

The Kang Family Tombs in the Burial Ground West of the Old Jiaohe City in Turfan, Xinjiang

Turfan Bureau of Cultural Relics

Key words: old Jiaohe city Kang family cemetery catacomb with ramp 6th–7th centuries

The burial ground west of the old Jiaohe 交河 city moat (Gouxi 沟西) is located west of the old city. This is the largest of burial grounds located south, north and west of the city. The layout of the burial ground is shaped somewhat like an elongated strip approximately 4km long, 1.5km wide, 6 sq km. It had been used by the populace for generations as one of the public burial grounds. Apart from the illicit excavations of foreign explorers at the beginning of the 20th century, four archaeological excavations were undertaken from the 1930s through the 1990s. In early October of 2004 and early October of 2005, the Turfan Bureau of Cultural Relics conducted salvage excavations in response to recent damages caused by natural erosion and disturbance of robbers. The following is a brief report of the excavations.

Burial Location

The geographical location and environment of the Gouxi burial ground has been described in detail and published in the *Report of Excavations in Gouxi, Jiaohe: 1994–1996* and will not be repeated here. The present excavation consists of 36 tombs, and 33 of them belong to the Kang family cemetery. Three others are located outside the cemetery towards the south, southwest and east (Figure 1). They have been numbered according to the order of excavations (04TYGXM1–M10, 05TYGXM11–M36).

The cemetery is in the southeastern part of the Gouxi burial ground. It has a rectangular layout; from east to west it now measures 52.6m, and from north to south it measures 49.4m. The northwest corner has been ruined

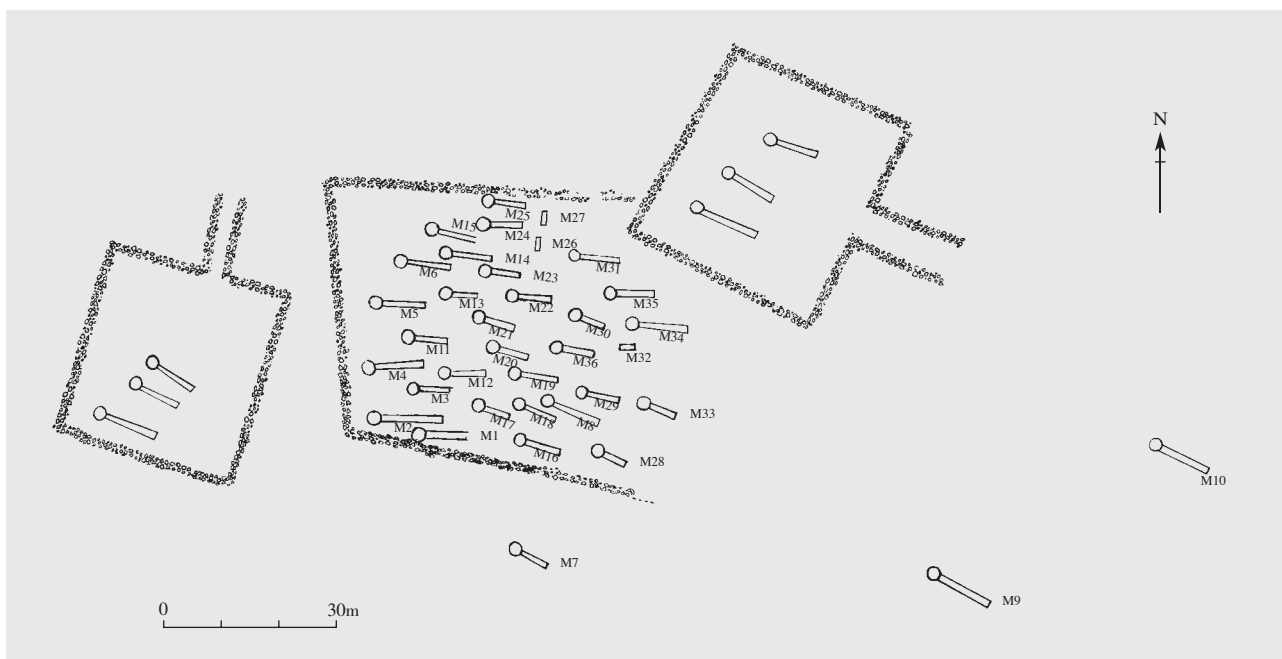


Figure 1. Schematic map of the Kang family tombs

by another cemetery; accordingly, the full length of the eastern section of the wall can no longer be determined. The ruined wall is 0.7m wide and 0.3m high.

Tomb Layout and Structure

The tombs inside the Kang family cemetery can be categorized by layout and structure into two types: catacomb tomb with ramp, and side chamber tomb with vertical shaft.

1. *Catacomb tomb with ramp.* There are a total of 30, all facing east and systematically arranged and designed. The tomb mounds are hemispherical in shape.

M28 is located in the southeast corner of the cemetery. The ground level is relatively flat with a tumulus shaped like a round dome, and over the surface is a layer of stone pebbles. The tumulus is 4.92m in diameter, 0.72m high, facing 129 degrees in orientation.

The layer of stone pebbles at ground level is arranged in a shape that approximates the layout of the tomb tunnel underneath. The entrance to the tomb tunnel is under the earthen ground level. It has a ladder-shaped layout that is wider at the eastern end and narrower at the western end. The opening is smaller on top but larger at the bottom. The sloping floor has a greater incline at the center, becoming more level near the tomb entrance. The opening on top is 6.52m long, 0.48–1.2m wide, the western end of the bottom space is 1.48m, and it is 2.88m below the ground. The exterior of the tomb en-

trance is sealed off by a pile of unbaked mud bricks, four rows of which are still intact. The ceiling has a round hole dug by robbers. The tomb entrance is 1.04m high, 0.7m wide and 0.58m deep.

The tomb chamber, leaning towards the south side of the tomb tunnel, has a square layout with rounded corners. It is a catacomb with a relatively flat ceiling. This tomb chamber measures 2.84m long from south to north, 2.64m wide from east to west, and 1.08m high. At the rear of the tomb chamber is an earthen mortuary platform measuring one meter wide and 6cm high. On top of the platform are the remains of a straw mat woven with a herring pattern. The human skeleton on top of the mortuary platform is that of a male lying face up with limbs straight. The skull heads south. In fragmented conditions, the skull is located on the southeastern side of the human skeleton. The human skeleton at the base of the mortuary platform is that of a female lying face up with limbs straight. The skull is shattered, and the legs are pointed north. Both human skeletons are so severely damaged that their ages cannot be determined. Under the head and feet are straw and wood ashes that must have been the remains of pillows for the head and feet.

On the south wall of the tomb chamber is a niche with a domed ceiling, measuring 0.32m wide, 0.3m deep and 0.36m high. The exterior of the niche opening is sealed off by a pile of unbaked mud bricks. Inside the niche is a single-handle earthenware jar containing human ashes (Figure 2).

2. *Side chamber tomb with vertical shaft.* A total of three of these are located on the eastern and northeastern sections of the cemetery. They have low earthen tumuli on the surface.

M26 is located in the northern section of the cemetery. On top of the tomb is an oval-shaped earthen tumulus, slightly elevated above the ground; it is covered with a layer of stone pebbles on the surface. The earthen tumulus is 0.36m high, facing 206 degrees in orientation. The opening of the tomb is under the earthen

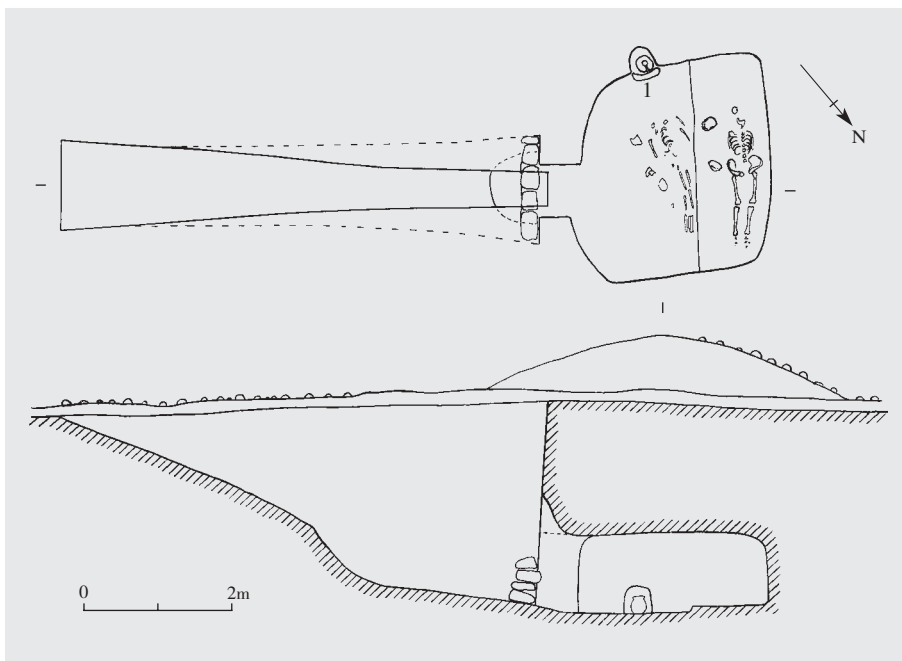


Figure 2. Plan and cross section of Tomb M28

layer at ground level. The tomb entrance has a rectangular layout. The cross-section of the opening from south to north is smaller at the top and larger at the base. The opening at the top measures 2.4m long, 1m wide; at the base the opening measures 0.56m wide, and it is 1.92m below the ground; the cavity is filled with yellow sandy earth. The tomb chamber has a rectangular layout, 2.44m long, 0.3m wide, 0.28m high. As the tomb had been extensively robbed, the human skeletons are incomplete and the mode of burial, gender and age cannot be determined (Figure 3).

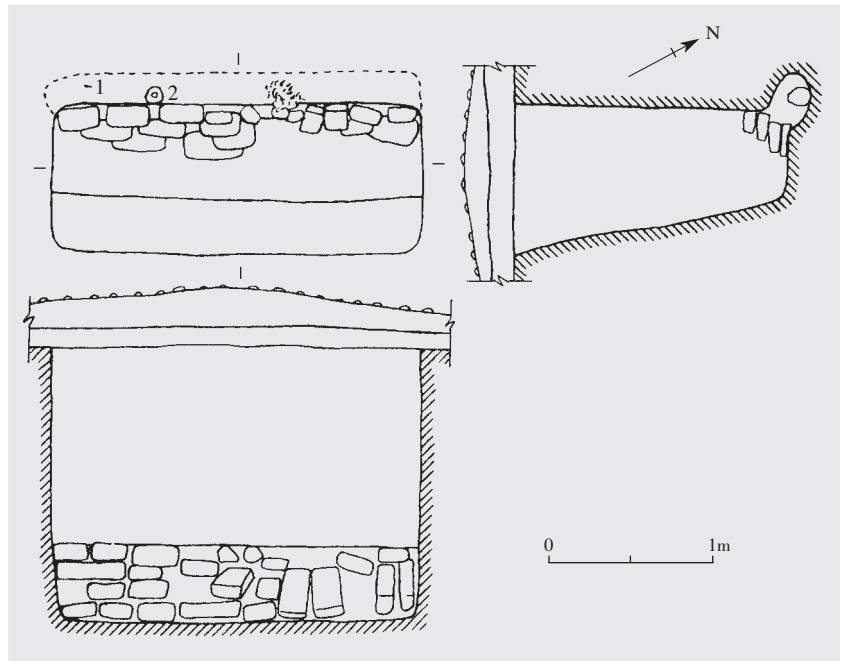


Figure 3. Plan and cross section of Tomb M26

Unearthed Artifacts

From the 33 tombs a total of 152 objects have been unearthed. They consist of ceramics, gold and silver coins, tomb stones, etc.

1. Ceramics: 119 pieces. Most of them are grey sandy earthenware, wheel-thrown or hand-made and reworked by the wheel. The workmanship is rough and the forms are crooked. Painted color pottery predominates, but the patterns and decorations have mostly faded. Vessel forms include urns, bowls, basins, and such.

Urns: 31 pieces. There are two types. Type A has 27 examples, all without handles. M1:8 has a mouth slanted to one side, short narrow neck, bulging shoulders, belly with sloping sides, and a large and flat bottom. The vessel's exterior has a coating of black slip on top of which are painted double yellow lines delineating a continuous pattern of inverted and upright lotuses. The center of each lotus is filled with thick vertical stripes in red, and round red dots decorate the space between the lotus petals. The mouth has a diameter of 6.1cm, and it is 10cm tall (Figures 4:1; 5). Type B has 4 examples. They are urns with single handles. M16:1 has a curled rim, narrow neck, single handle, sloping shoulders, bulging belly and flat bottom. On the belly are indented bowstrings, and the exterior of the vessel is decorated with inverted and upright lotus patterns. The diameter of the mouth is 9.6cm, and it is 17.6cm tall (Figures 4:2; 6).

Bowls: 74 pieces. Type A has 37 examples. They are bowls with flat bottoms. M2:5 has a wide open mouth and deep belly. The diameter of the mouth is 14.4cm,

and it is 7.8cm tall (Figures 4:4). Type B has 37 examples. They are bowls with false ring foot. M16:3 has a wide open mouth and deep belly. The exterior of the vessel has a coating of black slip on which patterns of red lotuses are painted; the center of each lotus is decorated with short vertical stripes. The mouth has a diameter of 14cm, and it is 9.2cm tall (Figures 4:3; 7).

Basins: 5 pieces. They can be divided into two types. Type A has 3 examples. They are basins with flat bottoms. M6:7 has a curled rim, flared mouth and belly with sloping sides. The inside of the rim is painted red and the exterior of vessel is painted red in the mid-section; above and below the red painted section are bowstring decorations. The diameter of the mouth is 31.4cm, and it is 13.4cm tall (Figures 4:5; 8). Type B has two examples. They are three-legged basins. M11:2 has a flared mouth, a belly with sloping sides, flat bottom, and each of the three animal-shaped legs is individualized. One of the animal-shaped legs has a carving of a pair of eyes and the clawed foot is prominently depicted. The inside of the rim is painted red, and the interior surface of the vessel has markings of finger indentations. The exterior of the vessel has a coating of black slip. Both above and under the rim are a string of molded pearls. Below the string of pearls under the rim is an indented bowstring, and below the indented bowstring is an incised pattern of wavy lines. Among the wavy lines are 15 molded double-fish patterns encircling the vessel; the fish have bulging eyes.

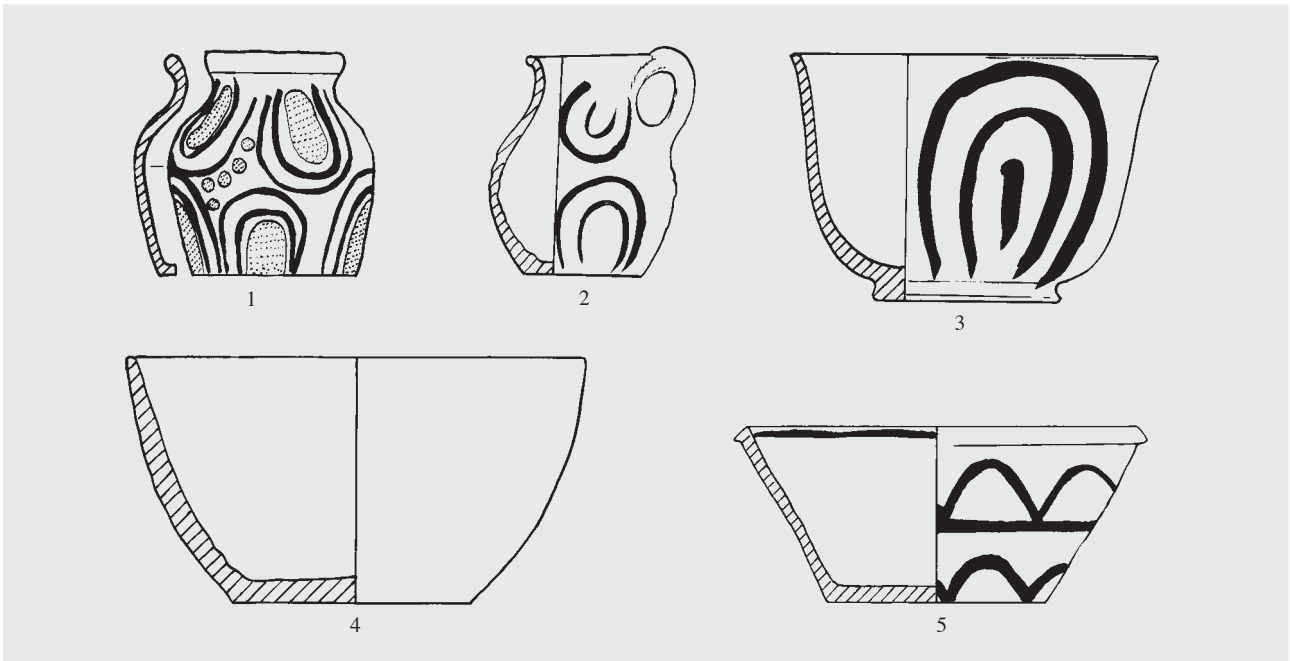


Figure 4. Unearthed Ceramics

1. type A guan jar 2. type B guan jar 3. type B bowl 4. type A bowl 5. type A basin (1, 3. c.1/3; 2, 5. c.1/6; 4. c.7/15)



Figure 5. Type A guan jar



Figure 6. Type B guan jar

Below the last wavy line is a row of molded double concentric circles. Each double-fish pattern is separated by a red vertical line. Above the top wavy line and between the concentric circles is a row of painted red dots. Between the fishes' tails are molded pearl roundels. The mouth has a diameter of 26.3cm, and it is 19cm tall (Figures 9 and 10).

In addition, lamps, trays and jars have been excavated.

2. *Gold and silver coins, 5 total.* There are three silver coins, all of which are Sassanid silver currency. M1:27 is shaped like a round cookie. The obverse has the relief of a human bust; around the rim are depictions of the sun and moon. On the reverse is an inscription at the center, and four patterns of the moon and stars are



Figure 7. Type B bowl



Figure 8. Type A basin

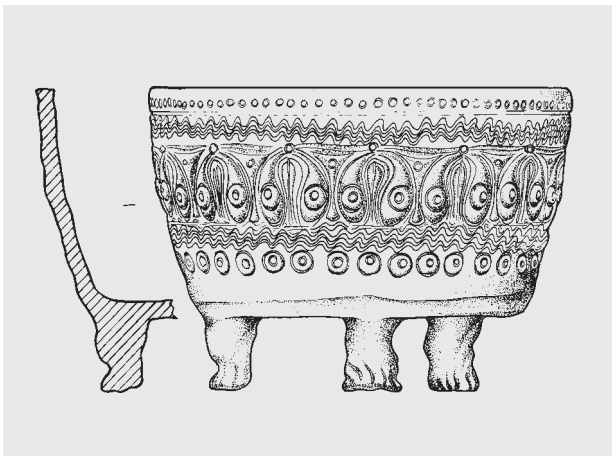


Figure 9. Type B basin with three legs (scale: 1/5)



Figure 10. Type B basin with three legs

symmetrically placed around the rim. The diameter is 3.1cm, and it is 0.15cm thick (Figure 11).

Two gold coins. M11:6 is an imitation Roman gold coin, round in shape, struck from sheet gold. It is decorated with the bust of the crowned emperor of the empire. The diameter is 1.8cm, and it is 0.05cm thick (Figure 12).

3. *Five tomb epitaphs.* All made of gray clay bricks, they were found in the tomb tunnels. With the exception of M6:2, they all have inscriptions in cinnabar. The inscriptions run from right to left in horizontal rows.

Such-and-such year of the Yanchang 延昌 era, 12th month, Kang? Bo's 康□鉢 tomb epitaph (M4:1). The length of each side is 36.9cm, and it is 4cm thick. Squares are drawn in ink lines, and there are 6 columns of 46 characters. 11 of the characters are faded and illegible.

33rd year of the Yanchang era (593), third month, Kang Minai's 康蜜乃 epitaph (M5:1). The length of each side is 36.9cm, and it is 3.6cm thick. There are 35 characters in five lines, and two characters are faded and illegible.

35th year of the Yanchang era (595), third month, Kang Zhongseng's 康众僧 epitaph (M6:2). The length of each side is 34cm, and it is 4.5cm thick. The inscriptions are in ink, with 35 characters in five lines (Figure 13).

Second year of the Longshuo 龙朔 era of the Tang Dynasty (662), first month, 16th day, so-and-so's tomb

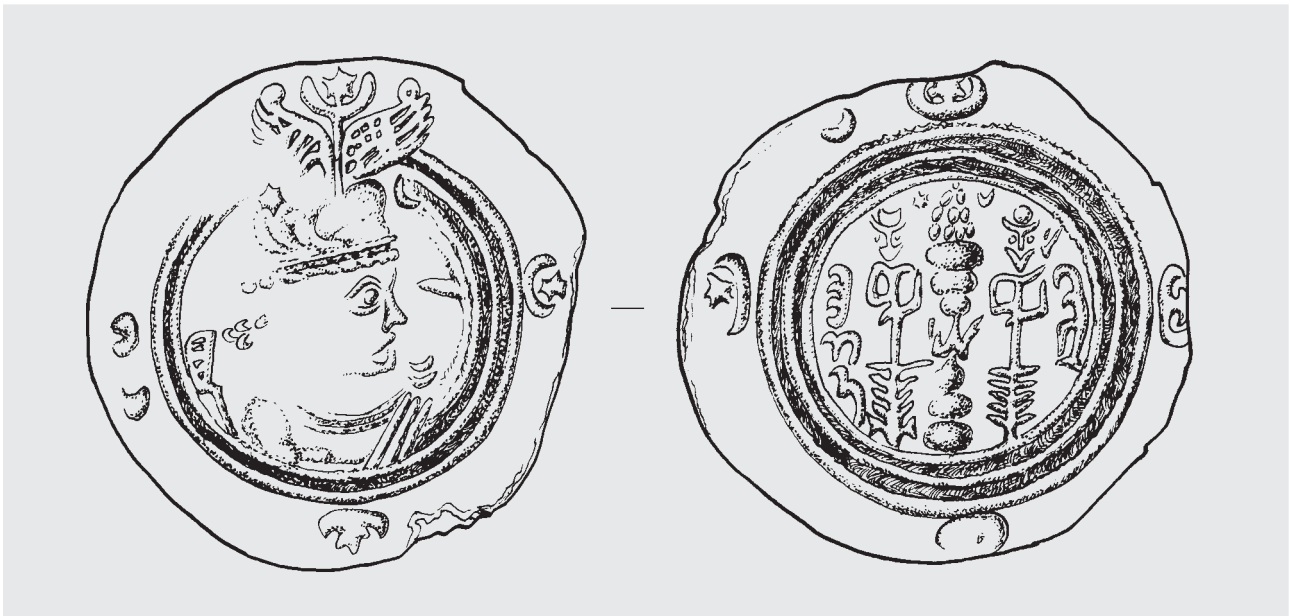


Figure 11. Sassanid silver coin



Figure 12. Gold coin imitated Roman style

epitaph (M20:15). The length of each side is 33cm, and it is 3.6cm thick. Squares are drawn in red lines, and there are 230 characters in all, 26 of which are faded and illegible (Figure 14).

14th year of the Zhenguan 贞观 era (640), 11th month, 16th day, Kang ? Shang's 康□相 epitaph (M11:1), the length of each side is 33.6cm, and it is 4.4cm thick. There are 51 characters in all, three of which are faded and illegible (Figure 15).

In addition, there are also metal objects, wooden objects, ornaments, shell currency, clay figurines, etc.



Figure 13. Tomb epitaph from Tomb M11

Concluding Remarks

The layout, structure and furnishings of the 36 tombs from this excavation can be dated between the late Gaochang 高昌 Kingdom of the Qu 麹氏 ruling family and the early Xizhou 西州 administration under the Tang Dynasty.

Most of the burials from Gouxu in Jiaohe are grouped by lineage, and stone pebbles are used to mark the fam-



Figure 14. Tomb epitaph from Tomb M20



Figure 15. Tomb epitaph from Tomb M11

ily cemetery. The Kang family cemetery is the largest cemetery in the Gouxu burial ground. An analysis of the epitaph inscriptions reveals the fact that the Kang family is a prominent official family with political status. They were the descendants of people from Samarkand, belonging to one of the nine Zhaowu 昭武 lineages of Sogdiana. Furthermore, they had acquired Chinese citizenship and had been sinicized as inhabitants of the Gaochang Kingdom and of the Xizhou province under the Tang Dynasty. Co-existing in the same cemetery are tombs with vertical shafts and side chambers. They are similar to the burial forms of the Cheshi 车师 people who lived in China from the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods to the Cheshi Kingdom period. Yet the tomb furnishings are contemporary with the Kang family cemetery in general. This seems to suggest that even though the Cheshi Kingdom had long vanished, the people of Cheshi survived as one of the local minority ethnic groups, and their old burial customs were preserved through the Tang Dynasty. This Kang family lineage must have been related to sinicized Sogdians who intermarried with the descendants of the Cheshi people. Urns with bone ashes have been found entombed in these burials. This must have been a remnant of the ancient burial customs of the Sogdians.

Most of the tombs from the present excavation have mud bricks laid out vertically in rows across the opening of the tomb tunnel and extend above the ground. At

the other end of the tomb tunnel there are also mud bricks laid out horizontally, forming two to three staggered rows. Similar structures have been found in tombs excavated earlier from Gouxu. From the perspective of the layout and structure of the cemetery as a whole, it seems that the stacking of stone pebbles on the surface of the tomb mound, the stacking of stone pebbles above ground to mark the surface area of the tomb tunnel, and the adobe wall at the tunnel opening may have been used to signal a particular time period or to prevent the overlapping of dugouts. The enclosing cemetery wall demarcates the area of the family cemetery. The adobe wall, tomb tunnel and stone pebbles piled atop the tomb mound signify the extent of the tomb of each family member.

The majority of unearthed tomb furnishings are ceramic vessels. The painted color designs of the ceramic vessels have mostly faded and their patterns can no longer be deciphered. Those that have been preserved consist of patterns of upright lotus and inverted lotus or their combinations. The lotus pattern must have been influenced by Buddhist culture.

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Note: The original report, published in *Kaogu* 考古 (Archaeology) 2006.12: 12–26 with 16 illustrations, one plate, and one appended chart, is written by Li Xiao 李肖, Zhang Yongbing 张永兵, and Zhang Zhenfeng 张振峰. This summary is prepared by Ding Lanlan 丁兰兰 and English-translated by Judy Chungwa Ho.