

# The Site Selection of Zhaoling Mausoleum in Tang Dynasty and Its Reasons

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## ABSTRACT

Due to the unclear posthumous edict of Li Yuan, the specification of Li Yuan's mausoleum was controversial during the regime of Li Shimin, prompting Taizong to select Jiuzong Mountain as the mausoleum site during his lifetime. Nominally, the way of using the mountains as mausoleum followed the Emperor Wen of the Western Han Dynasty, but the real reason was to achieve the height and momentum of natural mountains that could not be reached by artificial grave mound, so as to realize the political purpose of "being noble". Using the mountains as mausoleum makes the term "mountain mausoleum" that used to refer to the mausoleum of the emperor become a mountain mausoleum in the true sense.

**Keywords:** *Tang Dynasty, Mausoleum, Zhaoling mausoleum.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The mausoleum of Li Yuan, the first emperor of the Tang Dynasty, is located at the southern edge of Xumuyuan, Sanyuan County, Shaanxi Province. In the middle of the square mausoleum, above the underground palace, the grave mound made of loess was in the shape of inverted funnel. This is the traditional form of imperial mausoleum since the Qin and Han Dynasties in China. According to the records, the construction of Li Yuan's mausoleum referred to the form and specification of the imperial mausoleum in Han Dynasty. The new dynasty wanted to show the legitimacy of its mandate to the world by inheriting the specification of imperial mausoleum in Han Dynasty, and obtained the super fortune just like that of Han Dynasty. As the successor, Li Shimin was also the builder of Li Yuan's mausoleum. However, Li Shimin's mausoleum was not in accordance with the form of Xian Ling Tomb, but the underground palace was built in Jiuzong Mountain. This form of zhaoling mausoleum was followed by the Qianling mausoleum, forming the style of using mountains as mausoleums in Tang Dynasty. Why did Emperor Taizong select the way of using mountains as mausoleums? This question is of great significance to the study of mausoleum specification in Tang Dynasty.

## 2. THE TIME TO SELECT THE MAUSOLEUM SITE

According to the records, Jiuzong Mountain is the mausoleum site personally selected by Taizong. In "Tang Hui Yao", "Taizong said to officials, from beginning to end, oneself could see the construction of mausoleums in Han Dynasty, saving the efforts of descendants... Jiuzong Mountain is majestic, and I want to use it as the mausoleums. I want to be buried here when I die." <sup>1</sup>[1]

This piece of historical data in "Tang Hui Yao" was recorded in eighteen year in the regime of Taizong. In "Book of Tang", "since I have not contributed to the country in life, I should not spend more money after death. And to bury is to hide, so that no one can see. Since ancient times, sages and officials have advocated frugality. Only in times of bad political morality, they build tombs for funerals, increase the hardship of the people, and consume the treasury and property, which would be laughed at by wise people. I want to be buried in the way of using the mountain as the mausoleum. I don't need to build a new grave or a coffin. I want to use wooden pottery as my funerary objects. It is necessary to take the principle of frugality in

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1. "Tang Hui Yao" Vol. 20, "Mausoleum".

dealing with the afterlife, which is to remember me. On June 21, the tenth year during the regime of Taizong (636 A.D.), Taizong died at the age of 36 in Lizhengdian. On November 4 in the same year, he was buried in Zhaoling mausoleum."<sup>2</sup>[2]

The main character of this record was Empress Zhangsun, wife of Li Shimin, who was buried in zhaoling mausoleum in Jiuzong Mountain in November of the tenth year of Zhenguan. The original meaning of "厝" is to place the coffin to be buried, or to change the burial site. This is an ancient custom in China, is also an expedient measure taken when one dies but can't be buried for a variety of reasons temporarily. For example, in the Southern Song Dynasty, Gongxian County of Henan where the imperial tombs were located was occupied by the regime of Jin Dynasty, tombs of the emperor and empress of the Southern Song Dynasty were all called "cuangong", indicating the temporary burial, and hoping that they would be buried in Gongxian County in the future. If the imperial concubine died before the emperor, the coffin would be in shallow burial in order to achieve multi-burial. Empress Wende acted as the latter. And in this case, the coffin was usually placed in a royal temple, while Emperor Taizong ordered the coffin of empress into Jiuzong Mountain, indicating that he had already decided to build his mausoleum there. In the following year, Wen Yanbo was buried in zhaoling mausoleum, which also proved this point. Therefore, the author judged that the conversation recorded in "Tang Hui Yao" should have taken place in the period from Li Yuan's death to Zhangsun's death, that is, from May of the ninth year of Zhenguan period to June of the tenth year of Zhenguan period. It is recorded in "History as a Mirror" that Taizong and Empress visited Jiucheng Palace from March to July in the eighth year of Zhenguan period, and Zhangsun fell ill during this period. Therefore, it can be seen that Zhangsun's illness was earlier than that of Li Yuan. Emperor Taizong probably began to think about his own afterlife while dealing with the funeral of Li Yuan, and Empress Zhangsun's condition made it urgent. Since the Han and Jin Dynasties, it has been common practice for emperors and empress to be buried together. Therefore, when Emperor Taizong chose the tomb site of Empress Wende, he actually selected his own tomb site.

### **3. THE REASON OF CHOOSING THE BURIAL FORM OF "USING MOUNTAINS AS MAUSOLEUM"**

After burying Empress Zhangsun, Li Shimin carved the following words on a stone tablet in Jiuzong Mountain.

"Empress Zhangsun was thrifty and asked for a simple burial in her last words, thinking that the thief just wants the treasure. If there is no treasure, nothing can be stolen. My original intention is also the same Emperors take the world as their home, not burying things in mausoleums. Jiuzong Mountain can be used as a mausoleum. There are more than 100 workers chipping stone for dozens of days, the mausoleum can be completed. Instead of burying gold and jade, the figures, horses and utensils were all made of earth and wood, which was just for the appreciation. If there is no one robbing the tomb, I would have no worries. And this should be a law for posterity."<sup>3</sup>[3]

In the article, "my original intention is also the same", indicating that using mountain as mausoleum and selecting Jiuzong Mountain as his and empress' mausoleum are decided by Li Shimin. The author believes that the reason why Taizong chose the tomb site in advance is not only because of Zhangsun's illness, but also because of the discussion about Li Yuan's xianling mausoleum. In 635 A.D., Li Yuan died, leaving the famous "Imperial Edicts". "... The specification of mausoleum should be in accordance with the principle of frugality, considering the mausoleum standard in Han Dynasty and Wei Dynasty. ..."<sup>4</sup>[4] There were two different mausoleum specifications in the Han and Wei dynasties. The mausoleum in Han Dynasty had a tall mound, and the funerary things in underground palace were extremely rich, such as the Mausoleum of Emperor Wu in Han Dynasty and the Mausoleum of Emperor Jingdi in the Han Dynasty. Even the so-called simple burial of the Mausoleum of Emperor Wen in Han Dynasty, which Li Yuan admired, was only relative to other mausoleum in Han Dynasty. However, Wei Dynasty practiced simple burial without burial mounds, and the specific location of mausoleum of Emperor Wen of Wei Dynasty has not been found yet. Li Yuan said: "since the specification of mausoleum should be frugal, why don't follow

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2. "Book of Tang" Vol. 51, "Imperial Concubine".

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3. "History as a Mirror" Vol. 194.

4. Song Minqiu. "Collection of Great Imperial in Tang Dynasty", Vol. 11, "Yao's Edict", Beijing: The Commercial Press, April 1959.

the specification in Wei Dynasty? Viewing the Yongkang Mausoleum built in June of the first year of Wude period, there were grave mound, shintou, stone carving and door lintel." Therefore, it can be seen that Li Yuan's opinion on elaborate funeral is positive. Therefore, "frugality" is just a formula, the so-called principle of "considering the specification in Han and Wei Dynasties" is actually "to build the mausoleum according to the standard in Han Dynasty". Li Yuan wanted an elaborate funeral, but did not want to bear the name of being luxury. Then, the problem was given to Li Shimin. Emperor Taizong "issued a decree to formulate the mausoleum specification, ordered to be sumptuous in accordance with the standards in Han Dynasty."<sup>5</sup> According to the mausoleum specification of Liu Bang, the founding emperor of the Han Dynasty, the edict was fully understood by Li Shimin. But the officials may not understand, Yu Shinan reported two times: "in accordance with the specification in dynasties in 'Baihutong', three-ren<sup>6</sup> high mausoleum can be built"<sup>7</sup>, indicating that it is reasonable to be in accordance with the specification of Ba mausoleum, but is unreasonable to be in accordance with the specification of Changling mausoleum. On the moral level, the memorial gave Taizong a lot of pressure. If Taizong did not accept the opinion, the morality was equal to that of the Emperors of Qin and Han..... being luxurious." Because of Li Yuan's ambiguous edict, Li Shimin was caught in a dilemma, that is, using simple burial was unfilial, and elaborate burial was immoral. Finally, with Fang Xuanling's ingenuity, the problem was solved. Fang Xuanling and others commented:

"The mausoleum of Liu Bang, Emperor of Han Dynasty, is 3 metres high, and that of Liu Xiu, Emperor of Eastern Han Dynasty, is 2 metres high. Liu Heng, Emperor Wen of the Han Dynasty, and Cao Pi, Emperor Wen of the Wei Dynasty, used the mountain as the mausoleum. In the author's opinion, "it would be extravagant to take Changling mausoleum as the standard. The use of taking two zhangs as the standard would make the Emperor loose the nobility. Liu Xiu was a great monarch, and his mausoleum specification was largely based on ancient traditions, which would be a fitting standard."<sup>8</sup>

5. "Tang Hui Yao" Volume 20, "Mausoleum".

6. "仞" is eight feet or seven feet in Zhou Dynasty, and three "仞" is about 5.5m

7. "Tang Hui Yao" Vol. 20, "Mausoleum".

8. Same as above.

Taizong built the mausoleum according to the tradition of the Han Dynasty. "The construction can be supervised personally, which can save the operation of descendants". To solve the difficult problems by himself and avoid the predicament faced by the descendants conformed to Taizong's personality of being courageous and responsible.

#### **4. THE PURPOSE OF USING MOUNTAIN AS MAUSOLEUM**

In the February of eleventh year of Zhenguan period (673 A.D.), Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty issued the Imperial Edicts of Jiuzong Mountain, stating that

"... I'm afraid that after the death, the descendants still follow the usual rituals, put hard work on the people, and worship the lavish burial and overhaul of the mausoleum. Now, I decide the specification in advance. It is necessary to be in accordance with the principle of frugality. And coffins could be placed in Jiuzong Mountain... From today on, if the meritorious officials, relatives and wise officials die, the state should give cemeteries and coffins, so that there would be no loss in funeral services after their death..."<sup>9</sup>

This was the second official compendium document about the mausoleum specification after the Emperor Li Yuan's edicts, which identified Jiuzong Mountain as his mausoleum in the form of edict and established the style of accompanying mausoleum. According to the imperial edict, using mountain as the mausoleum was a simple burial. With this example, it can prevent future generations from building large-size buildings or disturbing the people. In fact, it is recorded that during the period of Five Dynasties, Wen Tao robbed zhaoling mausoleum, and saw the magnificent palace, which was same as that of the human world.<sup>10</sup> The luxury of underground palace of zhaoling mausoleum can be seen. Was it the result of Li Shimin's operation against Li Yuan's original intention that tomb was excavated and stolen? Taizong died in July 10 of 23rd year of Zhenguan period (649 A.D), and the coffin was buried in zhaoling mausoleum in August of the same year (September 29). Due to the time limitation, it is impossible to carry out large-scale transformation of the underground palace. It can be seen that Emperor Taizong's talks, such as "placing

9. "Imperial Mausoleum in Jiuzong Mountain", "Book of Tang" Vol. 3, "Taizong".

10. "New History of the Five Dynasties" Vol. 40, Miscellaneous Biography 28.

coffins", were just tricks here. Almost the testamentary edict of every emperor in Tang Dynasty stated that "it is necessary to follow the principle of frugality" in burial. In fact, in addition to heling mausoleum and wenling mausoleum, there was no one more emperor selecting the form of simple burial. As described in the "testamentary edict of Xizong", "involving mausoleum specification, the simple burial of Emperor Wen of Han Dynasty was used as the standard in the edict of Emperors in Tang Dynasty. Talks on the omission of silk, gold and silver decorations and the prohibition of luxurious and beautiful crafts have all become flubdub."<sup>11</sup>It is not that the descendants disobey the imperial decree. The so-called "simple burial" was originally a political propaganda, demonstrating the emperor's compassionate attitude and thrifty virtue.

The real intention of using the mountain as the mausoleum can be found in Yu Shinan's memorial. "The ancient wise emperors did want to bury their parents with noble treasures and sacrifices when they practiced simple burial." "崇" refers to be tall, "光" is glorious. "显" is bright, noble and prominent. Treasure refers to pearls, jade and other valuable articles. Objects refer to sacrifices such as wine, animal and food utensils. Yu Shinan used the double negative sentence to confirm the fact that all the rulers, even the so-called sage and emperors, wanted to build tall and eye-catching tombs to show the royal glory and splendour. This cannot simply be regarded as the extravagance of the rulers, which is of important political significance. In ancient China, there has always been a sense of valuing high. In "the Book of Rites · Sacrificial Vessel", "the hall of the emperor is nine-chi high, that of princes is seven-chi high, that of senior officials is five-chi high, and that of scholars is three-chi high." Mausoleums are no exception. During the warring states period, the size of a tomb was used to identify the owner of mausoleum. In "the Book of Rites · climate and phenology in a lunar month", "it is required to build the grave-mound ridge, and the mausoleum size is used to distinguish the owner of mausoleum". Tall mausoleum can reveal the imperial identity and reflect the supreme power, making the people have the sense of fear. The law of Han Dynasty explicitly stipulated the height of tombs, and formally stipulated the hierarchy of tombs in the form of decrees, making it a tool to maintain social

ethics and a means to guarantee the ruling order. [6] After the nearly four-hundred years of chaos, the rulers of Tang Dynasty was urgent to establish a stable social order, and the mausoleum specification was an important link. The mausoleum of Western Han Dynasty in the Xianyang Yuan, just across the river from Chang 'an, were the most convenient examples of the Tang Dynasty. However, after changing the dynasties, the tall grave mound would become an obvious symbol, providing a convenient way for tomb raiders. The chaos between the Western and Eastern Han Dynasties led to the excavation of all the tombs of the Western Han Dynasty, which was undoubtedly a painful lesson to the later emperors. If the mausoleum was built in the way like that of Emperor Wen of Wei Dynasty, it can guarantee the safety of the mausoleum to the maximum extent, but it would lose the important political function of the mausoleum. Therefore, the way of using mountains as mausoleums and replacing the grave mound with natural peaks can not only achieve the lofty goal, but also play the political function of mausoleums. Under the protection of the huge mountain, it is difficult for tomb raiders to find the tomb ramp after changing the dynasties, so as to avoid the excavation.

## 5. CONCLUSION

With the help of the natural mountain, using the mountain as the mausoleum can reach the height that mounding the mausoleum cannot be reached, people's worship of the mountain is used to achieve the purpose of advocating the divine right of monarchy. Jiuzong Mountain is located in the northeast of Liquan County, Xianyang City, Shaanxi Province, about 1125 meters high above sea level. Yanxia town in southern Shaanxi Province is 500 meters high above sea level on average [5], and the absolute height of mountain is 625 meters high, being magnificent, tall and straight. Even from Nansima, which is about 785 meters above sea level, the absolute height to the summit is 340 meters. It spent 50 years in building the mausoleum of Han Dynasty, which has the highest grave mound (46.5 meters). It took more than 700,000 people to build the Mausoleum of First Emperor of Qin for 37 years, which was 115 meters high when it was built. With the help of natural mountains, zhaoling mausoleum reached a height that could not be reached in the imperial tombs of Qin and Han Dynasties with huge manpower and material resources. Undoubtedly,

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11. "Collection of Great Imperial in Tang Dynasty" vol.1 and vol. 2, "Imperial Mausoleum of Emperor Xi".

the political purpose was achieved. From this perspective, it can be called "simple burial".

## **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

This paper is independently completed by Bo Qin.

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