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# SUI-TANG LUOYANG CITY

## Archaeological Excavation Report of the Ceramic Pit in the Eastern City

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# Abstract

In January 2003, during construction-related archaeological work, the Luoyang Tang City Team from the Institute of Archaeology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences discovered a ceramic pit in the Tianyuan community, located north of Yiyong Street and east of Jian'an Street in the old city district of Luoyang, Henan Province. The site lies within the eastern part of the Sui–Tang Luoyang city, where central government offices were densely distributed.

The excavation yielded a large number of ceramic fragments-more than 4,000 in total. After sorting and restoration, approximately 500 vessels could be reconstructed, with over 120 of them relativley complete. The ceramic finds include white porcelain, celadon, low-fired lead-glazed pottery, and unglazed grey pottery. White porcelain is the dorminant type, with a wide variety of forms such as bowls, cups, goblets, dishes, plates, spittoons, alms bowls, bottles, and jars. In addition, a small number of ceramic architectural components, stone artifacts, copper coins, bronze items, and ironware fragments were also unearthed. At the bottom of the pit, small amounts of porcelain clay, quartz, and other mineral raw materials were found, along with two elephant molars.

By comparing with artefacts with dated inscriptions and those from well-dated archaeological contexts, the ceramics unearthed from the pit can be roughly dated to the period between AD 650 and 700, spanning the reign of Emperor Gaozong of the Tang dynasty to the Wu Zhou period. All the ceramic itmes were found with defects and are considered to be waste products generated during the firing process. It is therefore inferred that this pit was used for the concentrated disposal of discarded ceramic items. The presence of such waste suggests that workshops, kilns, and other production facilities were likely located nearby, indicating a close relation to ceramic production. Given its special location, it is speculated that this pit may represent the remains of an official kiln operated by the *ZhenguanShu* ( 甄官署 ) under the *JiangzuoJian* ( 将作监 ) during the years from the second year of Xianqing (AD 657) to the third year of Qianfeng (AD 668). Further research indicates that the production technology and craftsmen of the Zhenguan Shu official kiln in the eastern city of Luoyang likely originated from the Gongyi kilns. The body and glaze making technology, as well as the firing methods, are similar to those of the Gongyi kilns, and the raw materials also appear to have come from the Gongyi area.

This is the first discovery within the Sui-Tang Luoyang City of a site primarily used for the burial of ceramic wares, and it holds significant archaeological value. Its particularlly noteworthy location-

within the central government office district-provides valuable evidence for studying the urban layout, spatial and functional organisation of the Sui–Tang Luoyang City. The discovery of this site is of great significance for understanding the official ceramic industry and the consumption of the official wares at that time. For example, it sheds light on the organizational structure of early Tang official ceramic production and its relationship with surrounding regional production centres. Analysis of the ceramics unearthed from the pit contributes to a deeper understanding of the development and evolution of China's ancient official kiln system. Moreover, this find offers a new perspective on the pattern of ceramic manufacture and the transmission of ceramic technologies in northern China during the Sui–Tang period.

The discovery of this ceramic pit not only fills a gap of archaeological evidence for the relevant historical period, but also provides invaluable primary source for studying handcraft, urban development, and the official kiln system of the time.