



# Interpretation of Zoroastrian Cultural Connotation in the Images Inside Yu Hong's Tomb from Sui Dynasty in Shanxi Province

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**Abstract.** As a representative of Zoroastrianism tombs in China, the excavation of Yu Hong's stone sarcophagus has special academic value and cultural connotation. For one thing, this sarcophagus reveals the strong regional civilization and era style. For another, it lays the foundation of the study of Persian culture during Sui and Tang Dynasty, and also provides the modern tomb aesthetic art with important references. This article took the origin of Yu Hong tomb stone coffin as the breakthrough point. Based on this, this article carefully discusses the artistic characteristics and image of Yu Hong's tomb, their significant religious and cultural connotation, and analyzes the inheritance and development of Zoroastrian culture in this coffin art. Through the exploration of Yu Hong's tomb, this article aims to explore the inheritance and development of Chinese excellent traditional culture and Western culture in China, as well as the wonderful cultural exchanges and collisions in this process.

**Keywords:** Yu Hong's tomb · Zoroastrian · tomb images · cultural inheritance

## 1 Introduction

Yu Hong, born in Lingzhou City (in Uighur language it is called Balikladi), the grandson of the Northern Wei Dynasty leader chief, the son of Ru Ru Mo He to Fen, is a famous diplomat in ancient China. As a foreigner with very special experience and identity, Yu Hong was favored by the emperor. In the Sui Dynasty, he was granted the founding of Guangxing County and fed 600 households. In the Northern Zhou Dynasty, he also served as Jiao Jian Sa Bao Fu, in charge of foreign affairs in China [1]. He served as an official in three dynasties and passed away at the age of 59, after all the turbulent disputes between the Northern Qi Dynasty, the Northern Zhou Dynasty and the Sui Dynasty. Yu Hong was born rich, so both the coffin and the burial goods in the tomb are very luxurious, with high archaeological value and artistic charm, reproducing the superb artistic attainments of ancient China.

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B. Majoul et al. (Eds.): ICLAHD 2022, ASSEHR 726, pp. 1377–1381, 2023.

[https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-97-8\\_176](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-97-8_176)

Yu Hong's tomb is one of the top ten archaeological discoveries in 1999. More than famous for the ancient tomb itself, the exquisite and impressive relief on the stone coffin in Yu Hong tomb is also a cultural value. The stone coffin is a three-way room pattern, resting on the top of the mountain type hall, the stone coffin seat each has two stone lion heads to support, their back bearing the base of the stone coffin. Not only that, the whole relief is made of white marble, and the relief painted works will remain immortal after the time changes [2]. The relief is rich in color. The gorgeous scenes suggest that the carving skills are very mature at that time. Besides, the relief is full of exotic customs, with vivid and lifelike people and animal images. The content of the relief painting is composed of more than 50 independent images and diverse content. The images of people all have high nose, deep eyes, black hair and thick beard, which is in accord with the image of the nomadic people in northwestern China and other northwestern countries next to China. Hence, the life scenes of the aristocratic Hu people (the Northern barbarian tribes in ancient China) in the Sui Dynasty displayed by the sarcophagus have extremely high cultural value for the study of the artistic development journey at that time [3]. The rich exotic amorous feelings are depicted through the patterns. Different from the phoenix, dragon and nine-tailed fox image in the Han culture, the animals here are belt bird, fishtail horse, etc., with imagination and artistic characteristics. In the relief, the scenes depict the huteng dance sacrifice and people's gathering in the harvest season, which shows the Hu people's romantic unique faith culture. The reliefs and color paintings of Yu Hong's tombstone are not only the world's top art treasures, but also as the very well-preserved tombs of the Sui and Tang Dynasty, which are of great significance for the study of the Sui and Tang Dynasty and reflecting the cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries in ancient China.

## 2 The Interpretation of the Zoroastrian Culture

Founded by the Persian Ahura Mazda, Zoroastrianism was introduced to China during the Southern and Northern Dynasty under the Chinese name of Xian Jiao [4]. Zoroastrian followers believe in the sun. They believe that the sun is omnipotent. Without the sun, humans will fall into darkness, and the evil will breed in the whole earth. At the same time, the sun represents power. Zoroastrian believers fulfill their wishes by believing in the supreme god Ahura Mazda-the god of light. The image of the bright god is the first "winged beast", with huge and exaggerated wings, which is deeply reflected in the relief of the sarcophagus, and is permeated with a thick Persian style.

Zoroastrianism mainly worships the "sacred fire" as its main ritual. Therefore, in China, it is also called Huo Jiao, which means fire religion, or Xian Huo Jiao, which means foreign fire religion. The worship of the sacred fire in the sect is extremely enthusiastic, which is reflected in the front seat of the stone coffin [5]. The image is engraved with a pattern, which shows two figures with human heads and the body of an eagle carrying an altar of fire burning with blazing fire. People with human heads and eagle bodies wear masks. In Zoroastrian culture, fire symbolizes the supreme god. The flame is not only sacred and pure, but also contains enormous energy and is the brilliance bestowed by the supreme god. Therefore, the sacrifice must wear a mask to avoid affecting the purity of the fire. At the same time, the image of the eagle with the

head of the god of light also comes from the creation myth of Zoroastrianism. The eagle is the bird of prey in the hands of the Hu people, and it is also the incarnation of the Zoroastrian god of war. Therefore, the birth of the God of Light embodies the best hopes of Zoroastrian believers.

### 3 The Interpretation of the Relief Color Painting

The relief paintings on the coffin wall of Yu Hong's tomb include grand banquet scenes, festive sacrifice scenes, ferocious hunting scenes and tragic human-lion fighting scenes. In the banquet scene, the hero and heroine toast to each other. In the field, the dancers twirled and danced, and their clothes fluttered. The musicians on both sides are holding konghou (an instrument), pipa (an instrument), corset drum and other instruments. The whole picture is peaceful and beautiful, like a picture scroll of a prosperous age [7]. However, below this carving is a scene of a man and a lion fighting. In the scene, with blood splattering, the picture is violent and bloody, which contrasts sharply with the concert banquet scene. At the same time, such a contrast is also unique in the contradictory beauty of Hu people's art [8].

The image on the right side of the front wall shows the extravagant scenes of noble travel at that time. The owner in the picture is wearing a sun and moon crown, a red round-neck robe and a half-back shirt, and white tight-leg trousers and soft boots. The image is noble, elegant and majestic. During the journey, the attendants followed him with canopies in their hands, while the master sat on horseback. Such a contrast highlights the incomparably noble status of the owner [9]. In addition, some of the figures in the picture are dressed in robes and some with ribbons, which is a typical Sasanian art style. It can be seen that although Yu Hong has experienced three dynasties and has a deep degree of Sinicization, he has been a devout Zoroastrian believer all his life and is also very loyal to his own nation. In Yu Hong's tomb, the tomb style combining Zoroastrian culture and Chinese culture, especially the culture of the ethnic Han culture, is very prominent. His descendants also believed that this style of cultural integration was his interpretation of the two cultures throughout his life. Tombs such as Yu Hong Tomb are not uncommon. This combination of Zoroastrianism and Confucianism more truly reflects the process of the fusion of Hu and Han at that time, and the creation of artistic treasures that take into account the styles of Hu and Han in this process.

### 4 Inheritance of Excellent Traditional Art

“Seek the wood of the elders, must strengthen its root; to flow away, must dredge its spring.” The excellent Chinese traditional culture is the spiritual cornerstone of the Chinese nation as well as the rich nutrition contained in which promotes the continuous development of socialist core values. Moreover, it is also an important source of the strategy of building a cultural power. As a representative of excellent traditional culture, the important position of Yu Hong's tomb stone coffin is self-evident [10]. Combined with his rich experience of visiting diplomatic countries, the connotation of Persian, chestnut and even Chinese Confucian culture can be interpreted from the images in the tomb [11].

Chinese culture has always advocated “collecting the culture of hundreds of times and thousands of years.” Therefore, a thoroughly study on the cultural connotation contained in Yu Hong’s tomb is necessary. These cultural connotations are also unique symbols of Chinese civilization, which can be used to promote Chinese literature and art. The excellent traditional culture contains profound humanistic thoughts and aesthetic spirit, and the combination of artistic virtues and cultural values, and the integration into the Chinese aesthetic spirit, stimulates the cultural creativity and vitality, so as to stick to the cultural foundation and development lifeblood of the Chinese nation.

The art of the Sui and Tang Dynasties represented by the stone coffin of Yu Hong’s tomb is both historical and contemporary, both national and the world. Therefore, if the academic circle wants to dig deep into the history, it must take root in the practice and the people, in order to continuously integrate the ideas and the core, and hope not to be forgotten in the cultural development. The Chinese culture emphasizes gratitude. It is said that “When you eat fruit, you should be grateful for the tree that produces the fruit, and when you drink water, you should be grateful for the source of the water.” Chinese people must stay true to their original aspiration as well as true nature, take its essence and foster their strengths and circumvent the weaknesses. It is also necessary to look to the world and to the future. The development of new works and art should be based on the inheritance and development of traditional culture and the profound Chinese ideas, thus spreading the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation, and in line with the contemporary aesthetic system of the Chinese people. In this way, the stone coffin of the tomb of Yu Hong can stand tall with distinctive Chinese characteristics, Chinese style and Chinese style.

## 5 Conclusion

Through the interpretation of the stone coffin image of Yu Hong’s tomb, we can connect it with the life background of the tomb owner, and carry out more extensive and in-depth research in related fields. For example, the cultural sources of the images in the tomb largely refer to Zoroastrian religious myths, legends and figures, which are directly related to Yu Hong as a loyal Zoroastrian. In this way, we can also understand the characteristic that the tomb hero was born in West Asia and had served as a diplomatic official for a long time. Combined with Yu Hong’s rich experience of visiting diplomatic countries, we can interpret the connotation of Persian, Chestnut and even Chinese Confucian culture from the images in the tomb [11]. In short, the discovery of Yu Hong’s tomb has great significance to the study of Chinese tomb culture. It not only enriches China’s cognition and understanding of western national culture, but also plays an important role in the study of the history of the Southern and Northern Dynasties, the Sui and Tang Dynasties, and the history of exchanges between China and foreign countries. What is more, Yu Hong, as a foreigner who believed in Zoroastrianism but settled in the Central Plains, inevitably experienced numerous collisions of Chinese and Western customs in his life. The period in which he lived can be seen as a concrete epitome of the historical activities of the Southern and Southern Dynasties and the spread of Zoroastrianism. At the same time, it also witnessed a series of cultural exchanges between the Central Plains and other civilizations during the Southern and Northern Dynasties.

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