

# An Attempt to Describe Chinese Tomb Art – Opening Door opening Diagram

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**Abstract:** *The theme of the Opening Door Diagram lasts for a long time and appears in a variety of carriers, which has aroused the interest of scholars. In recent decades, with the increasing number of archaeological discoveries, it has provided us with a more comprehensive analysis and understanding of the theme of the Opening Door Diagram in the tomb. This article will make a brief analysis of this decorative theme from several aspects discussed by many scholars and its development.*

**Keywords:** Opening Door Diagram; The Woman Opens The Door; Decorative Themes; Murals.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

"Opening Door Diagrams" is a common theme in ancient Chinese funeral art. In more than a thousand years, the image has changed from generation to annihilation, from silence to revival, along with the development of social history and the change of life and death concept. From the perspective of spatial structure, this half-open door is bound to lead to an undisplayed space. Then, in order to find out what kind of boundary the hidden space in the tomb symbolizes and to understand its meaning, it is necessary to interpret this door of life and death from the perspective of life and death of people at that time in combination with the background of The Times, characteristics of The Times and spatial distribution.

## 2. OPENING DOOR DIAGRAMS HAVE BEEN STUDIED

Such an image often appears in the tomb murals of Song Dynasty, Liao Dynasty and Jin Dynasty. There are two false doors, one slightly open, and a woman's body is half hidden behind the false door. Because the person who opens the door is mostly a woman, the name "Woman opening the door", "woman closing the door", "Woman opening the door picture" and so on are a common image in Chinese tomb art. Since the Han Dynasty, it has frequently appeared in the tombs, tombs and stone palaces (some ancient pagodas also have this image), disappeared in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, and prevailed again in the Song, Liao and Jin Dynasties.

The "woman opening the door" diagram is a kind of tomb decoration diagram which appeared in the Eastern Han Dynasty, developed in the middle and late Northern Song Dynasty, reached its peak in the late Jin Dynasty, and gradually declined in the Yuan Dynasty. From the current archaeological data found, the Northern Song Dynasty imitation wood brick chamber tomb excavated in Baisha Town, Yu County, Henan Province in 1957, the north wall of the burial chamber is carved with a brick imitation wood door, the door is half open, and a round carved woman is standing behind the door, which is the earliest discovery of the "woman opening the door" picture.

As early as more than half a century ago, Mr. Wang Shixiang put forward in the article Li Zhuang-Song Tomb in Nanxi, Sichuan Province: "The woman whose door covers the half of her body is the most attractive point in the whole tomb..... Its shape and shape are quite similar to those seen in the Ba-Song tomb in the old state of Yibin, which can be seen as a very common decoration at that time." A brief textual research was carried out on the woman opening the door[1].

In his report Baisha Tomb of Song Dynasty, Mr. Mr. Su Bai believes that the theme of opening the door "suspected its intention and that there were courtyards or houses and halls behind the false door, which means that the tomb chamber has not come to an end", and combined with literary works, he points out that the woman leaning on the door is a very popular and beautiful theme in the Song Dynasty[2].

After that, Liang Baiquan, Liu Yi and Zheng Mingluan discussed the subject matter of the woman opening the door respectively. Mr. Liang speculates that there are two explanations: one is that "it may reflect secular people's

pursuit of divine Daoism"; Second, "It may reflect the deceased's consideration of the safety of the cemetery, which belongs to the expression of a national belief concept" [3]. Mr. Liu Yi believes that "these young women who open the door represent the family of the maidens and concubines of the tomb owner before his death", reflecting that the wives and concubines of other burials hope that their souls can come to the husband's home [4]. On this basis, Mr. Zheng Mingluan divided such themes in the murals of the Liao Tombs in Xuanhua into two categories: maids and concubines [5].

Japanese scholar Shuko Tsuju included The half-Open Door of Ancient China in her book Ancient China on Cultural Theory, which mainly studied the subject of opening doors in Han Dynasty stone and brick paintings, and discussed it in combination with literature, and proposed that this subject reflected the theme of mythic figures opening the door of the underworld and guiding the dead into the celestial realm [6].

In the notes to the Second Title of Folk Art, Mr. Zheng Yan gives a detailed account of the information on the theme of the Opening Gate and the research of the former sages. After the understanding and analysis of various materials, he holds a positive attitude to Mr. Su Bai's view, and thinks that the drawing of the woman's opening door is a pure decorative technique; In a supplement at the end of the article, he argues that Ms. Tsukii's views are also worthy of respect [7].

Ms. Jessica Rawson has written about the transformation of the representations of the contents of tombs in the Tang and Song dynasties between life and the afterlife, including the reference to half-open doors. She points out that the half-opened door seems to indicate the condition of the tomb threshold, through which one can enter the world of the living or the world of the dead, reflecting the change in people's understanding of the afterlife during the Liao and Song dynasties [8].

In his dissertation, Mr. Liu Yaohui, based on the analysis of the theme of women opening doors in the tombs of Song and Jin dynasties in southern Shanxi, believes that the views of Liang Baiquan, Liu Yi and Zheng Mingluan cannot be established based on the materials in southern Shanxi, "The so-called theme of women opening doors is focused on 'opening doors' rather than 'women'" [9].

Li Qingquan combined the different views of previous researchers, and believed that the "woman's gate" represented the symbol of the so-called "bed" proposed by Mr. Wu Hong, and was the place where the tomb owner lived in another world after his death, and corresponded to the "hall" space decorated in the entire tomb chamber for the tomb owner's daily life [10].

In addition, from the perspective of Yin-yang feng shui, Yi Qing believes that the Qimen diagram "should suggest the place where a series of master recuperation, such as Huimen, kan, water, womb, and yellow spring," and at the same time, she believes that the Qimen woman, as a symbol of "Yin", together with a series of Yin attribute symbols, "in the tomb, it is not only a symbol of Yin benevolent, At the same time, it is also a metaphor for people's good wishes for biochemistry" [11].

On the whole, the current academic circle has the following interpretations of the theme of "women opening the door" :

The first one thinks that it is a visual suggestion to the extension of the burial space; Half leaning against the door, the woman looked carefully, suggesting that there were courtyards and houses behind, implying that the master's family was large and rich;

The second thinks that it is the expression of the tomb owner's wife and concubine, revealing the tomb owner's imagination of a happy life after death;

The third, on the basis of agreeing with the first interpretation, thinks that it is a purely decorative form without special meaning;

The fourth holds that it has a specific meaning in the burial, as a passage for the deceased into the real world or another world. The door opener is the fairyland messenger, leading people to fairyland; The ancients believed that when people died, they would reincarnate through a door and return to the earth.

The above views are from a certain point of view, can be said from the original, all have worthy of reference

significance. However, Qimentao itself is a kind of tomb decoration theme that originates from life, is easy to understand, and the threshold of painting requirements is not high. In addition, the form of the image itself has special visual experience, so the secondary creation occurs under the influence of different individual needs and regional culture. Any conclusion drawn from a single point of view would be biased in such a complex situation.

### **3. OPENING DOOR DIAGRAMS HISTORICAL EVOLUTION**

#### **3.1 The Initial Shape of the Opening Door Diagram in Eastern Han Dynasty**

The original carrier of Opening Door Diagram was stone relief, and the earlier stone relief with clear date and expression of Opening Door Diagram was found in the Eastern Han Dynasty in Chengqian Village, Cangshan, Shandong Province. The composition of the half-open gate, the welcomers and the procession of chariots and horses fully shows that the gate keeper does not constitute a necessary element of the gate diagram at this stage. This co-existence with horses and chariots constitutes an opening door diagram that is "represented as a continuous process", and its schema is not the same as that widely circulated by future generations. The person who opens the door is optional, and it must be connected with the horse and cart to form, which are the shackles that the gate diagram cannot be independently interpreted.

After the initial independence, the structure and content of the opening diagram have changed significantly. The first is the presentation of the image itself, once a common rectangular side display of the door opening behavior or the door opening diagram is located on one side of the panoramic picture, and there is also a basic schema of the change of the door opening diagram of later generations - center symmetry schema. In Shandong, there are two cases found in Quanfu Zhuang and Yishui Houchengzi in Licheng County, and one in Suining in Jiangsu.

#### **3.2 The New Features of Opening Door Diagram in Tang and Five Dynasties**

Although Opening Door Diagram appeared frequently in many areas of Han Dynasty, it disappeared from Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties until the middle of Tang Dynasty, and there are not many image data found so far, which needs to be further explored after abundant data.

The Opening Door Diagram of the Middle Tang Dynasty appears again in the Tang Pagoda of Zhuyuan Village in Shaanxi Province and the pagoda of Lingyan Temple in Changqing, Shandong Province. The opening doors of both towers are female. On the other hand, after the pagoda was introduced into China as a Buddhist architectural form, it developed rapidly and deeply influenced the construction of underground tombs in China. In addition to appearing on the tower, the Opening Door Diagram also returns to the tomb. For example, in the large-scale tomb of the Five Dynasties of Luoyang discovered in June 2012, the eastern wall is a half-broken gate drawing. On the vermilion gate with a door nail, the remaining skirt of the gate keeper is judged to be female. This tomb is more similar to the common layout of the tomb in the later Song, Liao and Jin dynasties.

#### **3.3 Regional Characteristics of Opening Door Diagram in Song, Liao and Jin dynasties**

According to the temporal and spatial changes, Opening Door Diagram can be divided into four central areas: Liangjing Area (Northern Song Dynasty), including North Jingxi Road and Jinggi Road, and Xijing Road, Nanjing Road (Liao Dynasty), Hedong Road (Jin Dynasty), Tongchuanfu Road and Kuizhou Road (Southern Song Dynasty). The main carriers of Qimen in the Song Dynasty tombs are mural, sarcophagus and brick carving. There are obvious differences in its shaping means and skills, which can be roughly divided into three categories: door, per capita carving, solid; The door is the actual building component in the tomb, and the person is painted on the surface of the stone door; There is also a door and a hand painted on the wall of the tomb.

First, with Liangjing area as the center of the Northern Song Dynasty Opening Door Diagram.

Liangjing area is the source of the opening door map of the tombs of the two Song dynasties. Most of the positions are in the positive wall of the tombs. Most of the half-closed doors are panel doors, and some are equipped with curtains. Most of the door is vermilion, there are also "door cheek blue, door ochre yellow"; Most of the door nails are inked, and half of the doors are imitated wooden structures with mullion Windows on either side of the same wall or adjacent to the wall on both sides. Most of the opening gatekeepers are from the outside of the tomb door to the tomb space, and their gender is mostly female. The shape of the semi-open door is mostly drawn on the false door, and people and doors usually show an abnormal relationship of people attached to the door. At the same

time, this area also appeared in the way of pure painting and stone carving.

In the Northern Song Dynasty, there were several examples of the opening of doors in the form of brick carving in the northwestern border of the junction of Song and Xixia. There have been similar "niches" around the tomb owner set up structure, imitation wooden gate niches structure is the common denominator of these tombs. As the earliest area where the niche structure of Opening Door Diagram appeared in the north, it indicates the transformation of the development of Opening Door Diagram to a certain stage.

Second, Xijing Road, Nanjing Road as the center of the Liao Dynasty gate map.

In the early stage of Opening Door Diagram, the carriers were sarcophagus and murals, which were distributed in Zhongjing Road, Tokyo Road and Nanjing Road. The first two places were similar in nature to the Liao Tomb, and Nanjing Road may belong to the Han-Liao intermarriage; In the middle and late period of Liao Dynasty, Opening Door Diagram are generally found in Han tombs, such as Xuanhua and Datong, which are specific concentrated areas.

The shape of the semi-open door is often seen in the mural, which is obviously influenced by the Han culture. Most of the gatekeepers were women, who were roughly divided into two categories: maid and concubine according to their hairstyles and clothes. Only male waiters at M1 Qingyun Store in Beijing. The images in Xuanhua Liao Tombs are more life-like, and the status reflected is more direct and easy to understand.

After the Song Dynasty Opening Door Diagram was spread to various places, in order to meet the needs of various places, the Liao craftsmen usually reflected their identity and behavior with the objects they held in their hands. In order to fit the characteristics of their own nation, Liao craftsmen worked hard to "localize" their hair style, clothing and objects. Opening Door Diagram is one of the earliest images borrowed by Liao people and developed in combination with their own national culture.

Third, with Hedong Road as the center of the Jin Dynasty gate map.

Hedong North-South Road is the concentrated area of Jin Dynasty Opening Door Diagram, and its position is very important. The pictures of gate opening in this area began to appear at the turn of Song and Jin Dynasties and in the early Jin Dynasty, and most of them were carved, painted or brick carved. The position of Opening Door Diagram in the tomb chamber is roughly divided into north and south parts according to the region, the southern part is represented by Houma, Jishan, Xiangfen, Xinjiang and Yuanqu, and most of the Opening Door Diagram is in the north wall (positive wall), while the northern part is represented by Xiaoyi, Fenyang and Changzhi. The gatekeeper is basically female, and only one footman appears on the gate of Majun tomb in Jishan. At the same time, there is also a situation in this area where there is no gatekeeper, only the door is half open, which may be related to saving cost and simplifying the image.

Four, Tongchuanfu Road, Kuizhou Road gate picture center of the Southern Song Dynasty gate picture.

Most of the Opening Door Diagrams in this area appeared after the junction of the Southern and Northern Song Dynasties, and the carriers were stone carvings. Most of the Opening Door Diagrams were located in the niche behind the front wall of the tomb chamber, which was a borrowing of the sacrificial function of the "niche". The Opening Door Diagrams symbolized the "sleeping" position of the tomb owner to facilitate worship. Half of the gate are basically lattice doors, complex structure, are decorated with animals and plants, such as broken branches of peony, running deer; Most of the gatekeepers are female, but the proportion of male gatekeepers has increased, such as the tomb of Song Dynasty in Lu County. The body of the door opener located inside the door is significantly reduced, and the situation outside the door is more common, while the Angle of the door opening becomes smaller, and the space behind the door is more difficult to see.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Opening Door Diagrams traced back to the Han Dynasty experienced the development of more than 100 years from the middle of the Eastern Han Dynasty to the collapse of the Han Dynasty, and initially formed a positive display of Opening Door Diagrams dominated by female Opening Door Diagrams. During the period, it disappeared, but in the Tang and Song Dynasties, with the opportunity of the revival of Confucianism, it was adopted again and became one of the image themes widely used in Liao and Jin. It can be divided into two types:

Song culture type and Liao culture type. The former retains the basic style of Jin and Southern Song according to their respective regional and cultural features to transform, forming a situation of divergence between the north and the south; The Liao Dynasty, on the other hand, dissolves the independence of Opening Door Diagram again and takes it as a part of the "combination schema" to present the life picture with national characteristics.

Opening Door Diagram with unclear direction and rich connotation, has always taken into account various factors such as life, feng shui, belief, ethics, aesthetic taste and so on. Due to the uncertainty of folk culture, there has been a lack of effective means to accurately and comprehensively restore the "local" of Opening Door Diagram in various places. At present, the "local" of Opening Door Diagram can only be distinguished from the carrier, style and carving techniques. The analysis of its meaning and function needs to improve its function and connotation with the help of other images.

In the process of development, the door opener has experienced a division of labor from door to sleep, and from female door opener to male and female door opener. The main reason is that people gradually lose interest in the visual expansion of the door opener in space, and only retain their attention to the new style. The mystery of the door opener is also weakened. In the Southern Song Dynasty, the picture of the opening door of different servants became a new form of realization of "sleeping", and the overall image tended to be decorative. This also foresees the final trend that Opening Door Diagram completely disappeared in the tomb decoration with the fundamental change of people's funeral interest in the Yuan Dynasty.

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