

Worldly Life and Fairyland Scenes in Song Tombs of Luxian County: the Meaning of Doors

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Abstract: the Song Tombs of Luxian County Are Important Heritage Sites under State Protection. They Were Built in the Middle and Late Southern Song Dynasty. the Owners of the Tombs Are Mainly Local Officials and Local Gentry. the Tombs Are All Made of Stone, with a Large Number of Exquisite Wood-Imitation Building Components Carving Figures, Four Gods, Flowers, Birds, Plants, as Well as “Door Opening” Images. This Paper Focuses on “Doors” and Takes “Images of Women Opening the Door” as the Starting Point. Combining with Exquisite Stone Carvings Like Flying Fairies, Four Gods as Well as the Scenes of Tomb owner’s Daily Life, This Paper Analyzes How the Song Tombs in Luxian County Express the Eternal Underground Life of Tomb Owners and Construct the Fairyland.

1. Introduction

The Book of *Xunzi* Says, the Dead Should Be Decorated and Sent Away as If They Were Alive. It is Needed to Serve the Dead Like he is Alive; Everything Should Be Carried out According to the Rules of Rites. in the Long History of Chinese Culture, the Concept of “No Differences Before and after Death” Has Long Occupied the Core Position of Funeral Culture. People Know That the Limited Life can’t Stand the Pace of Time. When Building the Tomb, They Build the Place Where They Live after Death as a Living Place, as If the Death is Just the Channel to Another World.

The Song Tombs in Luxian County Are Located in the South Edge of Sichuan Basin in Southwest China. They Are Stone Chamber Tombs with Wood-Imitation Structures Built in the Middle and Late Southern Song Dynasty. Most of the Tomb Owners Were Lower Officials and Local Gentry. a Large Number of Exquisite Wood-Imitation Building Components, Figures, Four Gods, Flowers, Birds, Plants and Living Utensils Are Carved; the “Pictures of Door Opening” Are the Most Common.

2. The Door of Netherworld: the Embodiment of the Place Where the Soul Lives

Among the Exquisite Stone Carvings in Song Tombs in Luxian County, the “Pictures of Door Opening” Appear Most Frequently. in All Tombs That Have Been Excavated, There Are Different Numbers of “Pictures of Door Opened” by Male or Female Attendants. There Are Many Vivid “Images of Women Opening the Door”. in Some Pictures, the Door Covers a Part of the girl’s Body; the Girl Looks Around Quietly, Half Shy and Half Cautious. the maiden’s Mood is Vividly Expressed. What She Looks is the Coffin Platform and the Door of the Tomb Owner. (Figure 1) There Are Also Women Whose Whole Bodies Are Fully Exposed. with Dignified Expressions and Tall Bodies, They Stand by the Door, Holding Living Utensils in Their Hands. Behind Them Are Half Closed Wood-Imitation Stone Doors. the Opposite side of the Figure is Also the Tomb Door and the Coffin Platform. (Figure 2) These Two Representative Pictures Are Located in the Back Niches of Tomb No.3 and Tomb No.1 Found in Qinglong Town. in Addition, the Left and Right Niches of Tomb No.1 in Qinglong Town Are Also Carved with the “Image of Doors Opened by Women” Holding Objects. Beside the “Images of Women Opening the Doors” on the Left and Right Walls, There Are Also Carved Wood-Imitation Stone Doors. the Two Tombs Are Carved

with Eight Doors and Three Maids. in Other Song Tombs of Luxian County That Have Been Excavated, the Image of “Door” and the Scene Displaying “Images of Door Opening” Almost Become the Main Decoration of the Whole Tomb. All Doors Are Exquisitely Carved with Flower and Animal Patterns Such as Peony Branches and Deer Holding Grass in the Mouth. Why Tomb Owners Used These Beautifully Carved and Wood-Imitation Stone Doors to Fill the Whole Wall of the Tomb?

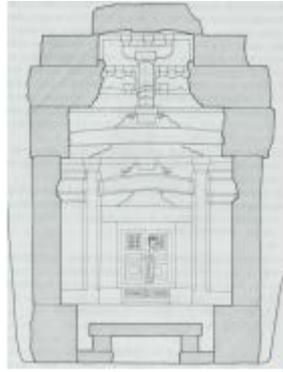


Fig.1 Cross Section of Tomb No.3 in Qinglong Town



Fig.2 Linear Drawing of Maid in the Niche of Tomb No.1 in Qinglong Town

As early as the Han Dynasty, the images of “women opening the doors” began to appear in Sichuan. Such images were found in many Han Tombs, such as the Gaoyique Tomb in Ya’an, the Baozishan Mountain Stone-chamber Tomb in Xinjin, the Changshunpo Stone-chamber Tomb in the Yibin and Wanghui Stone-chamber Tomb in Lushan (Figure 3). In Luzhou, where the Song Tombs of Luxian county are located, several sarcophaguses with such portraits have also been found.



Fig.3 Wanghui Stone-Chamber Tomb in Lushan and the Front Portrait

Sichuan Basin is surrounded by high mountains. The place has abundant natural resources; citizens live in a cosy life. It has always been known as the land of abundance. The relatively closed regional environment created the unique culture of Shu.

From Han tombs found in Sichuan Province, most of the “images of women opening the door” are located in the centre of the picture. They are the core of the whole picture and the core idea that

designers want to highlight. Around these figures, there are images of columns, the Queen Mother of the West, Fuxi, the goddess Nuwa, and the scenes of formal visits. In Han Dynasty, all kinds of elements on the stone reliefs of “door opening images” were the ideological sustenance of tomb owners, in hope that they could ascend to immortality and coexist with the “door”. The movement of opening the door has more profound meaning, and is closely related to the belief that the Queen Mother of the West represents the channel to become immortal. A door is both an intersection and a boundary. Between the human world and the fairyland, there is a door to fairyland. For example, in the Yingjing Sarcophagus and the Changshunpo Stone-chamber Tomb in Yibin, the door opening image locates in the middle of the picture. On one side there are scenes of the human world: farewell, formal visits, offering gifts, playing, kissing; on the other side there is the Queen Mother of the West, sitting upright, representing the fairyland. There is also a picture of women opening the door on the No. 5 stone coffin of Hejiang, Luzhou. The whole front part of the coffin in Wanghui Stone-chamber Tomb of Lushan is a picture of woman opening the door in stone relief. (Figure 3)

In Song tombs of Luxian County, on the back niches as well as the left and right niches, “pictures of door opening” are located in the centre of tomb carving. Most door openers are women. The wood-imitation stone doors are opened and then closed; the woman stands by the door quietly. It seems that life is eternal in the movement and stillness; it seems that time stops. All of these reflect the superb skill of the carver. (Figure 4) With the improvement of carving skills and the change of thinking concept, the “pictures of door opening” are no longer carved on the sarcophagus, nor designed as a plane figure. “Doors” occupy a large part of the three-dimensional space in the Song tombs of Luxian county. In the tomb, the whole small single chamber tomb is a three-dimensional structure. “Doors” are located on the four walls of the tomb, forming a relatively independent living space for the tomb owner.



Fig.4 Stone Carving of Maid Collected in the Song Tomb of Luxian County (2001fjlm1:2)

All Song tombs excavated in Luxian county have the same structure. The front wall is the tomb door connecting the tomb path and a large number of stone doors; servants and wood-imitation components are carved on the left and right niches as well as the back niches. The narrow, single chamber tomb forms a complete enclosed space. These servants, dressed in Song Dynasty costumes, holding hats, vases or standing beside chairs, all face the coffin in the middle of the tomb. They belong to the master of the tomb. The owner of the tomb was buried and placed on the coffin platform. The mourner exited the tomb and the door was closed. Then the tomb became a living space owned by the tomb owner alone. The soul of the tomb owner enjoys everything in the room forever, including groups of servants, beautiful clothes and cuisine, music, dance and opera, as well as tomb warriors stepping on auspicious clouds, green dragons, white tigers and flying fairies.

The illusory thought of immortality in Han Tombs became the concern of real life in the Song Dynasty. The element of fairyland only appeared on the door or at the side of the door as a part of the decoration. The owner of the tomb no longer paid attention to the process of becoming immortality, but attached importance to the tomb space after his death.

3. Doors in Southern Song Tombs: the Extension of Time and Space; the Combination of Reality and Illusion

What is a “door”, or what kind of existence is a “door”? According to French philosopher Deva,

the “door” refers to the flowing space, the crossing point and the interruption of continuous obstacles. In *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* written by Shen Xu of the Eastern Han Dynasty, the definition of “door” is Wen (hearing). Yucai Duan noted that, Wen means people outside the door can hear the sound inside, and vice versa. In the *Chapter of Jade* written by Yewang Gu, a scholar of Liang in the Southern Dynasty, a door is the place where “people go in and out”. The door becomes the intersection and boundary of isolated space. It can not only separate the living space in the real world, but also separate the virtual space in the spiritual world. It separates but also connects two different places with different attributes.

In Song tombs of female owners in Luxian County, the images are carved on the tomb wall. Some maidens open the door slightly. (Figure 5) Some of them hold plates or boxes and walk from the place behind the door. Some of the images show the elegant maid standing in front of the curtain with a pot and a towel. She uses her hands to lift the hanging curtain. The same theme can also be seen in tombs of male masters. The tombs are carved with waiters, but the “props” used for performance are changed according to gender characteristics and social division of labour. For example, in tombs of male owners, a painting depicts a waiter wearing soft Futou, standing in front of the door with a seal in his hand. Another painting depicts the man standing beside the empty seat, holding a tray on which a hat is placed. It seems that he is respectfully serving the owner of the tomb, waiting him to wake up (or return home) and sit down, and send (or remove) the hat for the owner.



Fig.5 Stone Carving of Maid Collected in the Song Tomb of Luxian County (2001fjlm1:5)

Therefore, the dark and dead atmosphere in the tomb has the vitality and aura of life instantly. The pictures show scenes of “getting up”, “going home”, as well as “combing and washing”. No matter which part of life is displayed, the breath of life flows here. The previous life, or the richer and more peaceful life that the tomb owner hopes become the eternal reality. It gives the vitality of life to the tomb, where time flows forever.

“Door” has the most essential and original meaning here. It is the “door” between different rooms in traditional Chinese folk houses, and the “door” to enter and leave the living room. Outside of the “door” is the wide courtyard and many rooms. If we can boldly continue to expand it, the outside of the “door” can also be the study of the tomb owner, halls, the government office, shops, even busy streets and lively social life, or the battlefield filled with gunpowder between Song and the Empire of Mongolia. The whole single chamber tomb is just a “point”, behind which there is an infinite “plane”. The “door” here is not static, but dynamic. This dynamic is the vitality after being given life. It is a combination of expansion in space and continuity in time.

4. The Beautiful Life inside the “Door”: the Ideal Reconstructs the Reality

So why tomb builders design a living room surrounded by many “doors”? This may be related to the historical background of Song tombs in Luxian county.

On the one hand, the land of Bashu (the area of Sichuan Basin) has military importance for its geographical location. It is “the throat of four routes in the southwest, and the lapel belt of Wu and Chu with vast territories”. On the other hand, the wars of separatist regimes in the past dynasties have a relatively small impact on the Sichuan Basin; the economy of Sichuan can continue to develop. *The Book of Sui: Geography* records, “(Shu County, Luchuan County and other places) are the old territory of Shu. Surrounded by mountains and rivers, the place is basically blocked. With

land and water transportation, the commerce is developed here. It is a prosperous capital.” After the Northern Song Dynasty and the Southern Song Dynasty, the political and military status of Luzhou was greatly improved. It became the upstream position for the Song Dynasty to control the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River Plain, which is the political and economic centre of the regime. The commodity economy and the urban economy achieved considerable development; the population grew. The cultural life which could only be appreciated by the upper class in the past now became popular; a large number of entertainment methods, such as Daqu and dance emerged to meet the cultural needs of the civil class.

The prosperous political and economic culture in the region is closely related to the elaborate Song tombs of Luxian county. The exquisite living utensils and the house arrangement in the carved stone chamber show the economic strength and life taste of the tomb owner. In this narrow single chamber tomb, tomb builders reasonably arranged the limited burial space. Within the scope of the local social values at that time, they selected the representative concrete objects which had visual impacts to express the broad, illusory and abstract concepts. They transformed abstract into concrete, and transformed broad into concrete. At the same time, the narrow decoration space can not satisfy the tomb owner’s pursuit of rich life. Between the limited and infinite, “door” has become the best bridge.



Fig.6 Collected Stone Carving of Maid (2001sqm2:18)

On the one hand, the Song tombs in Luxian County show us the daily life of local gentry as well as middle and lower level officials in Sichuan Province in the Southern Song Dynasty, and make us feel as if we were in the scene with the real home arrangement and vivid character style. On the other hand, in this dark grave room dug deeply into the soil, all it shows cannot be the real life. They are a kind of reappearance or illusion of the tomb maker and the tomb owner, who wanted to bring all the beauty and happiness in real life into the underground world and possess them forever.

5. Opening the Door: Communicating with the Heaven

In China, the tradition of communicating and exchanging with “Tian” (the heaven) has been popular since ancient times. In the Han Dynasty, the image of “Tianmen” (the door of the heaven) appeared in Sichuan area. “Tianmen” was represented by stone doors with wood-imitation reliefs and “the picture of women opening the door”. Some scholars think that in Han Dynasty in Sichuan, the image of door opening is closely related to the belief of the Queen Mother of the West or the image with the meaning of fairyland. The “opening door” image becomes a symbol of fairyland, just like the Tianmen in the Han painting. “Door” symbolizes the entrance to the fairyland. The women who open the door establish a stable relationship with the Queen Mother of the West and the fairyland. They are the messengers of the fairyland or the Queen Mother of the West. “Inside the 'door' should be the fairyland where the Queen Mother of the West lives; outside the 'door' should be the scene related to the tomb owner.”

In Song tombs of Luxian County, the whole small single chamber tombs are decorated with pictures of door opening and other daily life scenes, as well as engraved tomb-guardian warriors, green dragons, white tigers and other mythical creatures. In all the six tombs that have been excavated, the gate posts are carved with warriors in relief. The warriors are stepping on auspicious clouds, holding weapons, wearing armour, and have solemn expressions. Some warriors also carry ferocious little ghosts on their hands. Obviously, the warriors are created to protect the tomb

chamber and the soul of the dead. In the traditional Chinese folk belief, stepping on auspicious clouds means the warriors come from the heaven; they are not ordinary tomb-guardian warriors. In addition, on the left and right wall pillars, wall bases and “door” sides of the tombs, there are reliefs of the four gods of Qinglong (green dragons), Baihu (white tigers), Zhuque (rose finches) and Xuanwu (tortoises) (Figure 7). These animals can not only show the location, but also represent the celestial world. They can guide the tomb owner to become immortal. In our country, there is the old saying that mythical creatures can protect the place. The *Book of Mountains and Seas* records, “there are nine doors on the face, and there are enlightened beasts guarding the door; hundreds of gods lived in the place.” *San Pu Huang Tu* records, “Canglong (black dragons), white tigers, Zhuque and Xuanwu are the four spirits of the sky; they guard the four directions.” In tombs of earlier dynasties, such as the Zhangda Tomb in Beiqi Bay, the Tomb of Prince Yide of Tang Dynasty, and the Tomb of Princess Xincheng, there are many pictures depicting fairies leading the owner of the tomb to become immortality. In Han tombs of Sichuan, the door opening image is related to the thought of ascending to the immortals. It can be inferred that builders of Song tombs put green dragons and white tigers on the side of the wood-imitation stone gate to construct the fairyland in the tomb.



Fig.7 Doors with White Tigers and Flowers in the Right Niche of the Qinglong Town No. 3 Tomb

At that time, the exquisitely carved “doors” on the tomb walls are no longer isolated doors in real life; the whole small single chamber tombs are no longer simple living rooms. They become places guarded by four gods and auspicious clouds. Tomb makers use different elements to express daily life and fairyland scenes, and integrate them into one. The scholar Hong Wu said, “the relationship between them is not clear, and it is difficult for us to determine which realm the dead will live in. It seems that in order to express their filial piety and please the dead, tomb designers provide all the answers they know about the other world.”

6. Conclusion

Stone represents hardness and immortality; trees flow the breath of life. The burial material of wood-imitation stone carving is exactly the combination of fresh life with eternity and immortality. In Song Tombs in Luxian County, the stones were carved and became exquisite wood-imitation house decorations. These chambers are surrounded with carved doors, and decorated with “door opening pictures” with different contents. Different elements such as servants dressed in Song suits, daily necessities, tomb-guardian warriors stepping on auspicious cloud, four gods and flying fairies are integrated to show relevant information of the tomb owner, to highlight the central position of the tomb owner and to construct a permanent underground living place which integrates the real life with fairyland elements. The tombs truly represent the life customs and spiritual culture of officials and middle and lower levels local gentry in the Southern Song Dynasty, forming a “synchronic” burial space.

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