

SILK ROAD DRESS IN A CHINESE TOMB: XU XIANXIU AND SIXTH-CENTURY COSMOPOLITANISM

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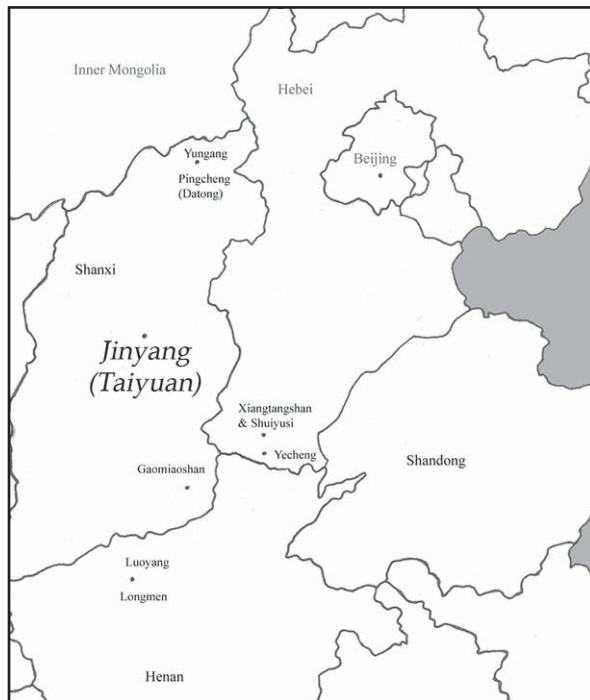
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The Northern Qi tomb of Xu Xianxiu in Taiyuan, dating to 571 CE, is remarkable for its unusually well-preserved tomb murals, depicting the deceased and his wife along with over 200 attendants of various kinds. It is a rich resource for the study of a period during which categories of “indigenous” and “foreign” were notably fluid (Lewis 2011, pp. 167–68). By the Northern Qi, the preceding two centuries of conquest and trade gave rise to a cosmopolitan culture that drew on a variety of influences, presaging the better known cosmopolitanism of the Tang. The varieties of dress shown in the tomb’s murals illustrate the lively interactions between Chinese and Silk Road cultures during the period, belying the old stereotype of inexorable Sinicization. In fact, the figures in Xu’s tomb illustrate a complex transition by which certain styles of dress, derived from Central Asian models, became entirely normalized and domesticated in

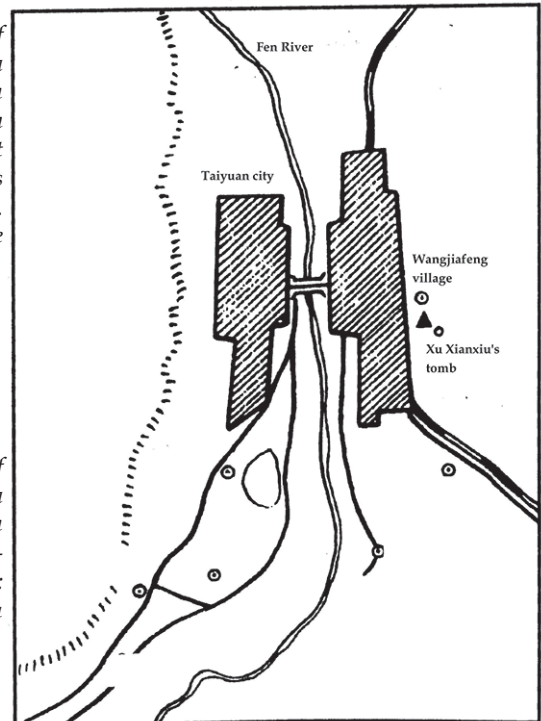
China by the beginning of the Tang. They can help illuminate the process by which the foreign becomes familiar in a multicultural society.

The tomb

Xu Xianxiu’s tomb is located in an orchard near the village of Wangjiafeng, in the eastern part of Taiyuan City, the capital of Shanxi province [Figs. 1, 2]. It is marked above ground with a tumulus that rises five meters above the flat surface of the land, making it visible from a significant distance. It remained undisturbed in modern times until December of 2000, when local residents noticed that tomb robbers had attempted to dig into the tomb, and alerted the archaeological authorities. Salvage excavations and conservation work took place over the next two years, concluding in October of 2002 (Shanxi kaogu 2003).

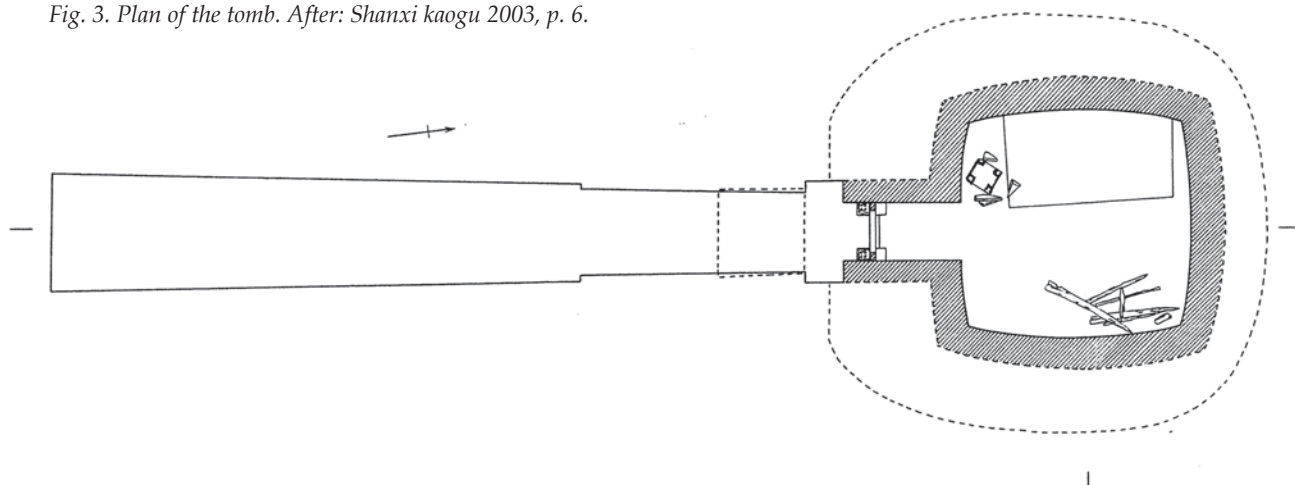


< Fig. 1. Map of northeast China showing location of Taiyuan, with other significant cities and sites of the period. Drawing by the author.



> Fig. 2. Map of the Taiyuan area with location of Xu Xianxiu's tomb. After: Shanxi kaogu 2003, p. 5.

Fig. 3. Plan of the tomb. After: *Shanxi kaogu* 2003, p. 6.



The tomb consists of a single, large, chamber about 6.5 m square, constructed of grey bricks, with a four-sided vaulted ceiling. The chamber is located directly under the tumulus, with a short, barrel-vaulted brick entryway and a fifteen-meter-long tomb passage dug directly into the earth [Fig. 3]. The tomb passage begins at ground level at its southern end, extending northward and sloping down to the level of the tomb entrance. The entrance was sealed with a carved stone door and door frame.

The presence of no fewer than five looters' tunnels (four in the main chamber and one in the entryway) suggests it was robbed at various times throughout its history, and relatively few grave goods survive. What remains are mostly objects whose value is largely historical: ceramic tomb figurines and glazed vessels, and the carved-stone tomb epitaph. A plain silver ring, and a more ornate gold ring with a blue intaglio gem, were overlooked by robbers in the rubble, and are nearly the only objects of precious metal found during the dig.

The tomb epitaph identifies the male tomb occupant as one Xu Xianxiu (徐显秀), who died in 571 CE at the age of seventy. Xu was the son and grandson of officials who served the Northern Wei. As a young man, he became a follower of the Northern Wei general Erzhu Rong (尔朱荣), and then of Erzhu's own general Gao Huan (高欢), who became father and grandfather of the emperors of the Northern Qi dynasty (550–577). Under the Northern Qi, Xu served in a series of important military and civil positions, culminating in his enfeoffment as Prince of Wu'an (武安王) under the reign of Emperor Wucheng (武成帝), and later promotion under Houzhu (后主) to Defender-in-Chief (太尉), the head of the imperial armies (Taiyuan wenwu 2005, n.p.). In other words, Xu was an important military official of the Northern Qi, and the scale and elaboration of his tomb were commensurate with his rank and position.

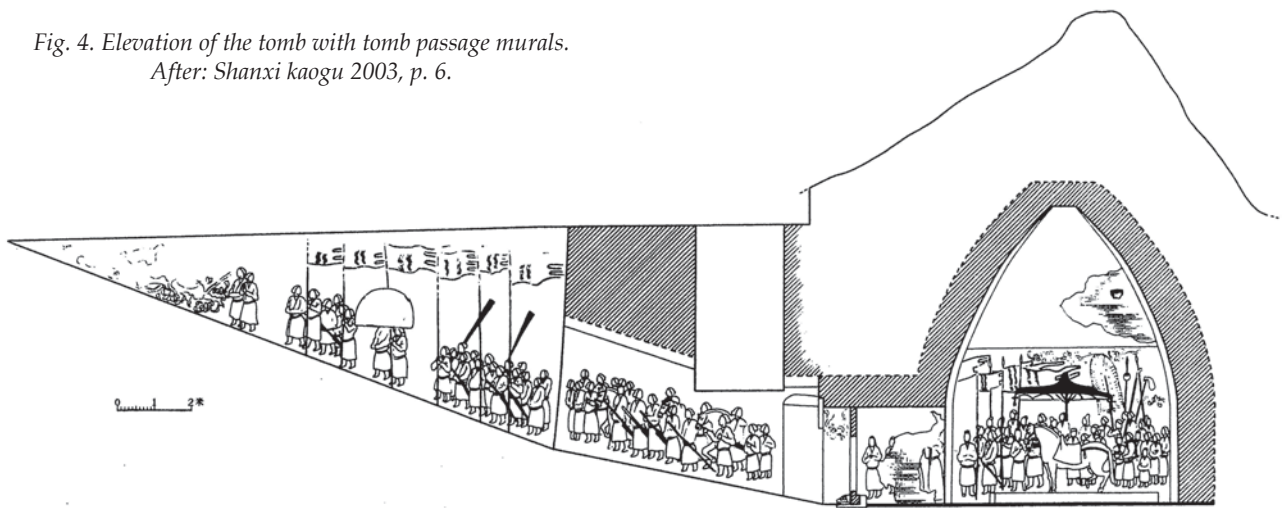
Despite its past depredations, the tomb immediately became the focus of intense interest for its unusually well-preserved mural paintings. Both side walls of the sloping tomb passage and the barrel-vaulted entry, and all four walls of the tomb chamber, are covered with paintings of mostly human figures, painted at or nearly life size. The area covered is more than 300 square meters, and more than 200 human figures are represented. The figures in the tomb passage are painted on a skim coat of white plaster applied directly to the earthen walls. Within the brick structure of the tomb chamber and entryway, a thicker layer of plaster has been applied over the bricks to create a smooth surface for the murals. Other than one missing section on the south wall of the tomb chamber, the murals in Xu Xianxiu's tomb are essentially intact, and provide a rich visual reference for their time.

The murals

This tomb displays a decorative scheme which Zheng Yan has characterized as the "Yecheng model" (邺城规制) (Zheng 2002, pp. 181ff). The Yecheng model is found in aristocratic tombs of Northern Qi date found in the region of the Northern Qi capital, Yecheng (now Linzhang county in southern Hebei province). Tombs of this type are also found in and around the city of Jinyang (now Taiyuan), the Northern Qi's secondary capital. Yecheng-type tombs are simple in layout, like Xu Xianxiu's tomb, comprising a single main tomb chamber with entrance and tomb passage. They are furnished with extensive and elaborate mural paintings in a distinctively Northern Qi style, painted using an iron-wire outline in black on a white plaster ground, which was then filled in with color. Of the eight or more such tombs which have been excavated,¹ Xu's is by far the best preserved.

The decorative program of Xu Xianxiu's tomb (Taiyuan wenwu 2005) begins at ground level, at the en-

Fig. 4. Elevation of the tomb with tomb passage murals.
After: Shanxi kaogu 2003, p. 6.



trance to the tomb passage, and culminates on the rear wall of the main chamber. Walking down the sloping passage, the visitor is flanked on either side by mural paintings [Fig. 4]. Those at ground level are fragmentary, but seem to represent a pair of supernatural guardian figures, one on either side of the passage. These are followed by a large number of human figures, making up an honor guard of armed soldiers. These male figures carry a variety of weapons, and fall broadly into two groups. The first group, on both sides of the upper part of the tomb passage, hold aloft standards with streaming banners, and some bear long conical trumpets over their shoulders. In other tombs, murals and figurines show similar instruments actually being played, as if to provide a martial fanfare (see Cheng 2003, p. 441). The second group, nearer to the tomb entrance, bear no banners or trumpets, but lead two war horses, saddled and bridled, on either side. All the figures on the passage walls are painted in three-quarter view, and all face outward, as if they are keeping watch for threats that might come from the outside world. The visitor passes between their ranks like a supplicant.

The tomb entrance, with its stone framing, is flanked by two painted guard figures, armed with whips or flails. Similarly armed figures stand on both sides of the barrel-vaulted entryway. The visitor emerges through an arched doorway into the main tomb chamber, a high-vaulted, square room. On the near wall, the mural paintings have fallen away to the right (east) of the entrance, but the remaining mural on the left side allows us to imagine the missing material with some confidence. The entrance is flanked by standard-bearers who carry banners on long pikes and face the doorway on both sides. Above the doorway are two more supernatural guardians, descending from above.

The procession of standard-bearers continues around the corners of the chamber and onto both side walls [Fig. 5]. The east wall is dominated by a large and very ornate ox-cart, surrounded by grooms and attendants [Fig. 6, next page]. The attendants who follow behind the cart, supporting its canopy or holding fans or other objects, are clearly female. In the corre-

Fig. 5. Drawing of the murals in the tomb chamber.
After: Shanxi kaogu 2003, p. 16.

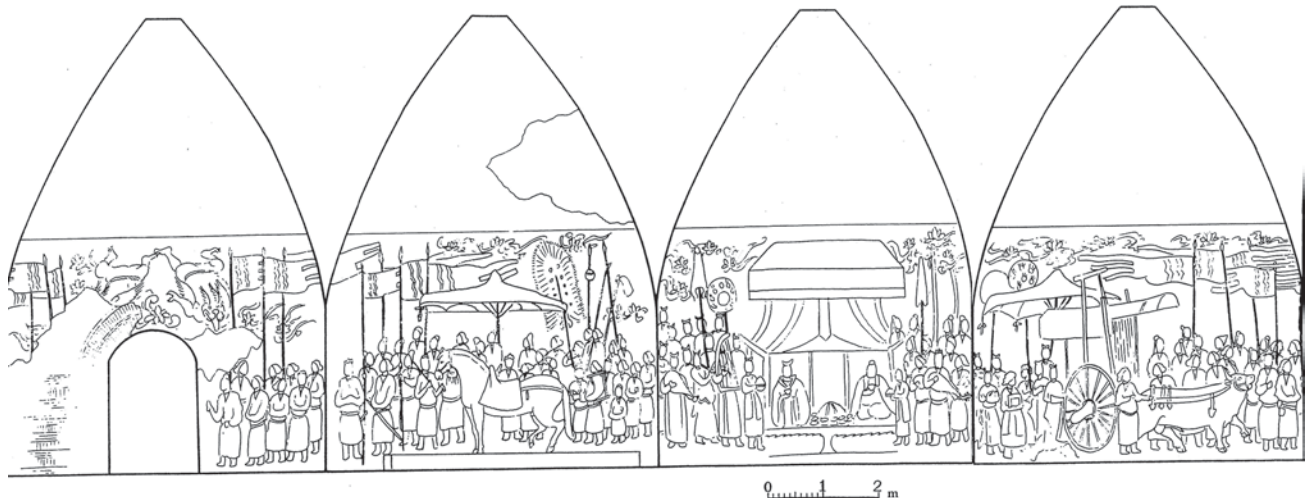




Fig. 6. Photograph of the east wall murals.
After: *Taiyuan wenwu* 2005, Pl. 22.

sponding position on the west wall is a riderless horse [Fig. 7], saddled and caparisoned with a rich saddle-cloth. The horse is followed by male attendants, who bear a large canopy, a huge fan of the deer-tail (鹿尾) type, long pikes and other weapons, and various items of gear.

So far, all the figures encountered by the visitor on the way into the tomb have faced outward, as if to guard against unwelcome intrusion. Within the tomb, the ox-cart and horse also face outward, suggesting the possibility of movement toward the tomb entrance and beyond. But the figures on the rear wall of the chamber face inward, in a composition centered on the portraits of Xu Xianxiu and his wife, whom the viewer approaches face to face [Fig. 8; Color Plate I]. They sit on an elevated platform couch (床) under a high, square canopy, which has been drawn back on either side with ribbonlike ties. A folding screen stands behind them. Xu himself sits on the proper left (the viewer's right) and his wife is at his right hand. Between them are numerous dishes and platters piled high with food. Each holds a drinking cup in the right hand.

Xu and his wife are flanked by an entourage of servants and musicians. On their immediate left and right

are a pair of female servants bearing trays of drinking cups. To the viewer's right, nearest Xu Xianxiu himself, the attendants are all men, including two *pipa* (lute) players and what may be a flutist, along with others bearing objects including a furled umbrella-like canopy. To the viewer's left, nearest Xu's wife, the attendants are all women, and include musicians playing a *pipa*, a *sheng* (mouth organ), and a *konghou* (harp). Others carry a second canopy and a large round feather fan. All round the four walls of the chamber, flying lotus blossoms and buds fill the air.

The murals on the vaulted ceiling are damaged and faded, but details of constellations can be made out here and there, and the overall design probably represented the heavens. It is not unusual for mural-painted tombs of the sixth century to have cosmological designs painted on the ceilings, including constellations, the Milky Way, zodiac animals, supernatural creatures, and so on. Examples include the late Northern Wei tomb of Yuan Yi near Luoyang, with a relatively well-preserved star map (Wu 2010, p. 51), or the Northern Qi tomb of [X] Daogui² near Jí'nán, in which the portrait of the deceased, on the north wall, sits beneath the Big Dipper and Polaris, flanked by the sun and moon (Zheng 2002, p. 126).

The directionality of this pictorial programme is common to many mural-painted tombs of the sixth century, including those that conform to the "Ye-



Fig. 7. Photograph of the west wall murals.
After: Taiyuan wenwu 2005, Pl. 31.

Fig. 8. Photograph of the north wall murals.
After: Taiyuan wenwu 2005, Pl. 15.



cheng model,” as well as later tombs of the same basic type (with arched brick chambers and long, sloping passageways) from the first half of the Tang dynasty (Wu 2010, pp. 213–17). The use of pictorial decoration to give meaning and direction to the spaces of a tomb goes back at least to the Han dynasty, when massed chariots and processions of immortal creatures suggested the movement of the deceased through the spaces of the tomb or out into the world. The same tension seen in Han tombs, between the tomb as the home of the deceased and the idea of a journey from the tomb into the afterlife (Wu 1997, pp. 86–88), is visible in the murals of Xu’s tomb. Xu and his wife sit in state, attended by servants and guarded by armed men, and provided with everything they need for enjoyment of a life in the tomb, even as their fine horse and costly oxcart wait, together with an armed escort, supernatural guardians, and traveling gear, to carry them into another existence.

The orientation of the tomb ensures that the portraits of the deceased occupy a position which had both cosmological and political significance. Xu and his wife are located at the north end of the tomb, facing south. In the old geomantic tradition based on principles of *yin* and *yang*, the south-facing position is a position of power and authority. The ruler in his palace is said to sit in the north and face south, which was often literally as well as figuratively true, such that even in very early texts the phrase “to face south” (南面) is used as a synonym for “to rule.”³ The placement of Xu’s portrait at the north end of the tomb puts the viewer in the position of a supplicant, approaching a person of superior rank.

The relative positions of Xu and his wife are also governed by concepts of *yin* and *yang*; from their perspective, Xu sits on the left and his wife, on the right. Traditionally, the left hand is the position of greater prestige, as we see in Chinese official titles (where the official of the Left is always senior to the same-titled official of the Right). The reasoning behind this is also apparently related to yin-yang cosmology (Wong 2003, p. 96). The same distinction is easily applied to gender, not only because men were considered superior to women, but also because *yang* is understood as a masculine force, and *yin* a feminine one; this makes it natural for Xu to sit on the left and his wife on the right.

That said, this gendering of space breaks down in the position of the riderless horse on the west wall, and the ox-cart on the east wall. Their presence in the tomb is not remarkable: they represent a means of transport for the deceased on the journey into the afterlife. The theme of the journey of the soul is an old one in Chinese tombs, and well established by

this date (Cheng 2011, p. 79; Wu 2010, pp 192ff). Beyond this, the lavishness of both vehicles is also a sign of the status of the deceased. In this case, the richly bedecked stallion surrounded by male attendants is clearly Xu Xianxiu’s own mount, while the elaborate enclosed ox-cart, followed by female attendants, obviously belongs to Xu’s wife. One might expect the ox-cart to appear on the west wall, nearest the figure of Xu’s wife, but for reasons that remain unclear, their positions are reversed.

Dress, textiles, and Silk Road trade

Because of the remarkable state of preservation of the murals in Xu Xianxiu’s tomb, it offers a trove of evidence for investigating any number of questions about the Northern Qi. It is a particularly rich source of evidence for modes of contemporary dress and personal adornment. The amount of attention the muralists have given to details of dress and textiles in general, especially in the tomb chamber, suggests that the details were important. Clearly, the way people dressed was not a trivial detail in this context, but rather served as an important visual signal of identity.

Of course, it is far from clear that any of the figures other than those of Xu and his wife necessarily represent actual living members of Xu’s household. Just as the terra-cotta warriors in the tomb of the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty are unlikely to be portraits of actual soldiers of the Qin army (Kesner 1995), the servants and attendants and soldiers who surround Xu and his wife are probably not portraits of the people who attended them in life. Rather, they are types: the soldier, the groom, the lady-in-waiting. The clothing they wear may not tell us exactly how servants in the Xu household actually dressed, but it can tell us much about what kind of dress was considered fitting for each of these different roles.

The same is likely also true of the figures of Xu and his wife, even though these are portraits. It is conceivable that they were indeed painted wearing articles of clothing that they owned in life. But it is just as likely that the portraits represent idealized forms of dress considered appropriate to their station in life — or even to a higher station they hoped to occupy after death. Is what we see here everyday dress for people of their social standing? Is it formal court attire? Is it particular to a special occasion of some sort? Might it be somewhat better than the dress they actually wore in life? No textiles remain among the looted tomb goods to help answer these questions. But the representation of dress and textiles in the tomb murals still has a great deal to tell us, even though it cannot be perfectly correlated with actual sartorial practice.

With this in mind, the most striking thing about the styles of dress represented in Xu Xianxiu's tomb murals is how many of them are derived from Central Asian or nomadic designs. The soldiers, grooms, and other male attendants, for example, all dress in the same basic attire: a long tunic or kaftan falling to below the knee, with a V-neck and what appears to be a wrap closure, in which the left-hand front panel laps over the right panel. The narrow-sleeved tunic, which comes in a range of solid colors, is worn over a round-collared undergarment of a light color. Each man wears a contrasting belt that sits low on the hips, sometimes decorated with studs, from which a scabbard or a purse may be suspended. Each also wears high black or brown boots. The men wear a variety of practical headgear, from simple cloth kerchiefs not unlike the later Tang *futou* (幘头), to larger turban-like hats, to small round or pointed caps with a neck-cloth hanging down behind. These doubtless indicate distinctions of rank or function which would have been legible to a contemporary viewer.

All of these details of dress can also be seen represented in other contemporary artworks, including tomb murals, tomb figurines, and the donor images found on Buddhist monuments; for a few comparative examples, see Figs. 9, 10, 11. That said, from tomb to tomb and from monument to monument (and sometimes from figure to figure), one can observe variations in how garments and accessories are combined. This diversity of detail makes it impossible to produce a clear typological reading of sixth-century dress: we can't reliably tell soldiers from house servants from traveling merchants, based solely on what they are wearing. There were doubtless forms of dress considered appropriate to soldiers and to servants and so on, but there was also, clearly, considerable room for variation. The differences may reflect regional fashions, economic constraints, personal preferences (perhaps the figures on the walls of this tomb are dressed in Xu

Xianxiu's particular household livery), or any number of other influences.

The basic form of dress we see here — long, belted tunic, boots, and presumably trousers underneath (which are more visible in other representations of this dress) — is clearly derived from similar attire first depicted in Chinese art during the fifth century, after the founding of the Northern Wei dynasty. The Northern Wei was founded by the Xianbei, an ethnic confederation with its roots in what is now China's far northeast. Xianbei dress, as we see it represented during the early years of their rule over northern China, consisted of this long tunic over trousers and boots for men, and long skirts for women. This is by contrast to forms of male and female dress derived from Han-period prototypes, consisting of a long wrap robe closed with a sash, with loose, voluminous sleeves. (For more detailed discussion, see Dien 2007, pp. 317–19.)

The Xianbei were still recognized as a distinct ethnic group during the Northern Qi, and the ruling Gao family had strong Xianbei ties, but by the founding of the Northern Qi in 550, the Xianbei had been living in China proper, and intermarrying with local families, for well over 150 years. After



Fig. 10. Figure of armored man with tiger-skin pauldrons, from the tomb of Xu Xianxiu. After: Shanxi kaogu 2003, Pl. 37.

Fig. 9. Male and female donors from the front wall of the Shuiyusi West Cave Temple, Fengfeng, Hebei. Northern Qi, c. 570 CE. Photograph by the author.





Fig. 11. Donor figure representing Chen Lanhe, wearing a fur coat as a mantle. From the Gaomiaoshan cave temple, Gaoping, Shanxi. Eastern Wei, c. 540-550 CE. Photograph by the author.

so long, distinctions such as “Xianbei” and “Han” had become remarkably fluid (Lewis 2011, pp. 144ff; Dien 2007, p. 427). Similarly, by the late sixth century, it is clear that what we might call “Xianbei-type dress” and “Chinese-type dress” coexisted in China, and that they were in the process of acquiring other meanings besides the strictly ethnic. Eventually, by the early Tang dynasty, the Xianbei-type combination of belted tunic and boots that we see here becomes a form of standard Chinese men’s dress, even as it also continues to be worn by Central Asians outside of China. Chinese-type robes continue to be worn by certain types of official into the early Tang, but in general, Chinese-type garments remain much more common in women’s dress than in men’s (for a fuller version of this argument, see Lingley 2010). Women’s dress is also more variable in design, beginning in the late sixth century, than men’s dress, and more subject to short-term shifts in fashion.

Xu Xianxiu himself is dressed in attire that differs little from that of his male attendants and soldiers, except that it is clearly finer and more luxurious. He

is wearing a similar long tunic in an auspicious red color, with a black belt. His cross-legged pose and one dangling sleeve obscure his feet, but likely the ensemble included trousers and boots like all the others. His headgear is a winged gauze cap which elsewhere seems to indicate official, or at least high, status. The most striking detail of Xu’s attire, and one which has not been seen in other tombs of the period, is the remarkable fur coat he wears over his shoulders. It is made of the white winter pelts of ermine, with their black tail tips; it has a collar and shoulder pieces of contrasting dark gray fur, and a dark cloth lining.

Although the coat clearly has sleeves, Xu is not using them, but rather wearing the coat thrown over his shoulders like a cloak. Seen regularly in other sixth-century art, this seems to be a Central Asian fashion. It is traceable as far back as the fifth century BCE, in reliefs at Persepolis depicting Median ambassadors to the Persian court. The same style survived into the modern day in coats worn by Eurasian shepherds, such as the Hungarian *szür* (Gervers-Molnár 1973).

As for the material of the coat, ermine was certainly among the furs hunted and traded by Siberian and Central Asian nomads from the Iron Age onward: samples of ermine are found in garments from the Pazyryk tombs, dated to the 4th-3rd centuries BCE (Rudenko 1970, p. 200; also pp. 59, 85, 86, 97). Extensive finds of medieval Central Asian silver in the Ural Mountains, long a region of fur export, suggest an ongoing trade relationship which probably included ermine pelts. Later records indicate that ermine was traded between Russia and China in the late imperial period: a 1668 caravan to Beijing carried 3574 ermine pelts (Lim 2013, p. 31). Although we have no records to explain the symbolic status of ermine in medieval China, we do know that a fur coat was itself a sign of high status (Zheng 2003, p. 60). The small size of the ermine (a kind of weasel) and the number of pelts required to make a full-size coat suggest that this must have been a valued luxury garment.

The ladies-in-waiting that attend on Xu Xianxiu’s wife also wear a form of dress that is based more closely on Xianbei or other Central Asian prototypes than it is on the Han wrap robe. The dress they wear seems to be particular to the Northern Qi and perhaps also to the Shanxi region, as it is also seen in the Shuozhou tomb mentioned in note 1. These attendants wear a round-necked under-dress that falls to mid-calf. Over this is worn a shorter, plain coat of a different fabric, that falls to about knee level. In a few cases the attendants seem to have added a belt over both the under-dress and the coat, and then shrugged out of the coat’s sleeves, leaving the upper part of the garment to

dangle behind; this seems to be what the female musicians have done, among others. Perhaps this allowed for more freedom of movement.

For the most part, all the women in the tomb have the same basic hairstyle, an asymmetrical bun which has been identified as the “flying-bird bun” (飞鸟髻) by archaeologists. Again, this is also seen in the Shuozhou tomb. The hair is drawn up sleekly and tightly away from the face and the bun sits atop the crown of the head. There are only two exceptions, among the attendants following the ox-cart on the east wall. Two women show a hairstyle in which curly hair is worn low over the ears and pulled up loosely in the back.

The female attendants in this tomb are especially striking for the variety of textile patterns that can be observed on their garments. These include several variations on the pearl-roundel brocade pattern characteristic of prized Persian and Sogdian silks in the early medieval period. (For more on pearl-roundel textiles in medieval China, see Kuhn 2012, pp. 167–201, esp. 194–99.) The two attendants who flank the deceased both wear red under-dresses with white pearl-roundel patterns, one showing confronted animals within the roundel, and one an abstract vegetal design. More unusual is the pattern seen on one of the female attendants who follow the ox-cart. She wears a white under-dress with a vermilion pearl-roundel pattern. Within each roundel is the head of a bodhisattva, recognizable from contemporary Buddhist art. A similar pattern is seen on the border of the uppermost of two saddle-cloths worn by Xu Xianxiu’s horse.

Rong Xinjiang points out that among the motifs found within the pearl roundel on textiles of this kind are supernatural figures, including the sun-god in his chariot or mythical hybrid creatures that come from an Iranian religious context (Rong 2003, p. 66). Although Buddhism was not unknown in Persia and Sogdiana at this time, it was a minority religion at best, except among Sogdians living in China (Marshak 2002, p. 20). Rong notes that a few examples of Buddha or bodhisattva figures in pearl-roundel motifs have been identified at the Buddhist site of Bamiyan in present-day Afghanistan, but the only example known from regions nearer China was found by Aurel Stein at the site of Shorchuk (Ming-oi) in what is now Xinjiang province [Fig. 12]. It is a stucco plaque showing a bodhisattva’s head within a pearl roundel (Rong 2003, p. 67). The pearl-roundel textiles seen in Xu Xianxiu’s tomb are unusual, but can be explained as an adaptation of an imported motif to a local culture with a strong tradition of Buddhism. No actual textiles with this bodhisattva pattern have so far been identified, but silk from this period rarely survives ex-



Fig. 12. Stucco plaque with bodhisattva’s head in a pearl roundel, from Shorchuk. Collection of the British Museum. Photograph by Daniel Waugh.

cept in protected or highly arid conditions.

The only figure in the tomb who wears clothing unequivocally derived from Han prototypes is Xu Xianxiu’s wife. Seated beside her husband, she is dressed in a voluminous wrap-style red robe, with a wide band of white forming a collar that stands away from her body. A light gray under-dress with a plain round neckline can be seen under it. Her large, flaring sleeves are attached with decorative white and red bands at shoulder level; they have wide white bands of yet another material at the wrist. The robe is belted just below her breasts, and a fall of contrasting material cascading downward suggests an additional garment or overskirt. The red material of the robe itself is plain, but there are at least three and maybe four different patterned brocades or embroideries in the neckband, sleeve bands, cuffs, and possibly the overskirt. This is clearly a very fine garment.

The basic design of this robe is Chinese, though its details are altered from its Han prototypes (see Lingley 2010). With its high waist and wide standing collar, it can be seen in many images of women from the sixth century, although other examples are worn without an under-dress, exposing the wearer’s throat and décolletage. What is striking is how different her dress is from that of the other women in the tomb. Why might the lady of the household alone choose to dress in so markedly Chinese a fashion? A suggestive observation comes from the research of Judith Lerner, who has studied funerary materials belonging to Sogdians living in China in the sixth and seventh centuries. She points out that Sogdian women’s dress was associated with dancing girls and other low-status entertainers who fulfilled north China’s taste for en-

tainment with a Silk Road flavor. In this context, upper-class Sogdian women may have deliberately eschewed Sogdian dress to avoid these associations (Lerner 2005, p. 22 and n. 52). Xu Xianxiu was, so far as we can tell, of Chinese descent, though we know nothing about his wife; but regardless of her ethnic background, if Central Asian-style dress for women was associated with performers of humble status, it might explain why it is seen here on servants but not on their mistress.

The murals in Xu Xianxiu's tomb reflect the internationalism and multiculturalism of the Northern Qi. While the basic layout of the tomb and its pictorial and conceptual themes are consistent with an indigenous tradition of decorated tombs that begins as early as the Han dynasty, the details of dress and material culture reflect post-Han cultural changes, including the arrival of Buddhism and the influx of non-Chinese populations. We can identify various details as Chinese or non-Chinese, but this is less telling than considering the tomb as a whole, as an example of the complex ways material and visual culture reflect a multicultural society. As Albert Dien observes, Xu's tomb suggests strategies of hybridity characteristic of life in sixth-century north China (Dien 2007, p. 427). If we think that Xu Xianxiu and his wife are both "dressed in their best" here, it is worth pointing out that his best included a rich Central Asian-style fur coat, while hers was a fine Chinese-style robe, doubtless of silk, adorned with several different decorative brocades and embroideries. And one of the few surviving valuables from this tomb, the gold ring found among the looters' rubble, was clearly made in western Asia, with its intaglio gemstone, granulated bezel, and double lion's-head mount (Zhang and Chang 2003).

The forms of dress seen in this tomb mark a transitional period, in which styles which began as markers of ethnic difference acquire new meaning after a century or two of ongoing cultural interaction. The phenomenon is familiar in our own experience of living in a globalizing world. U. S. readers over a certain age can doubtless remember when sushi was a new and exotic introduction to the North American palate. Now, although its Japanese origins have not been forgotten, sushi is a familiar part of the culinary scene in most cities. U. S. sushi menus routinely include local innovations like the California roll, whose existence speaks to the "domestication" of sushi. Similarly, Xu Xianxiu and his contemporaries were doubtless quite conscious of the cultural origins of the forms of dress represented here, and likely chose them deliberately for the meanings they conveyed. But it is unlikely that anyone depicted in these murals was understood to be dressing as a foreigner.

This decoupling of dress from ethnic origin only continued into the Tang, when the men's dress shown here became so normalized for Chinese men as to be near-universal in painting and sculpture of the time. Ethnic difference in Tang art is marked by differences of physiognomy, rather than differences of dress (Abramson 2003). We can already see the beginnings of this process in the figure of the groom who stands behind the ox's rump on the east wall of the tomb. By contrast to all the other figures in the tomb, this man is shown with wide, round eyes, a protuberant nose, and a full beard. He appears to wear a close-fitting cap, with curly hair protruding at the sides and back. This is the only figure in Xu's tomb who is unequivocally marked as a foreigner, and it is his physiognomy rather than his dress which distinguishes him.

Xu's tomb was furnished to provide for his journey into the afterlife, and to ensure his rank and privilege would be recognized along the way. The signs of that privilege, including his entourage and guard company, are made legible through the dress and personal adornment of the figures on its walls. They are a manifestation of Northern Qi cosmopolitanism, when the new ideas, people, and objects pouring into China along the Silk Road fed the growth of a vital, multicultural society, decades before the founding of the cosmopolitan Tang.

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Notes

1. These are enumerated in chapter six of Zheng 2002, pp. 181–203. They include the tomb of the Ruru Princess, the tomb of Yao Jun, the tomb of Gao Run, and the Wanzhang tomb, all near the former city of Yecheng (p. 187), plus a

number of additional tombs in the region whose wall paintings have not survived (p. 188), as well as the tombs of Kudi Huiluo, Lou Rui, and Xu Xianxiu, and the Taiyuan No. 1 Thermoelectric Plant tomb, all near Taiyuan (pp. 199–200). The more recent discovery of a tomb of this type in Shuozhou, in the northern part of Shanxi province, implies that it was even more widespread among the Northern Qi aristocracy than Zheng's preliminary study suggests (Shanxi kaogu 2010).

2. The tomb occupant's surname [X] has been lost, and only his personal name, Daogui, survives.

3. Although by no means the earliest, an example of this usage can be found in Burton Watson's English translation of the *Records of the Grand Historian*, a history compiled in the first century BCE by Sima Qian: "Wu Chen, Zhang Er, and Chen Yu brandished their horse-whips and conquered twenty or thirty cities of Zhao and, when they were done, each hoped to face south and become a king. How could any of them be satisfied to remain a minister?" (Sima 1993, p. 137)

PLATE I

[Lingley, "Silk Road Dress," p. 5.]



*The northern wall of the tomb of Xu Xianxiu
in Taiyuan.*

After: Taiyuan wenwu 2005, Pl. 15.