's Tongzhou District, the Beijing Institute of Archaeology houses a laboratory storing carbonised plant remains excavated from key sites across the city, neatly organised

heat-based

Food

in boxes along the laboratory walls. In 2019, archaeologists analysed carbonised plant remnants from the Liulihe ruins, discovering millet, proso millet, wheat, soybeans and barley. Their findings revealed that, despite wheat's presence in Beijing for millennia, the inhabitants of the Yan Capital during the Western Zhou Dynasty primarily depended on millet and proso millet as their primary staples. Wheat, barley, soybean and other cereals played secondary roles in local diets. Climate limitations for farming and a limited understanding of wheat preparation among the ancients contributed to this pattern. Archaeologists note that the preference for millet and proso millet was

not solely due to agricultural constraints but also stemmed from a lack of culinary expertise in wheat processing.

The dietary habits of ancient Chinese typically involved boiling or steaming whole grains of rice and millet. However, preparing whole grains of wheat through cooking or steaming posed challenges for digestion and resulted in an unappealing taste. Consequently, wheat was considered an inferior grain for an extended period. Historian Yan Shigu (AD 581–645) from the Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907) noted that only the impoverished and lower-class individuals consumed steamed wheat and soybean congee, while the upper class exclusively



A wheat field in Beijing

indulged in steamed rice or millet. Yan's observation sparks curiosity among modern individuals deeply engaged in Chinese food culture, prompting an exploration of when wheat began gaining popularity in ancient China.

Archaeologists recently unearthed additional grinding stones from the late Eastern Han Dynasty (AD 25–220) ruins, shedding light on the widespread use of these tools for processing grains and wheat into flour. This discovery underscores the extensive adoption of cooked wheaten food preparation methods in ancient Chinese civilisations, a testament to the ingenuity and hard work of their ancestors. Flour, abundant in mucedin, a

substance enhancing dough's elasticity and flavour, was preferred over millet. During that period, the collective term for cooked wheaten food was "*bing*." It encompassed various preparations like *shaobing* (sesame seed cakes) baked over fire, *chuibing* or *mantou* (steamed buns) crafted in bamboo steamers and *tang-bing* (noodles) boiled in water.

After prolonged research and experimentation, ancient Chinese eventually mastered the crucial techniques for cooking wheat, propelling the rapid expansion of its cultivation across northern China. In 2020, charred wheat grains were unearthed at an archaeological site in Daxing District's Jiugong. Subsequent analysis uncovered

that during the Jin (1115–1234) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties, wheat production surpassed that of millet and proso millet, establishing itself as a primary staple crop in today's Beijing. This surge in wheat cultivation led to the widespread presence of cooked wheaten food on the dining tables of Beijing's residents, at least during the Jin and Yuan dynasties.

Subsequently, an assortment of innovative cooking methods for wheat emerged, evolving continuously in Beijing to the present day. Over time, Beijingers have fostered a profound relationship with cooked wheaten food in this ancient city, their culinary enthusiasm advancing in harmony with the changing times.



Distinctive Imperial Jingxi Rice

As mastery over wheat processing and cooking techniques evolved in Beijing, rice cultivation also found its place in the region. Rice, originating in China's Yangtze River basin, boasts a cultivation history spanning over 10,000 years. During the Eastern Han Dynasty, Zhang Kan, the grandfather of the renowned scientist Zhang Heng (AD 78–139), planted the first rice seed in AD 42. During the Eastern Han Dynasty, regions situated at the base of Hunu Hill, encompassing today's Changping, Huairou and Miyun districts in Beijing, fell under the governance of the Yuyang Prefecture. Zhang Kan, previously in charge of Shu Prefecture, was appointed to Yuyang, as chronicled in the *Book of Later Han*. Zhang's commitment and care for the local populace contributed significantly to the thriving progress of the prefecture during his tenure. Seeking to invigorate economic development, Emperor Guangwu (reign: AD 25–57) of the Eastern Han Dynasty issued a decree, transferring Zhang to Yuyang to address the agricultural challenges prevailing in the region.

Jingxi

Upon assuming his position in Yuyang, Zhang Kan promptly recognised the distressing low living standards among the local populace, urging him to delve into the root causes. His frequent forays into the countryside revealed a stark reality: despite the region's abundant water resources, the locals predominantly focused on dryland farming, primarily cultivating millet and proso millet. However, these efforts consistently yielded disappointingly low harvests. Drawing on his extensive experience from leading Shu Prefecture, Zhang meticulously analysed the local geography. His astute observations led him to a compelling conclusion: the extensive land at the base of Hunu Hill boasted ideal conditions for cultivating rice, owing to its ample water sources and fertile soil.

In AD 42, Zhang played a pivotal role in reclaiming more than 8,000 hectares of farmland at the base of Hunu Hill. He introduced rice and its cultivation techniques, typically found in warmer southern regions, to the relatively colder climate of Beijing. By encouraging locals to adopt rice cultivation, their livelihoods flourished, effectively resolving food supply issues. Zhang's contributions were so valued that the locals composed a song in his honour, expressing gratitude for the thriving mulberry trees, wheat and rice cultivated under his leadership.

To ensure successful irrigation for the vast rice fields, Zhang led the implementation of water conservancy projects. These initiatives involved constructing channels to redirect water and connecting the Baihe River with the western section of the Wenyu River. These measures led to continuous harvests, fostering prosperity, stability and contentment among the people of Yuyang, who lived and worked in peace and happiness.

In 2017, excavations at the ruins of the Luxian County seat in Beijing's Tongzhou District unveiled a fascinating discovery: carbonised rice seeds. These seeds, confirmed through archaeological tests, date back over 2,000 years to the Eastern Han Dynasty. The revelation sparked immense excitement among the archaeologists involved. These carbonised rice seeds provided concrete evidence of Zhang's historical accounts introducing rice to Beijing, validating narratives previously confined to written records.

Rice has continuously held significant importance as a staple cereal in Beijing's history ever since its introduction by Zhang. In ancient China, both commoners and emperors esteemed and appreciated rice cultivation in the capital city. The saying "eating rice and wearing silk" epitomised life's utmost contentment for the common folk. Even Emperor Qianlong (reign: 1736–1796) of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) expressed his affection for rice in a poem, highlighting its indispensable presence in every meal, never skipping a day without it.

Unfortunately, when the fragrant rice flowers bloomed in Beijing, Zhang fell ill from overwork and passed away at 48 in his Yuyang residence. Over 1,600 years later, Emperor Kangxi (reign: 1661–1722) of the Qing Dynasty composed a poem, honouring Zhang's immense contributions to rice cultivation. Emperor Kangxi, appreciating rice cultivation in Beijing, actively par-



ticipated in the growing of "Imperial Rice," which evolved into today's Jingxi (Western Beijing) Rice. Acknowledging its distinct variety and cultural significance, this rice earned the name "Qing Dynasty Jingxi Rice as a Tribute" and was listed on the *National Geographical Indication Product Protection List* in 2015.

Under the reigns of Emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng (reign: 1722–1735) and Qianlong, Jingxi Rice underwent meticulous cultivation, eventually earning its status as Beijing's premier rice variety. Known for its smooth, translucent grains and a delightful, slightly sticky texture with a moderate firmness, this rice produces a thin, light green layer when made into congee. To cater to the dietary preferences of the imperial family, extensive rice paddies were developed in the vicinity of Yuquan Hill. In 2020, archaeological excavations commenced at the Simple Life in Quietude ruins, located northwest of Yuanmingyuan (Old Summer Palace). Dating back to 1727, this site was one of the Forty Scenes in Yuanmingyuan, featuring a hall shaped like the Chinese character "田" (*tian*), symbolising agriculture. Historical records reveal vast rice cultivation around this area, where the Qing emperors conducted an annual farming ceremony in the nearby paddies. In 2022, scientists undertook the first archaeological study focusing on the cultivation of imperial Jingxi Rice near these ruins. Their investigations promise intriguing insights into the distinctive attributes of this esteemed rice variety. The findings of this research are highly anticipated, holding the potential to uncover unique facets of the cultivation techniques and characteristics of the imperial Jingxi Rice.

Since Zhang first sowed the initial rice seed, the blossoming of fragrant rice flowers has become an enchanting spectacle in this ancient city. By October, the rice ears undergo a stunning transformation, donning a magnificent golden hue. Standing amidst these mesmerising golden rice paddies offers a captivating experience, allowing one to truly immerse themselves in Beijing's rich agricultural heritage. The hidden realm of seeds buried beneath the ancient capital preserves countless secrets, undoubtedly concealing surprises awaiting discovery in future explorations.

HONOURING THE DECEASED AS THE LIVING

Translated by Wang Wei

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Today's Beijing residents have a multitude of avenues to delve into their ancestors' lives. Archaeological excavations offer a passage through the remnants of ancient tombs, revealing the echoes of time and inviting exploration of the very ground our ancestors once trod.

In the Palaeolithic Age, the burial practices of Upper Cave Man from Zhoukoudian, Beijing marked the symbolic origins of traditional Chinese funeral customs. In the depths of a cave, the ancients conveyed grief using red hematite powders, symbolising peaceful rest for the departed. Urn-styled coffins, each with a small hole at its base, reflected reverence for the souls of the deceased—a practice integral to early human civilisation, signifying soul worship.

In the tomb of Liu Jian, a Western Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 24) prince and his wife in Beijing's Fengtai District,

the *huangchangticou* practice epitomised an ancient funeral rite—"Honouring the dead as the living." This practice reflected deep reverence for the deceased and their spiritual well-being.

The murals and reliefs found within the tomb of Liu Ji (AD 757–810), a Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907) military governor of Youzhou, and his wife, vividly depict the dynasty's opulence and the vibrant lives of the nobility. These artworks also offer a glimpse into the spiritual beliefs and leisure pursuits of the deceased.

Near Tianshou Mountain in Beijing's Changping District lies the Ming Tombs, a magnificent and enduring imperial complex. Its meticulous design beautifully melds nature with traditional Chinese culture, offering a solemn farewell from the ancients to those departed.



Stone statues at the Ming Tombs



Resting in Peace under Hematite Powders

The earliest burial practices among ancient Chinese differed vastly from the later tradition of coffin burials. Dating back to the Palaeolithic Age, the Upper Cave Man at Zhoukoudian initiated deliberate burial practices for the departed. Within a cave on Dragon Bone Hill in Zhoukoudian, archaeologists uncovered ancient human remains, purposefully arranged rather than randomly abandoned. This discovery signifies the Upper Cave Man's consciousness and intentional burial practices for the deceased.

The discovery of bones stained red by hematite powders holds significance. Hematite, an ancient red oxide of iron, was among the earliest mineral pigments used in ancient China. Archaeologists found traces of hematite powders near human remains in the lower cultural layer of the Upper Cave and alongside perforated artefacts. The deliberate scattering

of hematite powders by the Upper Cave Man suggests a purposeful act, likely associated with burial rituals.

The use of hematite powders was not exclusive to the Upper Cave Man at Zhoukoudian, as similar traces have surfaced across various periods and global locations in ancient history. This phenomenon, prevalent during the Palaeolithic Age, is evident in hematite particles discovered on human bone fossils in caves spanning from France and the Czech Republic to Kenya. Transitioning to the Neolithic Age in China, cinnabar replaced hematite powders, seemingly continuing the former trend. Residues of cinnabar have been identified on skeletal remains and burial artefacts from this era.

The ancient affinity for using red materials in rituals surrounding the deceased could be attributed to the vibrancy and brightness of the colour

red. Upon one's passing, companions would apply or place this striking hue on or around the body as a primitive form of solace, symbolising a peaceful rest for the departed. The mysteriously universal acceptance of this concept among diverse cultures seems to reflect a chaotic collective unconscious transcending race and time.

Some experts suggest that the preference for red could symbolise fiery flames and the radiant sun, representing passion and vibrancy. The use of hematite powders by the Upper Cave Man might have reflected an ambiguous belief in auspiciousness surrounding burial rituals. During this period, the inhabitants of Zhoukoudian were in an early stage of self-awareness, exhibiting a rudimentary understanding of death and a nascent consciousness regarding rebirth.

Emergence of Worship of the Soul

The Upper Cave Man applied red materials to the deceased but did not employ specific methods to protect or position the bodies. During that era, the deceased were simply placed in elevated caves as a means to prevent animal consumption. These ancient people mourned and offered prayers for their departed companions. Their concept of the soul was likely vague and rudimentary at best during this period.

During the Neolithic Age, humans started seeking methods to safeguard corpses. Despite their simplicity, the ancients utilised urns or pottery containers as coffins to offer protection. This burial practice remained popular from the Neolithic Age through the Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220). A significant excavation in Beijing's Tongzhou District in 2016 uncovered over 1,000 ancient tombs, including 62 urn-styled coffins dating back 2,000 years. This extensive and concentrated discovery marked an unprecedented milestone in Beijing's archaeological excavation history.

The ancient tombs discovered in Tongzhou were verified to span from the Warring States Period (475–221 BC) to the Western Han Dynasty. This finding establishes Tongzhou's prosperity and significant population at least 2,000 years ago, extending the area's history

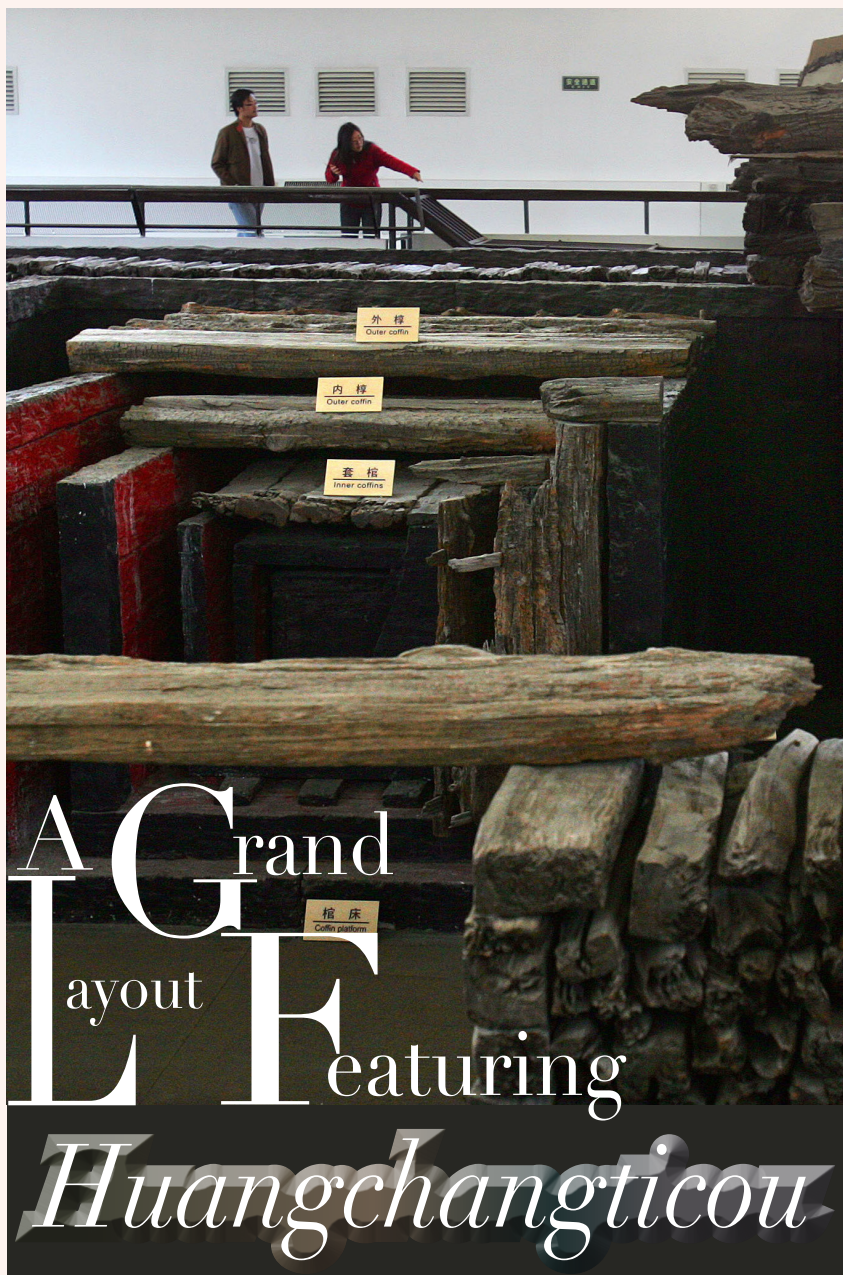
ry back by nearly 1,000 years. Historical records indicate the establishment of a city in Tongzhou during the Han Dynasty. In 2016, ruins of Luxiang County's seat from the Qin (221–206 BC) and Han dynasties were unearthed, situated two kilometres away from the Tongzhou tombs.

During the 2016 tomb excavations, a noteworthy discovery was that among the 62 urn-styled coffins, 23 were adult urns—a rarity given that urn burials were typically reserved for children due to their smaller size. Children's corpses were often placed within two small ceramic vessels or pots secured together. However, urns intended for adults required special construction due to their larger size. There were also instances where adults were interred in small urns, holding some of their bones.

A notable phenomenon observed among most urn-styled coffins is

the presence of a small hole drilled at the bottom. Additionally, in a few cases, the entire openings of ceramic vessels were deliberately removed. This practice is believed to stem from the ancient belief that after death, the soul could depart the body and persist, necessitating a small hole for “breath” and passage. This signifies an early emergence of soul worship during this period. Compared to earlier periods, the ancients during this era exhibited a clearer understanding of the concept of the soul.

A restored section of the ancient city walls at the ruins of Luxian County's seat in Beijing's Tongzhou



During the era of urn-styled coffin usage, very few objects, or sometimes none at all, were buried with the deceased. However, during the Western Han Dynasty, a lavish burial trend emerged, driven by the concept of “honouring the deceased as the living.”

Elaborate burial practices became widespread across the nation, with people generally considering grand burials as a mark of honour and simpler ones as a form of disgrace. This trend gained popularity due to the dynasty’s robust national strength and influence during that period.

In ancient China, “Honouring the deceased as the living” encapsulated the belief that there should be continuity in the treatment of individuals before and after death. Xun Kuang (313–238 BC) introduced funeral etiquette in *Xunzi*, advocating for elaborate funerals for deceased elders. This involved substantial spending on constructing ornate tombs with various decorations, treating the deceased with the same reverence as during their lifetime. Consequently, this tradition explains the abundance of burial items in tombs from that period, as they sought to encompass and encapsulate nearly all aspects of life within these burial sites.

The abundance of burial items exceeded the capacity of a single coffin, leading to the practice of burying some directly in the ground, contrary to funeral etiquette. To address this, the concept of “*guo*” emerged, denoting a larger outer coffin placed around the perimeter of the primary coffin. The specifications of this outer coffin varied depending on the status of the deceased. The highest specifications were naturally reserved for the emperor. A distinct term, “*huangchangticou*,” designated the coffins of imperial family members.

The discovery of “*huangchangticou*” was an accidental find during a 1974 archaeological investigation of the tomb of Liu Jian from the Western Han Dynasty in Fengtai District. While cleaning some beams, archaeologists encountered an intriguing and meticulously arranged structure. Surrounding the coffin, numerous yellow square timbers formed impressive wooden



walls. After extensive research into historical records, they drew parallels from Wang Guo-wei's (1877–1927) *"Guantang Jilin,"* connecting this discovery with the legendary *"huangchangticou."* This find marked the first known instance of such a structure following the establishment of the People's Republic of China.

"Huangchangticou," a unique burial practice during the Western Han Dynasty, involved arranging core timbers from yellow cypress trees around a coffin in a specific manner: positioning the root-side of the timbers inward toward the coffin. This configuration formed a large vertical wooden box structure between the cypress timbers and the coffin. Its purpose extended beyond highlighting the tomb owner's status, usually an emperor or an imperial family member, to also effectively prevent decay and theft of the corpses and burial items. Cypress, among the "three durable plants of winter" alongside bamboo and plum blossom, held sacred significance during the Han Dynasty. Thus, employing cypress timbers in constructing emperors' tombs not only served a practical purpose but also aimed to evoke a dignified and noble ambiance for the departed.

Following the principle of "honouring the deceased as the living," the tomb of Liu Jian was meticulously designed to resemble the standard and layout of his dwelling during his lifetime. Divided into a front chamber and a back chamber, the front chamber replicated a space akin to the hall in the prince's palace where he resided. Furnished with a beautiful long couch, musical instruments and items cherished by the tomb owner, this area was intended for the soul's repose and enjoyment. The

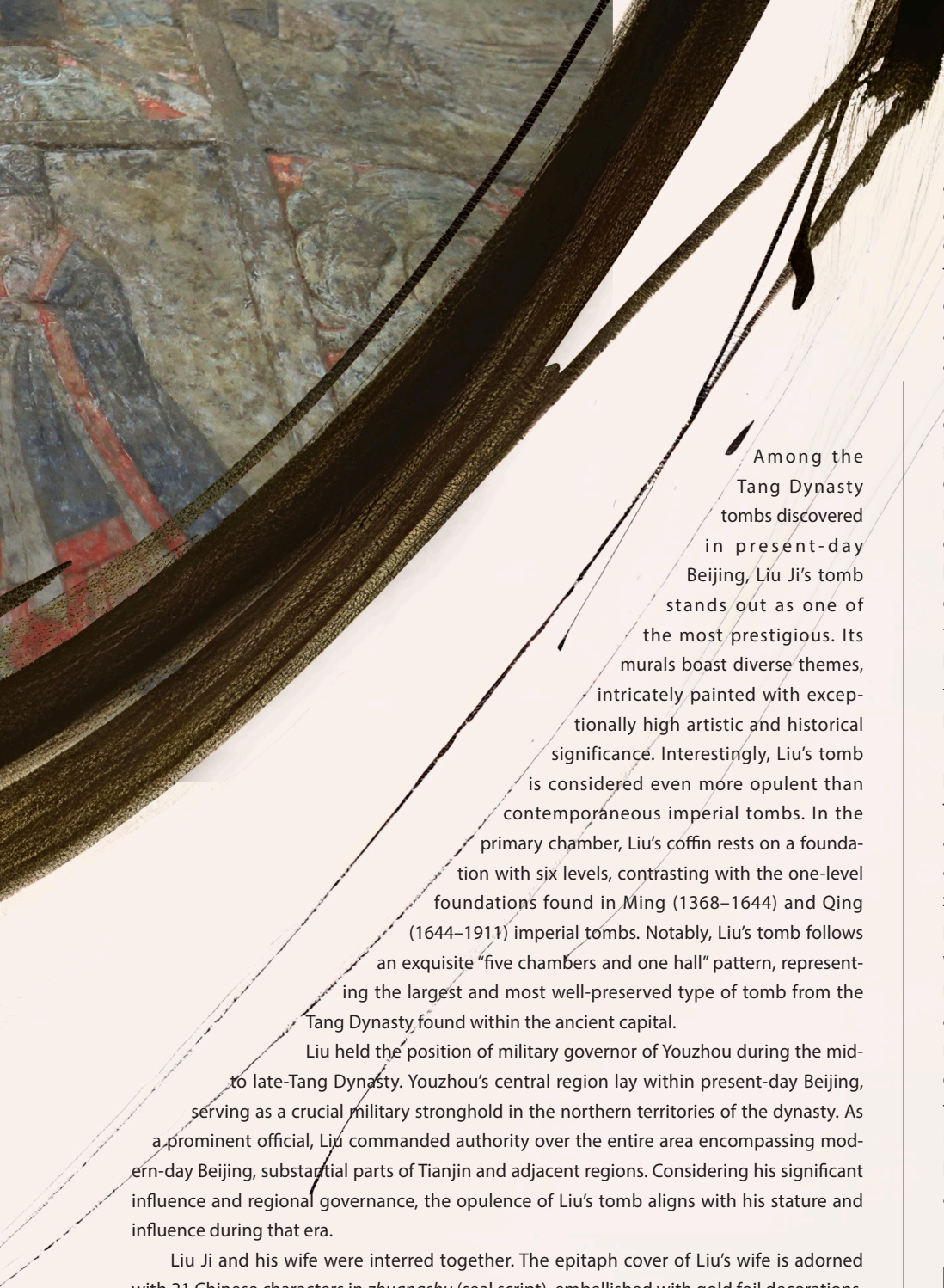
back chamber, also called *"zigong"* or *"catalpa palace,"* housed the coffin constructed from catalpa (zi) timbers. The tomb consisted of five layers of *zigong*, forming a pattern of five coffins and two outer coffins—one for Liu Jian, and the others for his wife and burial items. This design corresponded with descriptions found in *Zhuangzi* by Zhuang Zhou (369–286 BC). Reflecting opulence and intricacy akin to the prince's palace during his lifetime, Liu Jian's tomb stood as an extremely lavish and detailed memorial.

During the Western Han Dynasty, a profound belief in the soul's journey and rebirth prompted individuals to invest significantly in coffins and burial items. The aspiration was for the departed to experience the same pleasures in the afterlife as in their earthly existence. Constructing *huangchangticou*, the ancients devoted considerable effort to aesthetic artistry and noble spirits, thereby reflecting the profound richness of the spiritual world during that era.



Mural Arts from a Tang Tomb

During the Tang Dynasty, an era marked by significant advancements in culture and art, tombs reflected an elevated artistic standard compared to earlier dynasties. From the early Tang Dynasty to its pinnacle, mural depictions were prevalent in tombs belonging to the imperial family and nobility. Archaeological findings showcase Tang tomb murals featuring a diverse array of content, including depictions of dragons, tigers and people. Similar to coffins, the grandeur of the murals within tombs corresponded to the status of the tomb owners.



Among the Tang Dynasty tombs discovered in present-day Beijing, Liu Ji's tomb stands out as one of the most prestigious. Its murals boast diverse themes, intricately painted with exceptionally high artistic and historical significance. Interestingly, Liu's tomb is considered even more opulent than contemporaneous imperial tombs. In the primary chamber, Liu's coffin rests on a foundation with six levels, contrasting with the one-level foundations found in Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) imperial tombs. Notably, Liu's tomb follows an exquisite "five chambers and one hall" pattern, representing the largest and most well-preserved type of tomb from the Tang Dynasty found within the ancient capital.

Liu held the position of military governor of Youzhou during the mid- to late-Tang Dynasty. Youzhou's central region lay within present-day Beijing, serving as a crucial military stronghold in the northern territories of the dynasty. As a prominent official, Liu commanded authority over the entire area encompassing modern-day Beijing, substantial parts of Tianjin and adjacent regions. Considering his significant influence and regional governance, the opulence of Liu's tomb aligns with his stature and influence during that era.

Liu Ji and his wife were interred together. The epitaph cover of Liu's wife is adorned with 21 Chinese characters in *zhuangshu* (seal script), embellished with gold foil decorations. Encircling these characters are reliefs illustrating the 12 zodiac signs, intricately detailed and richly coloured. The use of these zodiac signs in ancient Chinese tombs dates back to the Southern and Northern Dynasties (AD 420–581). Their inclusion aimed to position the deceased at the universe's centre, ensuring their auspiciousness and happiness in the afterlife.

During archaeological excavations, scholars discovered that contrary to typical customs of the time where men held higher status, Liu's wife's epitaph was larger and featured more intricate decorations than Liu's. Historical records shed light on this anomaly. The governor, Liu Ji, was reportedly poisoned by his own son. After that, the governor's wife passed away too. Exploiting this circumstance, the son took considerable effort to adorn his mother's epitaph, aiming to establish a reputation for extreme filial piety. This led to the elaborate decoration of his mother's epitaph, deviating from the usual societal norms regarding gender and status.

The story behind the governor's death might differ from the historical narrative, yet the undeniable highlight lies in the remarkable murals within the tomb of the governor and his wife. Advanced archaeological techniques have shed light on the vivid scenes of ancient

aristocratic life, gradually revealing the original splendour of the murals. These depictions unfold a vibrant panorama of Tang Dynasty life: from lively music and dance, domestic scenes and colourful architectural settings to the presence of attendants, diverse flora and fauna.

The concept of "honouring the deceased as the living" provides a fascinating glimpse into the status and interests of tomb owners in ancient China. The murals vividly portray the governor's opulent and leisurely lifestyle, reflecting his enjoyment of entertainment and cultivated hobbies. Notably, the depiction of horses with various coat colours hints at the governor's possible passion for these animals, suggesting he might have been a lover of horses.

During the Tang Dynasty, peonies held a special place in people's hearts. The governor's tomb exemplifies this affection, evident in the peony patterns adorning the tomb door frames, the zodiac sign epitaph and the elaborate peony murals that embellish the tomb walls. Tang-era poems even hailed peonies as the epitome of national beauty and celestial fragrance. Tang people revered peonies for their elegance and opulence, qualities that resonated with the dynasty's openness and prosperity. It was only natural for them to embrace items that embodied such grandeur and abundance.



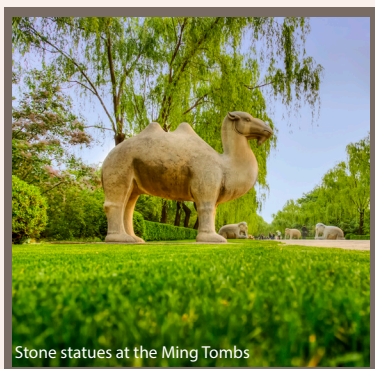
Murals found in the tomb of Liu Ji

Getting Back to Nature

China is home to numerous imperial tombs renowned for their grandeur and majestic styles, each holding significance in global cultural history. Among them, the Ming Tombs in Beijing's Changping District stand out with their stately layout and elegant scenery, marking a distinctive chapter in ancient China's imperial tomb history.

The Ming Tombs served as the final resting places for 13 emperors of the dynasty. Central to this vast complex is a serene plain surrounded by towering mountains. The mausoleum structures, ancient and picturesque, rest at the foothills of the northern, eastern and western mountains, shielded by lush trees from the elements. Embraced by these mountains, the complex is adorned with meandering watercourses. It creates an elegant ambiance within a landscape of clear waters and verdant hills, maintaining a dignified and solemn layout while preserving its natural allure.

Throughout China's history, the placement of imperial mausoleums, such as those in the Ming Tombs in Beijing, often adhered to specific principles. Many were situated at the base of mountains,



Stone statues at the Ming Tombs

a deliberate choice rooted in traditional Chinese cultural beliefs. According to *On Funerals* by Guo Pu (AD 276–324), selecting a tomb location near water takes precedence in feng shui practices, followed by shelter from the wind. This emphasis on water is due to its symbolic significance—larger water bodies are believed to gather abundant energy, signifying greater wealth and prosperity. Areas with both mountains and water are considered precious lands rich in feng shui, a force derived from nature. Feng shui guides people to align with natural energies, rather than opposing them, for a harmonious existence within their surroundings.

Tianshou Mountain in Changping, where the Ming Tombs are located, was specifically chosen as an auspicious location by Emperor Chengzu (reign: 1402–1424) during the Ming Dynasty. Guided by feng shui expert Liao Junqing (1350–1413), the northern section of Changping was identified for its robust “dragon vein,” an essential aspect in traditional Chinese beliefs. This site, known for its natural composition conducive to gathering imperial tombs, was situated between Qinglong (Blue Dragon) Mountain to the east and Baihu (White Tiger) Mountain to the west. After thorough exploration, the emperor found it fitting and officially designated it as his resting place, christening it Tianshou (“Heavenly Longevity”) Mountain.

The Ming Tombs, from their selection to construction, epitomise a harmonious integration of imperial resting places within the embrace of nature. Situated



Changling Tomb Ling'en Hall at the Ming Tombs

amidst mountains and rivers for centuries, the complex has seamlessly fused the bodies of the deceased with the serene landscapes of waters and mountains, rendering it an elegant and majestic resting place. Urban planner Edmund Bacon (1910–2005) praised the grandeur of the Ming Tombs, stating, “An entire valley is used to commemorate the dead emperors, showcasing their magnificent legacy.”

The poet Tao Yuanming (AD 365–427) from the Jin Dynasty (AD 266–420) expressed, “There’s no need to speak of one’s death; their body shall merge with the earth, rivers and mountains.” This profound thought echoes the deep harmony between humanity and nature, reflecting a traditional Chinese philosophical belief. It signifies a spiritual transcendence beyond materialism, an aspiration for the spirit to integrate with the vastness of nature, seeking enduring permanence beyond physical existence.

The ancient Chinese approached funeral practices with evolving perspectives, initially using red hematite powders to honour and mourn the departed. Over time, their rituals shifted from safeguarding the body to a simpler belief in the soul’s continuity. Their ideology transformed, focusing on the spiritual aspect, envisioning a harmony between the departing soul and the natural world, echoing the concept of “fallen leaves return to the roots.” Rather than lavishing the departed with material riches for the afterlife, their emphasis shifted to the spiritual realm, signifying a profound reverence for life and the soul’s eternal journey.



A stele fixed on a mythical creature statue at the Ming Tombs



EXTRAORDINARY CRAFTSMANSHIP IDENTIFIED IN ANCIENT ARTEFACTS

Translated by Zhang Hongpeng

Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi

Photos by Pu Feng, Zhou Shijie, Xue Jun

The most thrilling discoveries in archaeological excavations often revolve around ancient tools. Whether they're small Stone Age scrapers dating back 3 million to 9,000 years ago or large ceremonial bronze tripods like the renowned "Jin Ding" from the Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century–771 BC), the unveiling of these artefacts never fails to captivate and exhilarate archaeologists.

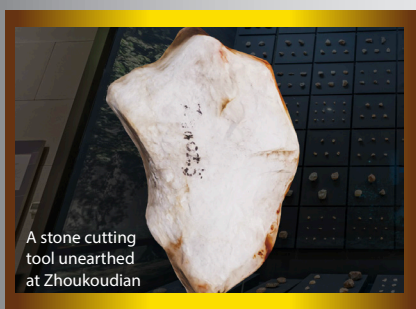
The excavation of these objects holds significance for present-day Beijing and for us that goes far beyond their sheer spectacle. Their true value lies in the intangible connection to the profound history they carry. Through these artefacts, contemporary observers can witness the enduring efforts of ancient people striving for survival and progress.

In ancient times, these artefacts were utilised by humanity to navigate the natural world. During the era of early faith, these objects assumed diverse spiritual roles for people. As civilisation burgeoned, craftsmen honed their techniques, transforming artefacts into exquisite works of art that mirrored the aesthetic tastes of entire communities.

Artefacts like stoneware, bronze vessels, inscribed sutras, Buddha statues and gold crowns have served as silent witnesses to the evolution of material culture, civilisation, faith and aesthetics across various historical periods in Youzhou, Jicheng and Yanjing (Beijing's earlier names). Together, they weave a rich tapestry chronicling the history of Beijing.

Stoneware

Tools Made by Ancient Humans



In 1921, Swedish geologist Johan Gunnar Andersson (1874–1960) conducted research at Dragon Bone Hill in Zhoukoudian. During an initial excavation, he unearthed a fossilised tooth belonging to an ancient human. Anderson famously remarked, “I have a premonition that our ancestors’ remains are lying here.” Eight years later, in 1929, Chinese archaeologist Pei Wenzhong (1904–1982) discovered the first complete skull fossil buried in an underground cave.

The skull, part of the “Peking Man” remains, caused a sensation in academic circles and was estimated to be approximately 500,000 years old. Since then, archaeologists have uncovered five additional Peking Man skulls along with other fossilised bones at the Zhoukoudian site. The site, also known as the “House of Peking Man,” was included on the *World Heritage List* in 1987. Following a period of renovation, the area was opened to the public as the Zhoukoudian Site Museum in 2014.

A wealth of stone tools, flakes and various items unearthed at Zhoukoudian are exhibited at the Zhoukoudian Site Mu-

seum alongside the skulls. The museum’s design, resembling an ancient stone tool from afar, features shiny, flat-cut surfaces that have been artfully rounded. Despite this artistic processing, the museum maintains a raw and rugged appearance in keeping with its historical context.

The shape of the Zhoukoudian Site Museum echoes a reminder that ancient humanity, hundreds of thousands of years ago, mastered the craft of tool-making in the very earth beneath our feet. Within its walls, bronze statues portray scenes of primitive life—people gathering fruits, hunting and harnessing the power of fire. Survival in such a harsh environment necessitated a collective reliance on each other’s strength. Prior to their discovery of how to artificially create fire, these early humans rotated responsibilities, guarding and tending to the flames each cold night, sometimes adding ashes to sustain the hard-earned light.

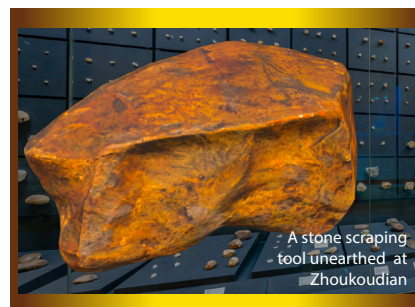
This communal existence cultivated communal intelligence among these people. Chinese historian Fan Wenlan (1893–1969) chronicled in the initial volume of the *General History of China*, “Peking Man already exhibited the capacity to discern gravel or quartz, fashioning it into angular stone tools for weapons or production. Residing within limestone caves, they employed firewood to ignite fires and cook their meals.”

Surprisingly, these stone tools aren’t primitive; they’re categorised based on their functions. Among the excavated artefacts, they are classified as chopping tools, carving tools and others. For



instance, a cutting tool exhibits a thick side and a fine edge. These are further divided into two types: large ones meant for cutting wood sticks, and smaller ones for skinning fierce animals, collectively known as “scraping tools.” Typically fashioned from sandstone, these tools possess a delicate appearance, often with dual edges.

Researchers suggest that these stone tools, small in size, were likely crafted by women. Their supposition is rooted not just in the women’s finer and more adaptable hands but also in the societal roles prevalent in ancient times. Men primarily hunted, while women focused on gathering fruits, affording them additional time within caves for crafting these stone implements. Predominantly, the prevailing perception implies that primitive society followed a matrilineal structure, with women central to production activities. This distinct division of labour amongst ancient humans was pivotal for survival and procreation amidst the harshness of nature, fostering collaborative efforts and laying the foundation for the initial rudiments of primitive society.



Jin. Ding

A Model of Ritual Bronze Vessels

Historiography classifies human developmental history into distinct epochs based on the tools used across various periods, including the Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age. In the Stone Age, ancient humans predominantly employed small stone fragments, stone arrowheads and other stone tools for hunting. As society progressed into the Bronze Age, the concept of the nation-state emerged, dividing major state events into two primary categories: rituals and warfare.

Weapons held an undeniable significance in warfare, often leading to escalations in conflicts. During the Bronze Age, a diverse array of bronze-forged blades formed the cornerstone of weaponry. Societal rules and norms dictated that individuals of distinct social statuses were restricted from using identical weapons. A notable artefact from this era is a short sword from the Western Zhou Dynasty discovered in Baifu, Changping, Beijing—a rare find featuring an eagle head-shaped handle and a willow-leaf blade, housed within a bronze scabbard. This exquisite sword, representing the weaponry of aristocrats in ancient times, now finds its place of preservation in the Capital Museum.

Derived from ancient human beliefs, worship served as a means to seek blessings. Early societies worshipped the heavens, praying for safety, health, happiness and bountiful harvests. They held the belief that connecting and communicating with the gods of heaven and earth was achievable only through ritual bronze vessels, revered as the highest standard of rites. Among these sacred objects showcased at the Capital Museum, the Jin Ding from the Western Zhou Dynasty stands out as the most majestic. This exceptional vessel not only holds the distinction of being the largest and heaviest bronze find in Beijing but also symbolises the pinnacle of the city's bronze culture.

If the original owner of a bronze object can be identified, it should be named after the owner. If the owner's name cannot be identified, it would be named according to its decorations. And if a bronze object's owner cannot be identified and it has



▲ The Jin Ding, a bronze tripod from the Western Zhou Dynasty



no special decorations, it can be named randomly. The bronze tripod, the Jin Ding, derived its name from its original owner, known as “Jin.”

In 1975, the archaeologists overseeing the excavation of the tripod initially referred to it as the “Great Bronze Tripod.” This significant bronze artefact had nearly been overlooked. During the excavation of the No. 253 tomb of the Western Zhou Dynasty, archaeologists were on the brink of halting their efforts after digging to considerable depth. At that moment, a scholar decided on one final attempt, using a shovel that unexpectedly struck the bronze item.

The archaeologists had reached the depth of the underground water during their excavation. They resorted to feeling around and manually shifting the tripod within the water. Yet, the tripod’s weight surpassed all expectations. To salvage it, on-site individuals had to fasten a rope to the tripod’s handles and then employ a pulley system to hoist it out of the water.

Once salvaged and cleansed, the tripod’s features were unveiled. With a slightly tapered opening, folded edges, square lips, straight handles, a bulging belly and feet shaped like animal hooves, it boasts a dignified form adorned with modest yet elegant motifs. Notably, it bears inscriptions signifying the marquis of Yan sending food to Duke Shao through his envoy Jin, who, upon receiving gifts from the duke, created the bronze tripod as an expression of gratitude. Hence, it was christened the “Jin Ding,” or the Jin Tripod.

The discovery of the Jin Ding holds immense significance. The inscription references Duke Shao, identified as Ji Shi during King Wu of Zhou’s reign (1046–1043 BC). Accounts from Records of the Grand Historian align with this finding, as Duke Shao, upon receiving the fief of Yan, remained in the capital to assist King Wu, entrusting his eldest son with the governance of the fief. This inscription further corroborates historical records. Importantly, it solidifies Liulihe in Beijing as the capital of the State of Yan over 3,000 years ago. Through the Western Zhou Dynasty’s bronze tripod, Beijing’s enduring history is eloquently affirmed.

▼ Bronzeware items unearthed from Beijing’s Liulihe



Stone Inscriptions

Engraved Records of Development

As the limitations of paper for preserving knowledge became evident, scholars and monks turned to stone carvings over a millennium ago to ensure the longevity of their legacy. The era of Buddhism during the Sui (AD 581–618) and Tang (AD 618–907) dynasties stands as a remarkable cultural phenomenon in Chinese Buddhist history, marking the pinnacle of Buddhism's expansion during that period. Master Jingwan (year of birth unknown, died AD 639) dedicated his life to the art of sutra carving. Guided by his monkhood, he harboured a fervent desire to “immortalise the Dharma.”

Leading his disciples and devotees to a remote, stone-rich mountain in Fangshan District, he pledged to inscribe all Buddhist scriptures onto stone slabs. This monumental decision transformed an obscure mountain into the renowned Shijing Mountain, earning its name “Mountain of Stone Scriptures.” It marked the official commencement of a millennium-long endeavour of chiselling stone to preserve these scriptures from both human and natural erosion, ensuring their passage to future generations.

Amidst a challenging environment, a dedicated collective refused to falter in their craft of stone carving. Later assessments of the stone scriptures revealed an astonishing precision—over 35 million characters, flawlessly etched. This impeccable engraving owed much to the unwavering support of the rulers. When Empress Xiao of the Sui Dynasty witnessed Jingwan's tireless dedication, she bestowed 1,000 bolts of silk in charitable donation, sparking a nationwide wave of contributions. Jingwan's commitment to carving sutras not only persisted but thrived, spurred on by this generous gesture.

Over 300 years later, in 1956, the official archaeological exploration of Fangshan's Shijing Mountain commenced, finally revealing the immense value of this millennium-old project to subsequent generations. The initial focus of the archaeologists lay on Leiyin Cave, which had fallen into disrepair over time. The once-aligned stone slabs on its walls lay scattered, some regrettably marred by graffiti. Faced with this challenge, the archaeologists enlisted skilled artisans to gather and reconstruct the slabs strewn across the mountain, restoring their original configurations. Upon piecing together the fragments, experts made a surprising discovery: contrary to some historical records, it was found that the *Nirvana Sutra* preceded the *Avatamsaka Sutra* as the primary stone scripture of Fangshan.

In AD 639, Jingwan passed away, leaving behind a legacy of 146 completed pieces, including the *Nirvana Sutra*, *Avatamsaka Sutra* and *Vimalakirti Sutra*. However, his monumental task endured beyond his lifetime. Per his final wishes, a stone box housing his ashes was positioned atop Shijing Mountain, overlooking future disciples' endeavours as they sought to fulfil his unfinished mission.

According to historical records, Yunju Temple was expected to house numerous scripture slabs alongside the stone scriptures within Shijing Mountain's caves. Yet, the investigation at Yunju Temple faced initial hurdles. Progress remained elusive for over a year.

During the sweltering August, experts persisted in their efforts, aided by the hospitality of nearby villagers who offered them respite in their homes, providing refreshing well water. While drinking the cool water, Huang Bingzhang, a member of the expert team, casually glanced downward and noticed inscriptions on a stone fragment nestled beneath the edge of a kang bed-stove. These inscriptions provided a direct clue to the whereabouts of concealed scripture stone slabs. Subsequently, within seven days, a cave near the foundation of the South Tower was excavated, revealing the stored scripture slabs. This serendipitous discovery inadvertently unravelled the mystery surrounding the location of these valuable scriptures.

The unearthing of scripture slabs on Shijing Mountain has bestowed upon Beijing a site akin to the Mogao Caves in Gansu Province. Jingwan set this enduring mission in motion over a millennium ago. Even today, the echoes of stone chiselling appear to resonate throughout the city. Across generations, devoted monks and faithful believers have bequeathed not just a Buddhist heritage but also a vibrant historical tapestry to Beijing.



Tri-coloured Bodhisattva Statue

An Example of Liao Dynasty Porcelain

Buddhism in the Liao Dynasty (AD 916–1125) presented both differences and similarities compared to that of the Sui and Tang dynasties. The countenance of the Liao Dynasty tri-coloured bodhisattva statue, unearthed at the Longquan kiln, exhibits the same compassionate and transcendent expression observed in Buddhist statues from preceding dynasties. Interpretations of this expression vary widely, akin to the enigmatic smile of the Mona Lisa. Whether seen in a Buddha statue or in the expression of the Mona Lisa, it seemingly elicits the term “meaningful” in attempts to describe its essence.

This tri-coloured bodhisattva boasts a flower crown on its head, a round face, two large drooping ears, slightly opened eyes, hair between the brows, a long cloak, *keyura* ornaments encircling the neck and bracelets adorning the wrists. The bodhisattva's complexion is white and delicate, while the attire exhibits hues of green and yellow, with a uniform, glossy glaze. The entirety of the bodhisattva statue is comprised solely of white, yellow and green tones, hence earning recognition as a piece of Liao Dynasty tri-coloured porcelain.

While lacking the vibrant blue tones seen in the remarkable Tang Dynasty tri-coloured glazed pottery, this tri-coloured statue may seem less striking. However, Liao Dynasty tri-coloured porcelain was significantly influenced by its Tang Dynasty predecessor. Unearthed at Longquan, these statues stand apart from other Liao Buddha figures, exhibiting a more fluid expression closer in style to the Tang Dynasty silhouette.

Upon closer inspection, the expression of this bodhisattva statue exudes simplicity, dignity, virtue and a subtle reserve. While both this statue and the tri-coloured arhat statue unearthed from the Longquan kiln belong to the Liao Dynasty tri-coloured category, the arhat statue's tightly sealed lips and taut facial muscles convey a sombre and dignified expression. This distinction primarily stems from the Buddhist perspective—arhats are perceived to remain intricately connected to the world, engaged in the exploration of profound ideas.

Buddhas and bodhisattvas exhibit more idealised characteristics, transcending the worldly realm with serene and transcendent expressions. A painted seated Buddha statue from the Longquan kiln shares the serene and tranquil expression akin to the bodhisattva statue. Despite lacking a comforting smile, both statues emanate a profound sense of holiness and compassion, offering a spiritual solace that is as soothing as a smile to the spiritual realm.

The significance of Buddhism during the Liao and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties is evident through the abundance of ceramic Buddha statues discovered in Beijing, surpassing those from other historical periods. During the Liao Dynasty, smaller ceramic Buddha statues offered a unique versatility, easily combinable with goods and art, thus becoming more accessible to the common folk.

◀ Tri-coloured bodhisattva statue from the Liao Dynasty



Gold Wire-woven Yishan Guan

A Crown for Emperors Decorated with Dragons

In April 2023, the National Museum of Classic Books hosted “Encounters with the Colourful Ming Dynasty in 1573: Special Exhibition of Relics from the Wanli Era.” This exhibition spotlighted the 48-year reign of Emperor Wanli (1572–1620) during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), drawing a substantial crowd of visitors. While many sought insights into the history of the Wanli era, a significant majority were captivated by the Gold Wire-woven Yishan Guan (translated as “philanthropy crown with wings folded upward”), making it the main attraction for most attendees.

Enthusiasm to view this crown stems not only from its exquisite beauty but also due to the rarity of such items. The world’s only well-preserved Gold Wire-woven Yishan Guan resides exclusively within the Ming Tombs Museum’s collection. This precious artefact has never left Beijing and has been seldom exhibited to the public.

This crown holds immense value, crafted entirely from pure gold using intricate and scarcely witnessed techniques. Remarkably lightweight and delicate, it comprises 518 gold wires, each merely 0.2 millimetres thick—with the fragility of a cicada’s wing. The decorative dragons adorning the crown boast an astonishing total of 8,400 scales. Despite undergoing over 10,000 folds and coils, these wires maintain consistent, dense gaps without a single knot. A prominent feature is the depiction of two dragons playing with a pearl, meticulously fashioned to be three-dimensional and remarkably lifelike. Notwithstanding the intricate weaving processes, there’s an absence of visible joints or gaps between the various sections of the crown. This exemplifies the exceptional craftsmanship of Ming Dynasty artisans, showcasing ancient mastery in wire drawing, weaving, welding and other complex techniques.

The value of a treasure often begets a myriad of mysterious tales that seem to validate its rarity. One such enigma surrounds the Gold

Wire-woven Yishan Guan: the ongoing debate about whether it served as a funerary object. The Dingling Tomb, the final resting place of Emperor Wanli, witnessed its first excavation in 1956, stirring archaeologists’ excitement upon opening the emperor’s coffin. Inside, they discovered Wanli adorned with a black-cloth Yishan Guan, while the prized Gold Wire-woven Yishan Guan lay nestled in a nearby round box, adding to the intrigue of its purpose and placement.

This discovery was often cited as evidence supporting the Gold Wire-woven Yishan Guan’s role as a funerary object. Notably, historical portraits of the emperor never depict him wearing the Gold Wire-woven Yishan Guan, reinforcing the belief among many that it was indeed designed as part of his funeral paraphernalia. However, ancient beliefs surrounding “death as an integral part of life” prompt some scholars to question this interpretation. Additionally, during the Ming Dynasty, the popularity of gold wire-woven hats among the public suggests that it might not have been unusual for the emperor to possess such a crown, muddling the certainty regarding its intended purpose as a solely funerary item.

The mystery surrounding its purpose persists due to the limited available information. Nevertheless, the discovery of the Gold Wire-woven Yishan Guan has underscored the remarkable craftsmanship of the Ming Dynasty. As the only golden crown of an emperor ever unearthed in Chinese archaeological history, it has captured widespread attention. Its sheer beauty captivates observers, serving as an exemplar of Ming Dynasty aesthetics that resonate even with contemporary audiences, touching the hearts of modern admirers.

HERITAGE FOSTERS EXCHANGES BETWEEN CIVILISATIONS

Translated by Zhou Feiyue Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi

Beijing, an intersection of diverse cultures, both domestic and international, has been a cultural crossroads since ancient times. Nestled amidst Taihang Mountain to the west, Yanshan to the north, Bohai Sea to the east and the North China Plain to the south, its varied topography fosters a convergence of unique influences. This natural layout facilitates profound exchanges, acting as a nexus for trade, scientific endeavours, technological advancements, cultural richness and religious diffusion with global counterparts. As a result, Beijing has attracted individuals from all over the world, birthing a conglomerate of civilisations that intermingle and amalgamate in this vibrant tapestry. Archaeological revelations animate this historical depth, unearthing ancient relics and artefacts that eloquently narrate the saga of a bygone era. These remnants serve as poignant testaments to history, illuminating the intricate and extensive past that continues to shape Beijing's identity as a melting pot of cultural exchange and evolution.

Mastoid Glass Bowl from the Western Jin Dynasty

In the museum's spotlight, a seemingly unremarkable green bowl takes on a gentle radiance. Amidst the Capital Museum's array of treasures, it may not immediately stand out. Yet, a brief glance at the exhibition board nearby unveils an astonishing revelation: this unassuming glass bowl hails from Sassanid Persia, crafted 1,700 years ago. The unexpected presence of such an ancient artefact in this modern setting sparks curiosity and prompts questions about its extraordinary journey to the Capital Museum.

In actuality, this bowl belonged to Hua Fang, wife of Wang Jun (AD 252–314), the governor of Youzhou during the Western Jin Dynasty (AD 266–316). During that era, China had not mastered glass-making, and elites favoured Sassanid Persia's glassware for its radiant, translucent allure and frosted finish. Given her high social standing, Hua Fang's use of such costly imported glass bowls in her daily life reflects the status and preferences of the elite at that time.

Following her death in AD 307, the tradition of burying a deceased wife with her cherished belongings for use in the afterlife became common. This glass bowl likely held significant value to Hua Fang, being among her most treasured possessions, a customary inclusion in her burial for her future use in the afterlife.

Unfortunately, this exquisite object was found upon its discovery by the Beijing Municipal Cultural Relics Task Force in 1965 to have suffered complete fragmentation. Judging by its mouth and foot structure, it appeared to be a disc-shaped item measuring 10.4 centimetres (cm) in diameter, supported by 8 feet—a deduction drawn from the distance

and angle between 2 of its feet. Following a brief archaeological examination, the remains were consigned to storage. The true hues of the glass bowl emerged only three decades later during the restorer's meticulous reassembly. This bowl boasts a spherical base, a broad-necked opening and an abdomen embellished with 10 larger oval nails. At its base, seven pairs of petite supportive feet uphold its delicate, thin, light green walls, fashioned from blown glass. The bowl garnered considerable attention from glass connoisseurs. A comparison between its composition and distant Iranian Sassanid glassware confirmed its origin within the Sassanid Persian Empire, dating back 1,700 years. The unearthing and subsequent restoration of this bowl can be likened to unsealing a bygone testament, offering a glimpse into the historical exchanges between Beijing and Persian civilisation as early as the fourth century AD.

Over 1,700 years have passed since the creation of this small green bowl, its thin walls bearing fragments that bear witness to the passage of time. Upon close inspection, its weathered appearance reveals a delicate beauty, now restored to its original form from the Sassanid Empire (AD 224–651). Lost to history is its original name, but due to its distinct shape resembling a nipple, the Capital Museum's exhibition board has dubbed it the "mastoid glass bowl." This exquisite relic, echoing craftsmanship from an ancient epoch, offers a captivating window into the past through its quiet, enduring presence.



Mastoid glass bowl from the Western Jin Dynasty

Glazed Emerald Celadon

Archaeological discoveries, such as the Sasanian glass bowl, illuminate the historical trade routes that once funnelled exquisite objects into Beijing. Treasured by their ancient owners, these artefacts, now unearthed after an unknown duration of burial, have re-emerged to reveal intriguing narratives. As researchers meticulously examine these relics, they continue to challenge and reshape established societal perceptions, providing a deeper understanding of ancient cultures and their interconnectedness.



▲ A Goryeo Celadon burner decorated with a mythical creature

As of 2022, the archaeological exploration of Zhongdu (Central Capital) of the Jin Dynasty (1115–1234) founded by the Jurchens concluded after nearly three years of intensive search in Xicheng District's You'anmen Inner Street. The vast 100,000-square-metre (sq.m) site yielded a trove of artefacts, prompting a pause in excavation for thorough analysis and relic monitoring. Among these discoveries, Goryeo Celadon has emerged as a significant cultural relic, shedding light on valuable historical insights sought through archaeological endeavours.

During the Goryeo Dynasty (AD 918–1392), celadon, known as emerald porcelain for its distinct colour, was crafted on the Korean Peninsula. Goryeo artisans largely learned the manufacturing techniques of celadon glaze from the products of the Chinese Ru Kiln. Consequently, the hues, like cyan, closely resembled those of the Ru Kiln ceramics. While replicating the Ru ware, Goryeo craftsmen infused their unique artistic expressions into the decorations and designs, resulting in the creation of the renowned "Goryeo Secret Colours."



▲ A Goryeo Celadon plate with fish and wave decorations



An archaeological excavation in Fengtai unearthed the tomb of the Wugulun Wolun couple from the Jin Dynasty. Among the array of exquisite jade ornaments, a distinctive green glazed gourd pot captured attention. Standing at a height of 28.4 cm, its smooth, light greenish-grey glaze enhanced its appearance. Mimicking natural plant shapes, the pot displayed elegantly rounded and flawlessly smooth lines, showcasing an exceptional level of craftsmanship. Upon analysis with an optical microscope, the archaeological team determined this pottery to be Goryeo Celadon.

Despite its extremely high value, the discovery of Goryeo Celadon in Wugulun Wolun's tomb was not surprising. Historical accounts reveal Wugulun Wolun's status as the son-in-law of Emperor Taizu (reign: 1115–1123) of the Jin Dynasty, with his son, Wugulun Yuanzhong, marrying the emperor's daughter. The Wugulun family held esteemed positions among the Jin Dynasty's nobility. As Beijing became the new capital under the reign of Wanyan Liang (1149–1161), their son relocated the burials of the Wugulun Woluns to the city. At the time of his parents' funeral, Wugulun Yuanzhong already held significant power as the prime minister of the Jin Dynasty, choosing an elaborate funeral to honour his parents and underscore his societal stature. With an appreciation for Central Plain culture that

aligned with the Southern Song aristocracy's aesthetics, Wugulun Yuanzhong saw Goryeo Celadon, a symbol of affluence for Goryeo and Jin Dynasty elites, fitting as a burial item. Placing a green glazed gourd jug in his parents' graves in 1184, perhaps for a fleeting moment, Wugulun Yuanzhong sought not to impress but to offer his parents a cherished item for their afterlife enjoyment.

▼ A Goryeo Celadon flowerpot with lotus decorations





DOMED BATHROOM DESIGN

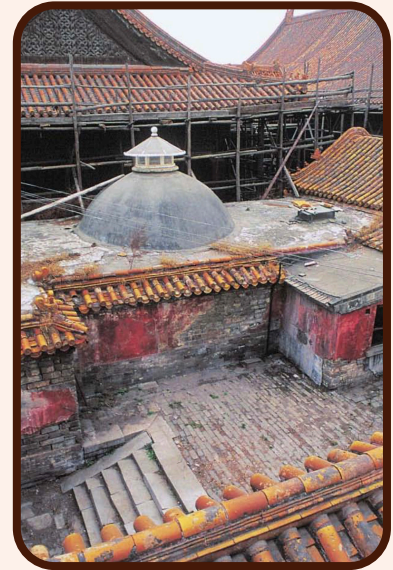
In the northwest area of the Forbidden City's Wuying Hall compound lies the Bath and Virtue Hall, a departure from conventional Chinese architecture. With two distinct sections—an antechamber and a bathroom—connected by a doorway, this structure boasts walls exceeding one metre (m) in thickness. Spanning approximately 16 sq.m, the bathroom is adorned with white glazed tiles. A striking feature, its dome-shaped roof beneath a skylight, has drawn considerable intrigue. The design's clear inspiration from Middle Eastern Islamic culture, particularly in bathroom construction, has become a subject of fascination for many observers.



The technique of constructing domes had been mastered by Chinese artisans during the Han (202 BC–AD 220) and Tang (AD 618–907) dynasties, primarily employed in tomb building. However, the utilisation of this technique in imperial palace structures was not a common practice among Chinese designers. The Turkish-style bathhouse in the Forbidden City, seemingly an anomaly, dates back to the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) and continued through the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). Historical records suggest its design was attributed to a Persian architect named Yeheidie'erding (Amir al-Din, died in 1312).

In the second year following the construction of Dadu (today's Beijing), the Yuan Dynasty's capital, emissaries from the north-western feudal lords expressed discontent with the city's exclusive use of Han-style architecture. Heeding their concerns, Kublai Khan, or Emperor Shizu (reign: 1260–1294) of the Yuan Dynasty, sought the collaboration of Persian architects, notably Yeheidie'erding, alongside city planner Liu Bingzhong (1216–1274), to reimagine the new capital's design, including its palaces. The outcome was a city that displayed a fusion of diverse global architectural styles. Beijing showcased an amalgamation of Han-style structures like Daming Hall and the Bell and Drum towers, alongside Mongolian architecture such as the halls for the emperor's wife and concubines, and the eagle room. Additionally, Persian-inspired stargazers, Turkish baths and the Western Region-styled Hall of Uygur, adorned the landscape of Dadu.

In Dadu, a myriad of architectural styles formed a comprehensive tapestry reflective of the Silk Road's vast influence. These architectural motifs stretched from Japan and the Korean Peninsula to Central Asia, the Middle East, West Asia and even Europe, following the trail envisioned by Yeheidie'erding within the city. People from various corners of the world—envoys, merchants and monks—travelled to and from Beijing. These travellers did not merely hold onto their riches; they also shared their cultures and



▲ The Bath and Virtue Hall before renovation

ways of life. Opting to settle in this bustling city with ample opportunities for study, work and family, they peacefully lived out their days, embracing the city's rhythm through every season until they grew old and passed away.

It is a profound loss that so little is known about Yeheidie'erding. Yet, his pivotal role in introducing an exotic civilisation to Beijing cannot be overlooked. Historian Bai Shouyi (1909–2000) extolled the grandeur of the Palaces and buildings in Beijing, attributing much of their splendour to Yeheidie'erding's contributions. Despite subsequent efforts by the Ming and Qing dynasties to enhance and extend the city, their alterations mainly involved adding or removing elements built during the Yuan Dynasty, lacking substantial innovation.

Indeed, history veils the metropolis under layers of dust, yet remnants of ancient structures across various parts of Beijing narrate the swift transformations this city has undergone. Even today, as visitors approach sites like Dongyue Temple, the White Dagoba of Miaoying Temple, Niujie Mosque or the Pagoda of Monk Wansong, they're greeted by remnants of beauty preserved from 700 years ago. These locales stand as living testaments to the intricate interplay and amalgamation of diverse nationalities, cultures and architectural styles that once converged within these grounds.

A RESTING PLACE IN TENG GONG ZHALAN

In every hidden nook of this city, her influence lingers. Stepping into the Beijing Administration Institute from the northern gate, the central garden unfolds, flanked by the main structure, its walls entwined with trailing ivy. A serene southeast corner of the garden offers a view of a modest cemetery, encircled by a brick wall adorned with blossoms. At the cemetery's south entrance, a stone monument bears the inscription "Major Historical and Cultural Site Protected at the National Level" and "Graveyard of Matteo Ricci and Foreign Missionaries." Few students pause here, perhaps due to its unobtrusive nature or their accustomedness to its presence.

The cemetery, situated facing south, hosts the tombstone of Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) near the stone gate. Ricci's white stone tomb, reaching 2.7 m in height, is adorned with intricate carvings of roses and olive branches. Engraved in both Chinese characters and foreign script at its centre are the words "Tomb of Jesuit Matteo Ricci," symbolising the harmonious convergence of Eastern and Western cultures. The proximity of his image evokes curiosity about Ricci's experiences in Beijing. Upon his arrival, Ricci was deeply captivated by the city's charm.

After his initial arrival in Beijing, Matteo Ricci compared the city to Nanjing, his former residence, before departing south along the Grand Canal. Though he left a comparative study of early Chinese cities, focusing on Beijing and Nanjing, Ricci's visit to Beijing was unsuccessful; he was denied permission to remain in the capital by the ruling emperor at the time. Nevertheless, Ricci perceived this obstacle as inconsequential. Despite grappling with language barriers, cultural disparities and unfamiliar routines upon his arrival in China 16 years earlier, he persevered. Undeterred by these challenges, he persisted rather than returning to his homeland. Ricci found Beijing's courtyard houses distinct from

those in Nanjing, and he marvelled at the city's captivating essence, amiable locals, delectable cuisine and vibrant streets. Upon his return to Beijing after two years in Nanjing, he was fortunate to meet Emperor Wanli (reign: 1572–1620) of the Ming Dynasty.

Matteo Ricci was fortunate that the emperor allowed him to settle in the capital city. Ricci established residence in his own house in Beijing, where he lived for 10 years until his passing in 1610.

In Beijing, Ricci cultivated deep friendships with luminaries like Xu Guangqi (1562–1633), Li Zhizao (1565–1630) and other notable scholars of the Wanli era. Collaborating closely, they engaged in the arduous task of translating significant Western texts. One of their remarkable achievements was the translation of Euclid's *Elements of Geometry*, where they meticulously rendered fundamental mathematical terms

like point, line, plane, triangle and right angle into Chinese—terms that remain integral in modern mathematical discourse. Their collective efforts also birthed the monumental "*Kunyu Wanguo Quantu*," China's earliest colourful world map, reshaping the conventional Eurocentric view of geography. Alongside this scholarly exchange, Ricci played a pivotal role in a cultural symbiosis, introducing Confucian philosophy and the essence of the "Four Books" to Europe through his publication, *Matteo Ricci's Chinese Notes*. This remarkable exchange offered Europeans an illuminating glimpse into 17th-century Chinese society, underlining Ricci's pivotal role as a bridge between Eastern and Western civilisations during his illustrious tenure in Beijing.

Matteo Ricci left an indelible mark on cultural exchange between East and West during his time in Beijing. After his passing, Emperor Wanli made a rare exception, permitting Ricci's burial at Tenggongzhalan, outside Fucheng Gate. Ricci became the first non-Chinese individual to find eternal rest in Beijing.

Matteo Ricci's grave holds two smaller tombstones on either side. To the east lies the tomb of Ferdinand Verbiest (1623–



A statue of Matteo Ricci



Graveyard of Matteo Ricci and Foreign Missionaries in Tenggongzhalan

1688), a Belgian known for overseeing the creation of monumental astronomical equipment, still displayed at the Beijing Observatory. On the western side is the tomb of Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1592–1666). As a German skilled in artillery, von Bell rose to be the highest-ranking foreign official among missionaries in China, earning the title “foreign *mafa*” (“foreign grandfather”) from Emperor Shunzhi (reign: 1644–1661). Additionally, the eastern part of the cemetery hosts a collection of dozens of tombstones, marking the final resting places of individuals who, in their own ways, contributed to Beijing and held deep affection for this land.

Over 400 years ago, when various overseas missions and trade

groups settled in Beijing, few might have envisioned that this contingent, initially embarked on missionary work, would eventually establish not just a distinctive graveyard in Beijing, but also forge a robust cultural bridge between the East and West upon their arrival in this ancient city.

The exchange has transformed Beijing into a vibrant civilisation, and any article or book can only offer a glimpse into its essence. Time cannot be reversed; to experience the incredible past, one must visit those sites and cultural relics. They stand as gateways to feeling the depth of civilisation, integration and greatness that Beijing embodies.



2022年10月16日