

Excavation of Chu Tomb M7 at Changtaiguan in Xinyang, Henan

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Key words: Xinyang Changtaiguan Chu Tomb M7

Changtaiguan 长台关 lies above 20km north of Xinyang 信阳 City, Henan 河南 Province, with a hill extending from north to south and the Huaihe 淮河 River winding northward on its eastern side. On the western side are the Taizi 太子 city-site of the Western Zhou period and the Chu State Chengyang 城阳 city-site (Chu Wang Cheng 楚王城, or Chu Capital City, by local name) of the Warring States Period; and on the hill are numerous ancient tombs. In 1957, the former Henan Provincial Archaeological Team excavated there famous Chu State Changtaiguan Tombs 1 and 2.

In October 2002, a large-sized grave in the reservation of Changtaiguan tombs within the brick and tile yard by the State Highway 107 was seriously damaged. Upon hearing the news, the Institute along with Xinyang municipal antiquarian institutions carried out a salvaging excavation to explore the tomb (numbered M7). Although it was repeatedly robbed and damaged, the remaining cultural relics are still in a great number, reaching more than 700 pieces, which provides extremely valuable material data for the archaeology of the Chu culture in the Henan region.

Tomb Structure

The tomb looks like the character “甲” in plan, faces to the east with an orientation

of 100 degrees, and consists of a rectangular sloping passage and a sub-square pit. The passage is largely destroyed, the remains measuring 2.5m in length and 4.5m in width. The pit is destroyed in the upper part, so its size for the opening and its depth are unknown; for the presently seen remains, its opening is 13.6m long and 12.35m wide, and the maximum depth is about 5m. This is a shaft with stepped walls, which are left over in three tiers, each 0.40–0.60m wide and 0.50–0.85m high. The lowest tier is covered with a layer of reed and protected with slender wooden stakes (Figure 1).

The shaft is 10.10m long and 8.85m wide and is furnished inside with a rectangular chamber built of beams.

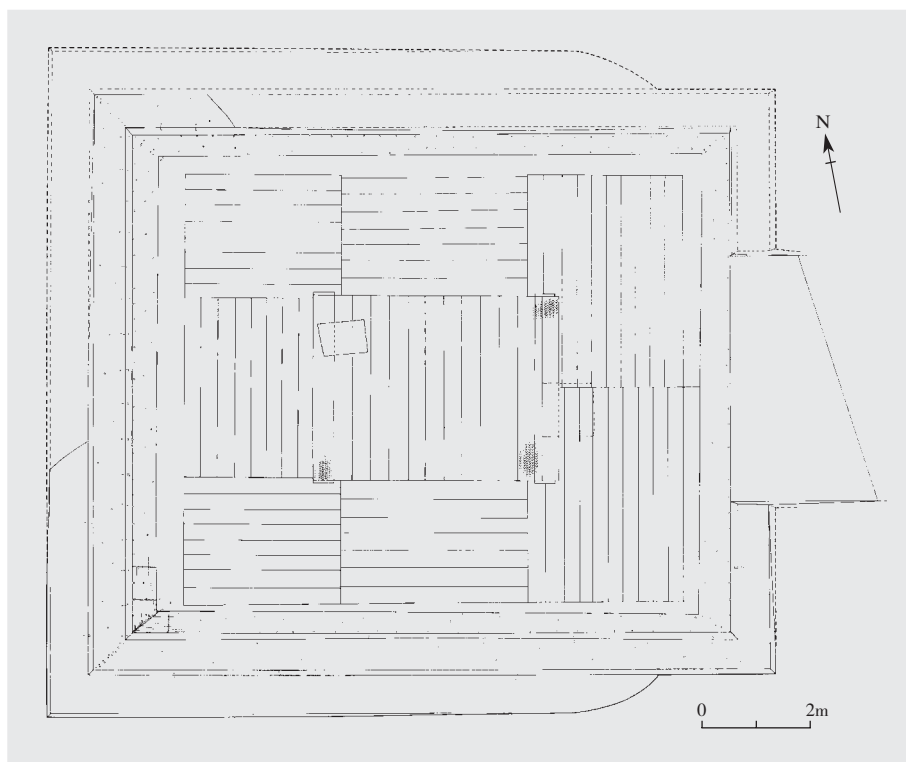


Figure 1. Plan of Tomb Changtaiguan-M7, Xinyang

The chamber is partitioned into seven units: a main room, an anteroom, a left side room, a right one, and a left, a middle and a right rear rooms, with the first unit right in the center. All the partitions are built of well-wrought beams fastened in tenon-and-mortise structure, and the tops are covered first with planks and beams and then with several layers of bamboo mats (Figures 2 and 3).

The main room is covered with three layers of planks, which are linked with each other by dovetail-shaped tenons. Inside are double outer and double inner coffins. The former are 2.60m long, 1.34m wide and 1.18m high; the top and sides are made of arc-shaped planks and well fitted with each other. The inner coffins are decorated with color-painted exquisite designs on the side planks and with openwork patterns on the base. Inside them, a human skull was discovered at the eastern end, and the limb bones are scattered in disorder, which must have resulted from disturbance.

The anteroom is rectangular in plan with the central axis pointing to the north and south, and measures 2.30m from the west to the east and 7.20m from the north to the south. In its middle are two beam-supporting pillars, which divide the room into a northern and a southern parts leading to each other. Flanking the main room are the left and right side rooms, which are identical with each other in width, and the length is equal to that of the anteroom. In the right side room, a large-sized design is color-painted on the northern wall, depicting two doors (Figure 4). On the four walls, ten wooden pegs are beaten in the upper part, and a jade ring is hanging from one of them. Such pegs are also seen in the left



Figure 2. Top of the chamber in Tomb M7 (photo from northeast to southwest)



Figure 3. Structure of the chamber in Tomb M7 (photo from east to west)



Figure 4. Color-painted designs in the right side room (photo from south to north)

side room and the rear ones, though none of them have jade hangings. The three rear rooms are equal to the anteroom in total length; of them the left and right rooms are good in condition.

Two square robbery holes were found at the main room. Hole 1 is located at its northwestern corner, from which the robbers sneaked into the main room, the left side one and the middle rear one. Hole 2 is opened right in the middle of the front of the main room and leads to the anteroom and the main room. Therefore only the right side room and the left and right rear ones remain undisturbed.

Funeral Objects

The funeral objects of Tomb M7 comprise lacquered woodenware, pottery, bronzes and jades.

1. Position and assemblage of funeral objects

The anteroom yielded 367 funeral objects, mostly pottery and lacquered woodenware and partly bronzes. They are placed roughly in layers. The pottery objects



Figure 5. Funeral objects in the anteroom

belong to the *ding* 鼎 tripod, *li* 鬲 tripod, *fu* 罍 rectangular vessel, *gui* 簋 food container, *dui* 敦 round vessel, *dou* 豆 stemmed vessel, pot, jar, urn, dish and stand; and the lacquered woodenware falls into the *dou*, small table, box, tray, eared cup, shield, spear and human figurine (Figure 5). Among them the lacquered *dou* can be classified into round-dished, square-dished, goblet-shaped, *etc.*; and the long wooden spears are largely covered with alloy sheet on the point. The bronzes belong chiefly to the *ding*.

In the main room, only a few small jades are left over for its serious robbery.

The grave goods in the left side room are mainly wooden musical instruments, including a group of drum stands, chime bells and their racks, imitations of chime stones and their racks, *se* 瑟 zithers, small-sized tables and human figurines; and metal horse-and-chariot trappings occur in quantities, such as chariot axle-caps and bits (Figure 6). The drum stands are made of a pair of logs and represent two tigers standing head to tail, either supporting a flying phoenix with a pearl in the mouth. They are huge in size and gorgeous in decoration. In addition, a group of inscribed bamboo slips were unearthed from this room.

The funeral objects in the right side rooms can be roughly divided into four groups, i.e. a wooden bed right in the center, lacquered wooden *se* and wooden figurines on the periphery of the bed, two sets of bronzes in a corner, and a group of small jades. Round the bed, bamboo baskets, glass beads and wooden tables are scattered in disorder, some baskets containing bronze mirrors or plant seeds (Figure 7).

In the left rear room are a wooden carriage, a large tomb-guarding animal with a pair of antlers and a bronze dish. The middle rear room was robbed, and only a small number of wooden structural members and quantities of round objects wrapped in plant leaves are left over from the grave goods.

The right rear room contains mainly pottery and lacquered woodenware. The former falls into the color-painted large-sized square pot, *ding* tripod, swing-handled *he* 盨 pot, *yi* 匱 ewer, dish, steam-piped dish, three-legged dish, *qi* 萁 pan, jar and urn; the latter, color-painted large-sized square pot, small table, ladle, *dou* 斗 wine vessel, *zan* 瓚 wine ladle, *zhi* 卮 wine cup and human figurine. The square pot in pottery and that in wood are identical in shape and similar in size; both types are for furnishing the small wooden table (Figure 8).

2. Description of some funeral objects

The funeral objects unearthed from Tomb M7 not only great in quantity but also rich in variety, numbering more than 700 pieces, some belonging to previously unknown types. Below is a brief description of a part of them.

Pottery stand (M7 anteroom:322) It belongs to gray clay ware and is a hollow bottom-less cube. In the body, two quite large round holes and two triangular openwork designs are at the top; and four small openwork motifs in the corners of the top respectively. The sides are decorated with triangular openwork patterns, engravings and color paintings, including a dragon-like figure engraved on one side, head raised, neck slender, body bent, tail stretched backward, and scales represented with checkers in intaglio and painted in bright color, which, unfortunately, have largely lost. The object is 23cm long and 7.6cm high (Figures 9:3; 10).

Pottery dui (M7 anteroom:126) It is a round vessel of gray clay ware, consists of an upper part and a lower one, identical in shape and size and either bearing three bird-head-shaped knobs, and measures 29.5cm in overall height and 19.5cm in mouth diameter (Figure 9:4).

Pottery fu (M7 anteroom:136) It is a cubic vessel of gray clay ware, consists of two identical parts with the upper well fitted on the lower, and has a rectangular-frame foot, which bears a T-shaped openwork motif on each side. The whole object is 29cm in length and 28.5cm in overall height (Figure 9:2).

Pottery gui (M7 anteroom:320) It is a gray clay food container shaped like a deep-belled bowl with a straight mouth, a curved belly, a flat bottom and a square-frame foot, each side bearing a T-shaped openwork pattern, and measures 18.5cm in height and 20.8cm in mouth diameter (Figure 9:1).

Lacquered wooden table (M7



Figure 6. Funeral objects in the left side room



Figure 7. Funeral objects in the right side room



Figure 8. Funeral objects in the right rear room

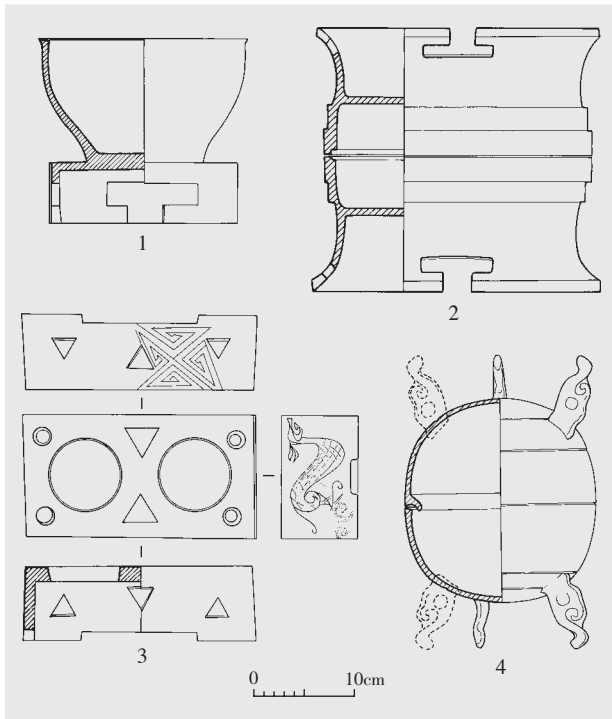


Figure 9. Pottery from the anteroom

1. *gui* (320) 2. *fu* (136) 3. *stand* (322) 4. *dui* (126)

anteroom:56) It is rectangular, the four sides are reinforced with wooden strips, which form a raised flange, and the body is supported by four bronze cabrioles, the upper part of which is shaped like an animal head holding in the mouth a large pendant ring. The top surface is coated in red lacquer and painted in black lacquer with 21 roundel-type cloud designs neatly arranged in three rows and seven columns. The size is 135cm in length and 60cm in width (Figure 11).

Wooden tiger (M7 left side room:62) It is a sculpture; one foreleg is missing. The limbs stretch forward in a crawling position, hip slightly raised. The head is round, ears erected, and features carved carefully. The surface is coated in black lacquer, with a little curly hair painted in yellow, black and white. It is 52cm in length (Figure 12).

Painted wooden figurine (M7 right side room:95) It is sculptured of a whole log with attached arms, which, unfortunately, have been damaged. The body is tall, head slightly lowered, face turned to one side, and features finely chiseled. The nose and lips are carved, brows and eyes drawn, and cheeks colored in dark brown. When it was unearthed, black hair and silk dress partly remained on the body. Representing a submissive expression, a graceful figure and sedate deportment, the work can be rated as the most perfect image among the human figures so far unearthed from Chu tombs. Height



Figure 10. Pottery stand (M7 anteroom:322) and engraved designs on it

65cm. The wooden figurines from Tomb M7 are commonly broken with a quarter of the back cut off, the meaning of which calls for inquiry (Figure 13).

Four bronze ding tripods They are all unearthed from the anteroom (223, 308, 309 and 310), share the same shape and are close in size. The mouth is contracted, belly swollen, bottom rounded, legs shaped like slender cabrioles, and ears made ring-like. The body has an inverted-bowl-shaped cover with three knobs at the top and an annular handle at the center. Each piece measures 14.8cm in overall height and 10.4cm in mouth diameter (Figure 14).

A set of a bronze flask and other vessels (M7 right side room:56–78) It comprises a flask, eight out-turned-rim dishes, ten flat-mouthed dishes, and four round boxes, totaling 23 pieces. The flask consists of an upper and a lower sections well joined together and has a small mouth, a short neck, four ring-like handles atop the cover, and a rectangular-frame foot beneath the oblate bottom. The two sections are fastened with beak-shaped turnable pins inserted into the corresponding

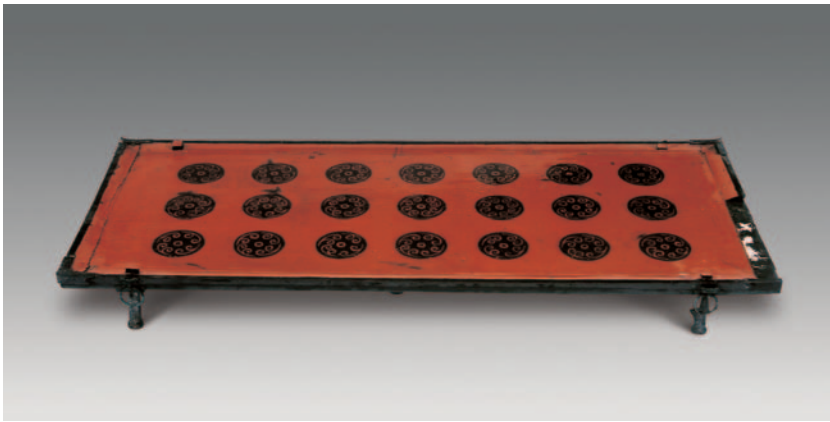


Figure 11. Lacquered wooden table (M7 anteroom:56)



Figure 12. Lacquered wooden tiger (M7 left side room:62)



Figure 13. Wooden tomb-figurine (M7 right side room:95)



Figure 14. Bronze ding (M7 anteroom:223, 308–310)



Figure 15. Bronze flask and the objects combined with it (M7 right side room:56–78)



Figure 16. Bronze flask (M7 right side room:51)



Figure 17. Round bronze box and the wine vessels combined with it (M7 right side room:17–55)

rings. The surface is decorated with silver-inlaid and color-painted flying phoenixes and floating clouds. The whole flask is 27.6cm in height, and 9.9–22.7cm in the major axis of the belly. The flat-mouthed dishes vary in size, mouth diameters 18–19.9cm, all curved in belly and flat in bottom, and divided into two equal groups, either containing four inverted out-turned-rim dishes put in each other. The latter are 18.4–19.9cm in mouth diameter, all carinated in belly and flat in bottom. In either group, between the flat-mouthed dishes and the inverted out-turned-rim ones are two bronze boxes that are also varied in size and put upright in each other. The boxes each consist of a body and a cover. The former has a straight mouth, a carinated belly and a small flat bottom. The dimensions are 9.9–13.2cm in mouth diameter for the body and 10.3–13.6cm for the cover, and 6.1–6.8cm in height (Figures 15 and 16).

A set of a round bronze box and a set of wine vessels (M7 right side room:17–55) This is combined of a round box and nine *yi* ewers, six round dishes and 23 eared cups, totaling 39 pieces. The box has a tight fitting cover. The body is shaped like a deep-bellied flat-bottomed bowl; and the cover is topped with a short hollow tube that leads to the belly. Inside the body, from the lower to the upper, the eared cups, round dishes and *yi* are put upside down in each other. The eared cups are oblate or round in shape and equal in size for the same type, the former measuring 9.5–11.1cm in length while the latter 8.9cm in

mouth diameter. The dishes and *yi* ewers are all flat-bottomed and vary in size. The dishes are 9.5–11.4cm in mouth diameter and the *yi* 12.7–13.5cm in length. The round box is not covered closely as its contents are too many. It is 20cm in overall height and 18.4cm in mouth diameter (Figure 17).

A Brief Sum-up

1. Location of the Chu City of Chengyang and its relationship with Tomb M7

The Changtaiguan cemetery where Tomb M7 lies is adjacent to the Chu Capital City-site. According to the *Zhanguo Ce*: “*Chu Ce Si*” 战国策·楚策四 (Intrigues of the Warring States: “Chu State, IV”), after Qin General Bai Qi captured Yin Capital in 278 BC, the Chu ruler Qingxiangwang 顷襄王 moved his political and military center northward to Chengyang. The *Shi Ji* 史记 (Historical Records) mentions that the Han Emperor Gaozu titled Xi Yi 奚意, Marquis Ding, “Marquis of Chengyang” and that in the early Han period, the government established Chengyang 城阳 County under Ru’nan 汝南 Prefecture. These suggest that Chengyang City must have been in southern Henan.

The name of Chengyang occurs also in Li Daoyuan’s 酈道元 *Shui Jing Zhu* 水经注 (Commentary of Waterways Classic). It is said in the chapter “Huaishui 淮水” (Huaishui River) of the work that “The Huaishui River flowed to the northeast, passing by the south of the seat of Chengyang County (the Han Emperor Gaodi in the 12th year of his reign titled the holdings of Xi Yi, Marquis Ding, “Marquisate,” which was later called Xinli 新利 in the Wang Mang 王莽 reign and became the seat of Chengyang Prefecture in the Wei period)... Then the Huaishui ran eastward to the mouth of the Shishui 师水 River.” Presently the Shishui is called Shihe 沙河. It passes by the place about 50km south of the site of ancient Chengyang City. The above record on the location of ancient Chengyang City completely conforms to the presently seen site, which indicates that the site of Chu Capital City at Changtaiguan was just the location of Chengyang City where the Chu ruler Qingxiangwang stayed for a period of time or, as another version says, established his temporary capital. Archaeological discoveries suggest that the City of Chengyang was first built in the Spring and Autumn period and flourished in the Warring States period. Therefore through a long period, by the time when Chu State Qingxiangwang moved his capital there, a deep, solid foundation of the

Chu culture had deposited in the Changtaiguan area. Tomb M7 and other large-sized Chu graves must have been much concerned with this condition.

2. Date of Tomb M7

As known from archaeological surveys and excavations so far carried out, the tombs in the Changtaiguan cemetery are as many as more than one hundred, among which a number of graves are rather large in scale and rather high in rank. This must have been concerned to a certain extent with Chu State Qingxiangwang’s moving his capital northward to Chengyang as well as the Chu State’s exploitation of this area before that. Therefore the interment of M7 must have been in the Warring States period.

Tomb M7 is roughly identical with Tombs Changtaiguan-1 and -2 in the structure of the tomb chamber and the way of building. In all the cases the grave goods include mainly pottery, lacquered woodenware and bronzes, with bright unique lacquer-ware as the most characteristic. It is especially important that not only the pottery of ritual and everyday use but also the lacquered wooden objects show distinct identity in shape, decoration and combination, as reflected in color-lacquer-painted large wooden phoenix-shaped drum stands with tiger-shaped bases, the color-lacquer-painted square wooden pots, and so on. So Tomb M7 must be comparable in the date of interment with Tomb M1 excavated in 1957.

Concerning the date of Tombs Changtaiguan-1 and -2, most of the researchers assigned them to the mid-Warring States period. Moreover, the *ding*, *dui* and pot combination shows obviously the style of Chu tombs of the mid-Warring States period in the southern Henan region. Compared with the Chu tombs recently excavated at Zhengyang 正阳 Suzhuang 苏庄 and Huaiyang 淮阳 Ma’anzhong 马鞍冢 in southern Henan as well as the Chu burial data recorded at Jiangling 江陵 in Hubei 湖北, Tomb Changtaiguan-M7 must go back to the time no earlier than the mid-Warring States period.

Of course, there still exists a good deal of differences between Tomb Changtaiguan-M7 and Tombs M1 and M2. For Example, the pottery *dui* coexists with the *dou* in M7 but did not occur in M1 and M2; and the position of funeral objects in the former differs from that in the latter two although the three graves are identical in tomb-chamber structure. It calls for further investigation whether these phenomena reflect the tomb-owners’ differences in status or the disparity of phases in cultural style.

Tomb M7 at Changtaiguan yielded a great batch of

treasures with high aesthetic and scientific value, such as the two groups of well preserved rust-less wine vessels unique in shape and combination way, which have rare counterparts among the previous findings. The peculiar-shaped gorgeously decorated lacquered wooden objects are also scarce and constitute an important discovery in the recent archaeology of the Chu culture.

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Note: The original paper, published in *Wenwu* 2004.3: 31–41 with 19 figures, including 16 photos, is written by Chen Yantang 陈彦堂, Zuo Chao 左超 and Liu Wei 刘维. This summary is prepared by Chen Yantang and English-translated by Mo Runxian 莫润先.