

# A Preliminary Study on the Identity of the Winged Divine Beasts on the Coffin of Lv Xu's Tomb in Datong\*

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In December 2021, the Datong Archaeological Research Institute conducted an excavation of the Lv Xu's tomb in Zhijiabao Village, Pingcheng District, Datong. The Lv Xu's tomb is a newly excavated tomb of the Pingcheng period of Northern Wei Dynasty, which contains a rare painted shallow relief stone coffin. On the northern side of the coffin, there is a picture of ascending owner flanked by an ox-headed bird with wings and a mouse-headed bird with wings on each side. There are also images of azure dragon, white tiger and vermilion bird in the lower part of the east, west and north walls respectively. The identity information and the roles these images played in the tomb are not to be clarified yet. This paper aims to use iconographic methods to interpret the painted shallow relief carvings of winged divine beasts on the stone coffin, to identify their characteristics, schematic sources, and cultural attributes, and to provide some foundational work for further research on the stone coffin of the Lv Xu's tomb.

*Keywords:* Lv Xu's tomb, winged beasts, cultural relic identification

In December 2021, with the progression of the excavation of 67 tombs of the Northern Wei Dynasty in Zhijiabao Village, the stone coffin of the tomb of Lv Xu (No. M57) emerged with painted bas-relief. It is the only wood imitation stone coffin tomb with painted bas-relief unearthed in Datong City. The stone coffin is embossed with winged beasts, including a creature with beast head and bird body serving on the north wall, a pair of vermilion birds also on the north wall, a white tiger on the west wall, and an azure dragon on the east wall. From the epitaph of Lv Xu's tomb, the tomb was built in the second year of Tai'an in the Northern Wei Dynasty (456 A.D.), about 23 years later than the M7 tomb in Shaling, but it basically belongs to the tomb of the same era. At that time, Emperor Wencheng Tuoba Jun was in power, and he established Feng as the empress. The Feng family belonged to Han ethnicity, and the Sinicization policy was still implemented in the dynasty, and elements of Han culture can also be seen in the tombs. The painted bas-relief images of winged beasts on the coffin of Lv Xu's tomb are intuitively related to the Han culture in the Central Plains, but further analysis of its detailed components is required.

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*Figure 1.* Top view of the location of the coffin in Lv Xu's tomb.  
(Photographed by Datong Institute of Archaeology)

The tomb of Lv Xu is a tomb with a long slope and a square stone coffin. It faces south. The tomb is about 13 meters long and 1.1 meters wide. To the north of the center of the tomb is a stone coffin with a wood imitating front porch. The tomb is about 1.8 meters long from north to south, 3.3 meters wide from east to west, and 1.9 meters at the highest point. There are bas-reliefs on the outer south wall of the stone coffin and the east, west and north walls of the inner stone coffin. The pictures are vivid, the techniques are classic, simple and elegant, and the carvings are in fine details. The colors are mainly red, black and white, and the colors are bright.

The bas-reliefs on the four outer walls of the stone coffin are rich in content. The center of the north wall is a picture of ascending immortals, and the center of the upper part is a group of feathered human beings. On two sides there are cow-headed and mouse-headed beasts with bird bodies and wings. Such images have not been seen in other Northern Wei tombs. On the left is the image of a cow-headed bird with two horns on the forehead, and on the right is the image of a mouse-headed bird with two pointed long ears on the top of the head. The upper body of the two mythical beasts has the characteristics of human beings. They wear cross-collared and large-breasted tops, and the sleeves are drooping Hu sleeves. The lower body is a bird, with two claws, which have three toes, two forward and one backward. It has wings on the shoulders, and the interior is painted with feathers; it has a long tail like a phoenix that floats upward. Vermilion pigment remains on clothing, animal heads, bird tails, and wings.



*Figure 2.* Painted Bas-relief of the ox-headed and mouse-headed winged beasts.  
(Photographed by Datong Institute of Archaeology)

The lower parts of the east and west outer walls of the stone coffin are respectively the bas-relief of azure dragon and the bas-relief of white tiger. The image of is different from that of Heluo dragon in the Han Dynasty. The head of the dragon is like a capricorn, with long ears, two horns on the forehead, and five groups of tumor-like objects at the front end, which resemble deer antlers. The body resembles a beast, with snake scales, four claws, and long hairs on the front paws and shoulders; blue-blue pigment remains on its back and red stripes on its lower abdomen. The shape of the white tiger on the west wall is also quite special. The head is a tiger, with sharp teeth, a beard extending from the corner of the mouth, and an inscribed line similar to the pattern on the forehead; the neck is long and curved, and the body shape is roughly the same as that of the azure dragon. Claws and shoulders of the front claws have long hairs, and the tiger has a long tail. Vague vermilion paint is visible on the back.



*Figure 3.* Azure dragon and white tiger painted bas-relief from Lv Xu's tomb.  
(Photographed by Datong Institute of Archaeology)

On both sides below the north wall of the stone coffin are a vermilion bird (Zhuque), with a round head, a long neck, a pointed beak but not like an eagle's beak, a corolla above the head, and no distinct feather shape on the bird's wings. Each of the bird's claws has three toes, one toe is backward and two toes are forward. The bird takes a standing posture, and its tail has long feathers like a phoenix. The color of the vermilion bird is partially preserved, and there are traces of red paint on its tail and back.



*Figure 4.* Painted Bas-relief of vermilion bird (Zhu Que) from the Tomb of Lu Xu.  
(Photographed by Datong Institute of Archaeology)

The above-mentioned groups of winged mythical beasts were mentioned in the first round of reports of the archaeological team. The identity of the beast-headed bird-body winged beast has not yet been determined. The azure dragon and white tiger have been identified as two of the four mythical creatures guard the world in

four directions, and the divine bird should be the vermilion bird, another of the four mythological creatures. Although the creatures have been designated as vermilion bird, azure dragon and white tiger according to their orientation, there are other possibilities that need to be further ruled out and confirmed. Further exploration of its identity and role in the tomb space can be made based on the situation of its wings.



Figure 5. Lv Xu tomb's stone coffin bird body mythical beast.  
(Painted by Writers)

The images of divine beasts with beast heads and wings are quite special. In the tombs of the previous Han, Jin and even pre-Qin dynasties, images of divine beasts with bird bodies and animal heads and wings were rarely seen, and there were almost no cases of wearing cloth for divine beasts. The divine beast in the shape of a person was designed to wear pants in the tombs of the Northern Dynasties in other regions during the same period. Only the direction gods, the deity guarding against devils and plagues, wears cloths in local mythological legends. Another kind of image with a top and a beast is seen in the creations of Fuxi and Nuwa, the ancestors in Chinese mythological legends. The difference is that the ancestors have the upper body of a human body, while the upper body of the beast in the tomb of Lv Xu is a bird. The act of dressing has an image suggestiveness, that is, the person wearing the dress has the nature of a person, which means that such images are related to the fairyland system in the Central Plains.

The fairyland of the Han nationality in the Middle Ages usually comes from the relevant records in the *The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Shan Hai Jing)*. From this, it can be inferred from the literature that a rat-like mythical beast is recorded in the *Chapter of Northern Mountain (Bei Shan Jing)*

Three hundred and eighty li (1 li= 0.5 kilometers) to the north, it is called Guoshan Mountain. It is rich in lacquer, and below it is many tungsten trees. Its sunny side is rich in jade, and its shade side is rich in iron. The Yi water flows out and flows west into the yellow river. There are many birds living there. The birds have shapes like a mouse with wings, with sound like that of sheep, and can ward off soldiers. (Translated by Chen Huanliang, 2012, p. 64)





Figure 6. Nanyang Qilingang mouse body winged beast portrait brick.  
(Rubblings of Chinese Picture Brick Editorial Committee)

According to records, this mythical beast called Yu bird resembles a mouse, has bird wings, and has the same function of defending against foreign invasion as the mythical beast “Bo” (see the west wall of Jiuyuangang Tomb Road). According to the habit of choosing the mythical beasts in the *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* in the Jiuyuangang Tomb, the mythical beasts with the head of a mouse and the body of a bird in the tomb of Lv Xu may also be the Yu birds in the *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*. In addition, a winged rat body image has also appeared in several groups of winged mythical beasts unearthed in Qilingang, Nanyang, Henan Province. The head has long ears, a pointed mouth, and hairy wings grow on the shoulders. Judging from the themes of other groups of portrait bricks, such as the portraits of Kunlun fairy beasts such as unicorns discovered at the same time, it shows that the winged mice are in most cases an integral part of the Kunlun fairyland space. On the uppermost bas-relief on the north wall of the stone coffin of Lv Xu’s tomb, there is a group of relative Featherman (Yuren). Wang Chong of the Western Han Dynasty mentioned the records of the Featherman in Lunheng: “The body is born with wings, fly in all directions, loses the human body, and has special morphology” (Wang Chong, compiled by Huang Hui, 2018, p. 293).

Featherman is a very special existence in the Chinese tomb image system. Although they have the biological characteristics of human limbs, they should not be regarded as human images. One is that the Featherman has the nature of a fairy, which is an integral part of the fairyland system in the tradition of the Han nationality in the Central Plains and Taoist mythology; the other is that the feathered man also has the element of a beast (with wings), which is a very fixed Han fairyland imagination. In the circulation after its birth (about the Yin and Shang dynasties), its connotation and semantics have hardly changed. They are all “guides” who lead the dead to enter the fairyland. In the period of Han dynasty, featherman was once used as one of the messengers of the Royal Lord of the East and the Queen Mother of the West. *The Classic of Mountains and Seas ·Overseas South Classic* also

mentioned the “Featherman” as a wonderful race. However, the combination of featherman with the Kunlun mythology did not occur until some tomb murals and portrait bricks during the Han dynasties, where images of featherman messengers with human faces and bird bodies began to appear. In the famous Western Han Dynasty T-shaped silk painting from the Mawangdui tomb, there is a group of featherman with human faces and bird bodies positioned between the earthly scene and the ascension scene at the bottom of the painting. The placement of this image indicates the role of feathered people as guides in the tomb owner's journey to immortality. This group of featherman in the tomb of Lv Xu was identified by the excavation team as the tomb owner and his wife. This conclusion deserves further discussion, but it is certain that they are indeed part of the ascension scene and are of the nature of “immortals”. This shows that the bird-body, mouse-head-winged beast in Lv Xu's tomb should also belong to the Kunlun mythology system.

Although there is no corresponding textual description of the animal with the head of a cow and the body of a bird, it can be found in the images of the Han tombs of the previous excavation. Shaanxi Shenmu Dabaodang M17 Han tomb door is engraved on the upper part of the right column of the door of the tomb with the head of a cow and a bird. The bas-reliefs on the stone pillars of the tomb gate belong to the theme of the fairyland of Kunlun Mountain as a whole, and there is also the image of the Queen Mother of the West on the stone pillars. Although the portrait stone is abstract, it is enough to prove that the image of the cow head and bird body can also be attributed to the Kunlun fairyland myth.



Figure 7. Portrait of the tomb gate of Dabaodang M17 in Shenmu, Shaanxi.  
(Painted by Writers)

There is another Han culture that can also explain the original design of the images of these two mythical beasts. In the Han Dynasty, people already had a relatively clear understanding of the constellations. *Shangshu Wei: Kaolingyao* (*Apocryphal Book of Documents: On Stars*) describes:

The Twenty-Eight Mansions are the heavenly primal qi, the essence of all things. Therefore, the seven mansions of the east—Jiao, Kang, Di, Fang, Xin, Wei, and Ji—have the shape of a dragon and are called the “Azure Dragon of the Left.” The seven mansions of the south—Jing, Gui, Liu, Xing, Zhang, Yi, and Zhen—have the shape of a pheasant bird and are called the “Vermilion Bird of the Front.” The seven mansions of the west—Kui, Lou, Wei, Mao, Bi, Zi, and

Shen—have the shape of a tiger and are called the “White Tiger of the Right.” The seven mansions of the north—Dou, Niu, Nu, Xu, Wei, Shi, and Bi—have the shape of a tortoise and snake and are called the “Black Tortoise (Xuanwu) of the back.” (Compiled by Ma Guohan, 1870, p. 79)

Among them, the bull under the northern Xuanwu is the Taurus star, also known as Niu Jin Niu, the main ghost host. *Watching Constellation and Prediction (Guan Xiang Wan Zhan)* says: “Those who are white as powder in the center of the ghost are called corpse qi, and also called the corpse of the sky, it is the main death temple” (Compiled by Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2002, p. 36).

So the Ox is the constellation god who controls death among the twenty- eight constellations. And the rat is also one of the constellation gods in the twenty-eight constellations. It is the illusory constellation god, that is, the virtual sun mouse. In the ancient people’s cognition, it is usually a symbol of good luck. For the purpose of deifying the object, the coffin of Lv Xu’s tomb was carved with the body of a bird to express the divine nature. The lower part was Xuanwu, and the orientation was north. This situation should not be a coincidence but was deliberately influenced by the Han astrological culture.

The location of the azure dragon and white tiger corresponds to the guardian direction of the god of orientation. The shape of its wings is relatively special. It is a type of long hairy wings. The same type of wings is found on the murals of the tomb of the Jiuyuandang tomb, the tomb of Xu Xianxiu, and the bas-relief of the tomb of Lou Rui. The origin and development of this type of wing shape can be traced back to the previous research. In short, the long hairs that appeared on the azure dragon and white tiger in Lv Xu’s tomb were indeed a type of wing shape. In a group of Western Han Dynasty warrior royal dragon bricks of the previous discoveries, the dragon’s wings are shown as a long curly hair, and the whole body is in a state of floating upwards. The wings of dragon’s portrait bricks in the Eastern Han Dynasty in Nanqiao, Henan are basically in this shape.

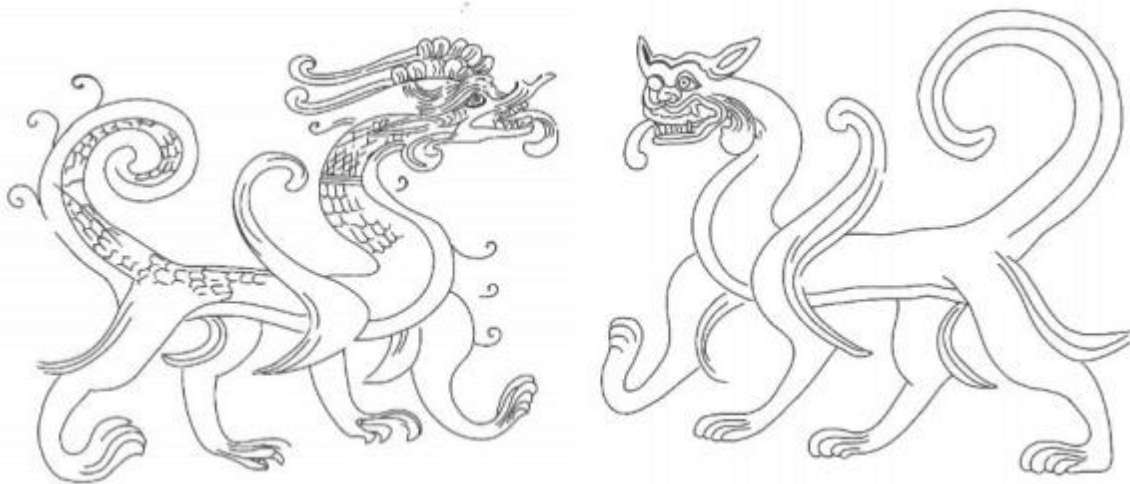


Figure 8. Bas-relief line draft of azure dragon and white tiger on the east and west wall of Lv Xu’s tomb.  
(Painted by Writers)



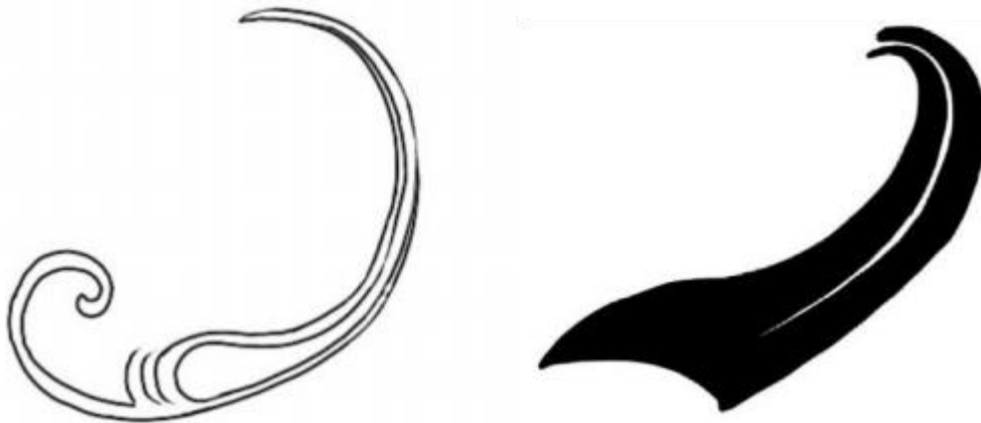


Figure 9. Two Han Dynasty dragon images portrait brick airfoil.  
(Painted by Writers)

It should be pointed out here that the winged beasts from the pre-Qin to the early Western Han Dynasty are considered the products of the exchange between the Western Regions and the Central Plains culture in the academic world, so some winged beasts can also be expressed as bird wings. This view is indisputable. After the Western Han Dynasty, the habit of adding wings became more and more integrated with the culture of the Han people in the Central Plains. In the funeral culture, the winged beasts are almost the same as the ordinary beasts in function, and the artistic image is completely “Chinese”. The long hairy wings that appeared in the tombs of the Han people in the Central Plains from the late Western Han Dynasty to the Southern Dynasties were undoubtedly the localized artistic creation of the Central Plains Han people after accepting this concept. The winged mythical beast in the tomb of Lv Xu inherited part of this re-creation, so it is believed that its long hairy wings were the result of the influence of the Han culture in the Central Plains.

However, in terms of artistic features, the dragon and tiger wings of Lv Xu's tomb have gradually separated from the simple shape of the long hairy wings of the Han Dynasty. From the bas-relief lines, there was an attempt to change to an elegant style. The edges of the body appear, and the inwardly curling lines with varying thicknesses. However, this attempt is rather shallow, and the depiction, including the inner lines of the wings, hints at the immature characteristics of its technique. And due to the limitation of the space of the stone coffins, this group of images of azure dragons and white tigers lacks the dynamic trend of the four gods in the Southern Dynasties area, but only initially shows the tendency of the artistic style of the Han culture.

Excluding the stylistic factor, this group of bas-reliefs of azure dragon and white tiger basically conforms to the traditional modeling concept of the Han culture in the Central Plains, and the tomb of Lv Xu is also the earliest tomb of the Northern Wei Dynasty in which the images of the four gods have appeared among the tombs excavated in Shanxi. The epitaph records that the owner of the tomb, Lv Xu was from Huaili County, Fufeng. After 446 A.D., the place was roughly near Xingping, Shaanxi Province. Lv Xu himself immigrated from Hexi. If this is the case, the images of the four gods in the tomb should be inherited from Wei Jin Dynasty's Hexi system. The biggest difference between the Jin Hexi system and the four gods of the Central Plains in the Han Dynasties is that the shape of the dragon is closer to the animal body than the python, and the kiss of the dragon head is different from the Heluo azure dragon, but similar to the river god Capricorn in Hindu mythology. Therefore, the materials of the four gods in the tomb of Lv Xu can prove that some Han cultural concepts in the early Northern

Wei Dynasty may not have come from the central area of Heluo, but from the edge of Hexi, which was influenced by the culture of the Han culture during the Han and Jin rule.

Phoenix and vermilion bird are very classic images of divine birds in Chinese culture. The concept of the phoenix bird has been formed in the Warring States Period, and the tomb gold ware made of it is also common. The concept of vermilion bird was formed relatively late. The *Chunqiu Wei: Yankongtu (Apocryphal Book of Spring and Autumn Annals: The deeds of Confucius)* in the Han Dynasty contains:

The ancients used the five spirits to match the five directions: dragon wood, phoenix fire, scales earth, white tiger gold, and divine turtle water... Therefore, it is said: Seeing the rites and cultivating, the unicorn swimming; thinking wisdom and act with faith, the white tiger taming disturbance; words following from the text, and the tortoise is in the marsh; listening, intelligence and righteousness, and the river would be known for the dragon; the graceful body is benevolent, and the phoenix comes to the ceremonial phoenix, bird of Chunhuo (vigorous life), symbol of positive energy like fire, only the ones with noble characters can reach the holy bird. (Ago Kayamado, 1994, p. 1016)

At this time, the concept of phoenix bird was gradually confused with vermilion bird, and their function gradually converged. Eventually both became one of the five spirits that symbolized the fire of the south. In the decoration of the tombs of the Han Dynasty, the phoenix bird or the vermilion bird has become a very common image of the divine bird, and paired vermilion birds became common. The sacred bird in Lv Xu's tomb is clearly of the nature of the vermilion bird, but it is not located on the southern wall, that is, it does not correspond to the direction of the four gods' guardianship. Because the south wall of the stone coffin is replaced by a warrior figure, and the bird is transferred to the north wall. The combination form of this pair of two vermilion birds (phoenix birds) is related to the earliest concept of door chicken. The portrait of Dongque, Shaoshi, Dengfeng, Henan Province is carved with two opposite rooster images (as shown in Figure 10). This kind of door chicken image may be related to the preference for chickens in ancient China. During the Southern Dynasties, some folk portals also had the custom of posting paired chickens in front of their doors.



Figure 10. A portrait of a brick door and a chicken in the East Que of the Shaoshi in Dengfeng, Henan.  
(Rubbings of Chinese Picture Brick Editorial Committee)

In some higher-level tombs, the image of the door chicken was replaced by the phoenix (vermilion bird) to show the status of the owner of the tomb. However, as stated in the epitaph, "Only the second year of Tai'an, Dadai, the second year of Bingshen, the first month of, the twenty-third day of Dinghai Shuo, Jiyou Shiwen, General Jiang, Fufeng Prefecture, Huailijie, Yongzhou, Fufeng County, Huaili County, Lv Xu stone room for one". It appears that the owner of the tomb, Lv Xu, was not a dignitary, but a commoner with more family background and prestige. This shows from another level that the four gods system or the Han mythological

system in the early Northern Wei Dynasty was not given more political factors, so it can also be said that the adoption of Han culture by the regime of the Northern Dynasty did not go to a deeper level.

In addition, the shape of the Vermilion bird's wings is relatively abstract, which is different from the wings of the feathered man and the beast-headed bird-winged beast above. There are three feasible explanations. First, the four gods in the tomb of Lv Xu are in a slightly lower class than the feathered and the beast-headed beast. In the carving, a distinction is made between the winged vermilion bird and the feathered beast. Second, the winged beasts in Lv Xu's tomb generally have the tendency of Han art, and some earlier Han portrait bricks also simplified the wings of the vermilion bird into abstract shapes. Third, in order to highlight the differences in the hierarchical relationship between the above-mentioned mythical beasts, the contrast between the upper and lower shapes and the simplicity of the whole picture is used to create a strong contrast effect in the rhythm of the picture.



*Figure 10.* Bas-relief line draft of Suzaku from Lv Xu's tomb.  
(Painted by Writers)

There is also a theory about the identity of the bird's image. In the tombs of Xu Xianxiu and Lou Rui excavated in Shanxi before, there is an image of a pair of birds that can be called Garuda, and other parts of the sarcophagus of Lv Xu's tomb show obvious Buddhist elements. What about the possibility of a Garuda, the Buddhist Garuda (Garuda in Sanskrit)? The author believes that the influence of the concept and factors of Garuda cannot be ruled out. Before the owner of the tomb, Lv Xu moved to Datong, the concept of divine Garuda was already shown from the western wall of Cave 257 excavated in Dunhuang. Garuda images are also found in Kizil, Kumtula and Sennusem Grottoes. The image of Garuda in the frescoes of the Western Regions Grottoes can be attributed to the following characteristics: (1) Garuda can be in the form of a bird with a human face or a bird body. As for the overall form, there is no paradigm that must be followed as the earliest image of Garuda is

eagle-shaped; (2) the characteristics of bird-shaped Garuda are basically determined to be sharp beak, long tail, sharp claws, patterned, and the head can be light or lotus crown; (3) not all Garudas need serpent dragons in their mouths. If the Vermillion Bird in Lv Xu's tomb is judged by this standard, it seems that it can also be regarded as a Garuda. However, the author believes that this kind of interpretation is too extreme. Although there are cases where the images of vermilion bird and tortoise are missing in the tombs of the Northern Dynasties and even the Han Dynasties, they are generally missing at the same time or only missing tortoise. Since tortoise has appeared in the tomb of Lv Xu, then it proves that the four gods are complete in this tomb, so the divine bird should not be a Garuda.

In ancient funerals, exorcism was the most important ritual. Since the Zhou Dynasty, it has been widely believed that the deceased has a soul and will enter another world to live after death. However, there are all kinds of devils to make the soul restless. Azure dragon and white tiger serve as the guardian in the Han tomb system has been basically established during the Han Dynasty. Guo Pu said in *The Burial Book*: "The dragon and the tiger hold the guard, the host and the guest greet each other... dissipate the living spirits, so the dragon and tiger guard the cave" (Guo Pu, 2012, p. 181).

It shows that the main function of the azure dragon and the white tiger in the tomb is to protect the tomb. For the bas-relief of the tomb coffin of Lv Xu, the meaning of this function exists, and the craftsman also made a deliberate distinction between the functions of different beasts. As pointed out above, when dealing with the images of the vermilion bird on the lower level, the artistic techniques used by the craftsmen are obviously not as detailed and complicated as those with the head, bird and body of the immortal creatures on the upper part. This distinction also implies that the images of the azure dragon, the white tiger and the vermilion bird are functionally and richly related. The beast head, bird body, divine beast and feathered man with the "fairy spirit" are different. Even in the Mawangdui T-shaped silk painting mentioned above, the image of the dragon only exists to carry the tomb owner and escort the tomb owner to ascend to immortality.

Generally, the burial chamber and the coffin belong to the "sacred realm" of the owner of the tomb, and it is also the end point for the soul of the owner of the tomb to ascend into the heaven and leave the human world. The tomb gate usually plays a transitional role. It is the only way for the owner of the tomb to lead to the end point or to the "sacred realm". Thus, it requires certain force to guard and to protect from disturbance. This concept has similarity with the modern Han culture of sacrifice, where a small circle drawn on the ground to keep the tomb owner from outside disturbances. In some tombs of the Northern Dynasties, such as the tomb of Xu Xianxiu and the tomb of Lou Rui, the images of the azure dragon and the white tiger also appear on the tomb gate, and in terms of location, they exist to protect the sacred space of the tomb. In the same way, the four gods on the lower layer of the stone coffin in Lv Xu's tomb are basically the same height as the gate on the south wall of the stone coffin, which also shows that the winged beasts on the lower layer should play the role of tomb guards.

In the funeral customs of the Han ethnicity, in addition to the tomb-guarding mythical beasts that protect the soul of the tomb owner, there are also some immortal beasts that represent the tomb owner's ascension process and help the tomb owner escape from the mundane world and enter the fairy world. The difference is that fairy beasts usually do not have the terrifying temperament of tomb-guarding beasts. There are tiger gods and rabbit gods left on the four walls of Lou Rui's tomb. The twelve zodiac gods not only have the well-known function of guarding the living who were born in their zodiac year, but also lead the deceased to enter the fairyland. The cow

god and the rat god are commonly used folk gods to guide the soul of the dead, and the image of the beast head and bird body in Lv Xu's tomb has similar indication. As a "fairy spirit", the upper animal head, bird body and wing head are obviously more exquisite in shape than the lower four gods. The cow head and the mouse head have a gentle face and elegant posture, not as fierce as the azure dragon and white tiger. In detail, you can even find the cow head with a smiling face. Moreover, the center of the two divine beasts with the head and the body of the beast is a man with a bird body and a face and a feathered man. Judging from the long-term serving and guiding functions of the feathered man, this group of winged beasts should be more functional than guarding.

As Professor Wu Hung stated in *Space in Art History*: "It is not the images in the space, but the images that constitute the space, and the space therefore exists in the images" (Wu Hung, 2018, p. 86). For most tomb murals, the images themselves also have the function of distinguishing the space. The internal space of the tombs in Han ethnicity in middle plains is divided into two parts. The first part is the passage space, which is the tomb passage and the corridor for the tombs. The second part is the divine space for the soul. In general, it is the chamber for the coffin. This symbolizes as the Fairyland, which is the separation point from the world. The form of Lv Xu's tomb is not of high standard, only the stone coffin is rich in images. The painted bas-relief on the stone coffin subtly divides the space of the stone coffin. The images of the four lower-level gods such as azure dragon, white tiger, vermilion bird, and tortoise belong to the tomb passage. The feathered man and the bird-winged beast belong to the sacred space of the soul. From this point of view, the internal processing method of Lv Xu's tomb has basically learned some conceptual contents in the traditional Han tomb format. It tried to divide the image space inside the tomb. Compared with the Northern Wei mural tomb in Shaling, which is about 23 years earlier than the Lv Xu tomb, the latter is more mature in concept. The image space system inside Shaling tomb is not as clear and standardized as Lv Xu's tomb. The change in Lv Xu's tomb indicates a close relation to the tomb owner Lv Xu's Hexi origin. It shows the significance of the historical event of the large-scale immigration of the Hexi region to the Northern Wei Dynasty in 426 A.D. for the spread of the Han culture in the Northern Dynasty.

### Conclusion

Preliminary study shows that the winged beasts in the tomb of Lv Xu were less affected by external factors in terms of identity and belonged to the standard Han culture system. The painted bas-relief sculptures of winged beasts in Lv Xu tomb, which is newly seen in tombs excavated in the area, shows the continuation of the Han tradition. However, due to factors such as immature carving techniques, incomplete Han culture influence, and the Hexi culture origin, the painted bas-reliefs in Lv Xu tomb show different winged beasts in comparison to the ones in the He Nan & Luo Yang's Han tombs.

Therefore, although it can be clearly stated that it is an expression of the traditional mythological beliefs and funeral concepts of the Han ethnicity, it is not appropriate to consider this as authentic Han art. It can only be said that it has the tendency of Han ethnicity tomb art to a certain extent. In addition, there are images of tomb warriors dressed in Indian-style clothing, with their chests and belly exposed, and the hairstyles like snails, as well as the inscriptions of Buddhas sitting on their knees, which are exotic influences from the Buddhism. Further study is needed to understand the cultural and artistic characteristics of these winged mythical beasts in combination with other parts of the tombs.

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