A Riddle in Stone
Identifying a Plinth of Yangling Mausoleum 陽陵

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Abstract

The archaeological investigation of Yangling started in the 1970s. By now, much more has been written about Han burial system and burial objects. A large number of excavations are valuable to the investigations of Western Han society that covers such realms as politics, economy, military and culture. Furthermore, they are also of great significance in the study of art history. However, the topic of this paper is about a stone selected from numerous unearthed cultural relics. For all the investigations on the basis of archaeological reports of Yangling, the focus on this stone is less than those of the burial system of Western Han and excavated objects from the angle of art history. The stone was recorded as Luojing shi 羅經石 in written form for the first time in the stele to memorize the significant archaeological discovery in 1997. In two of the most important archaeological reports, Pelorus is employed as its English translation. Both the Chinese name and English translation of the stone seemingly imply that the stone was placed in the site of Yangling to confirm the directions. However, it is not a generally
accepted conclusion. This article aims to answer the riddle in the Stone in Yangling Mausoleum with more certainty. All previous studies and increasing accessible archaeological data make it possible to conduct a more comprehensive investigation of the nature and function of the Stone and the architecture inside which the Stone was placed. Compared to other speculations, I am more inclined to suggest that the Stone is a central plinth of a Mingtang style ritual architecture in Yangling. Therefore, I prefer to rename it as Plinth of Yangling 陽陵柱礎 rather than Luojing shi 羅經石, which is too misleading.

Key Words: Han Yangling (漢陽陵), Luojing shi (羅經石), Mingtang (明堂), Plinth of Yangling (陽陵柱礎)

1. Introduction

The fourth emperor of Western Han dynasty, Emperor Jingdi 漢景帝, is named Liu Qi 劉啟. He was enthroned at the age of 32. During the 17 years of his reign, he continued the policy of “giving the people time to recuperate”. Externally, he adopted the policy of “pacifying the Huns through marriages”. His reign promoted the Han to the first zenith of Imperial China. Therefore, Emperor Jingdi and his father Emperor Wendi 漢文帝 were praise by later generations of historians as:

At the beginning of the establishment of Han Dynasty, (Emperor Gaozu 漢高祖 implemented the policy of) eliminating exorbitant taxes, and giving the people time to recuperate. In the reign of Emperor Wendi 漢文帝, the policy of respect and frugality was added. All the recuperating policy was compiled by Emperor Jingdi 漢景帝. During the following five or six decades, the social traditions were transformed, the people were pure and honest. Speaking of Zhou Dynasty, it is bound to mention the rule of Kings Cheng and Kang, and speaking of Han Dynasty, it is bound to mention the rule of Emperors Wendi and Jingdi. What flourishing reigns!

漢興, 掃除煩苛, 與民休息, 至於孝文, 加之以恭儉, 孝景遵業, 五六十載之間, 至於移風易俗, 黎民醇厚。周言成康, 漢言文景, 美矣！1)

Emperor Jingdi died at Weiyang Palace 未央宮 in 142 BC and was buried in February the next year. 2) Empress Xiaojing, surnamed Wang 孝景王皇后, who was the mother of Emperor Wudi 漢武帝, died in the fifteenth year after the death of

1) Hanshu·Jingdi ji 漢書·景帝紀. Unless otherwise noted, all citations in this article are translated by the author.
2) Hanshu·Jingdi ji 漢書·景帝紀.
her husband, 126 BC. She was buried at Yangling 阳陵 by the side of her husband tomb.\(^3\) In other words, Yangling is the mausoleum where Emperor Jingdi and his empress were buried in the same mausoleum but in separate tombs.

Yangling is located in the Xianyang Height (Xianyang yuan 咸陽原) to the north of the villages of Zhangjia wan 張家灣 and Hougou cun 後溝村 in the town of Zhengyang 正陽, Xianyang City, Shaanxi 陝西 Province. Lying on the border area of Weicheng 渭城 district, Jiangyang 江陽 and Gaoling 高陵 counties, it reaches the Jing River 涇河 in the north and extends across the Wei River 渭河 to border on Chang’an 長安 County; on its eastern side, the two rivers the Jing and the Wei converge, and on its west it borders on Changling 長陵, the mausoleum of Emperor Gaozu, or the High Progenitor 漢高祖. Yangling is the westernmost one among the nine Emperors Mausoleums of Western Han.\(^4\) Its specific location can be observed in the map below:

\(^3\) *Hanshu·Waiqi zhuan* 漢書·外戚傳.
\(^4\) Shaanxi Province Archaeological Research Institute, ed. *The Yangling Mausoleum of Emperor Jingdi of the Western Han Dynasty* 漢陽陵 (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 2001), 1.
The archaeological investigation of Yangling started in the 1970s. By now, the two most important and detailed reports on this investigation have been published in 2001 and 2004. The archaeological discoveries and investigation of Yangling, combined with excavations of other Emperors’ mausoleums of Western Han, unveiled the mysteries of the burial system of the Western Han and solved a knotty problem in the research of the pattern of the mausoleums during Han period.6)

A large number of excavated remains are valuable to the investigations of Western Han society that covers such realms as politics, economy, military and culture. Furthermore, they are also of great significance in the study of art history.

The topic of this paper is about a stone selected from numerous unearthed cultural relics. For all the investigations on the basis of archaeological reports of Yangling, the focus on this stone is less than those of the burial system of Western Han and pottery figures from the angle of art history. The stone was named Luojing shi 羅經石7) in a written form for the first time in the stele to memorize the significant archaeological discovery of Yangling in 1997.8) In two of most important archaeological reports, Pelorus is employed as its English translation. Both the Chinese name and English translation of the stone seemingly imply that the stone was placed in the site of Yangling to confirm the directions. However, it is not a generally accepted conclusion.9) For this reason, I will refer it as the Stone rather than Luojing Shi.

7) The stone was called as Luopan shi 羅盤石 by local people. Therefore, it is recorded as Luopan shi 羅盤石 in Yang Kuan, Zhongguo gudai lingqin zhidushi yanjiu 中國古代陵寢制度史研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), 19. Liu Qingzhu 劉青竹 and Li Yufang 李毓芳, Xihan shiyi ling 西漢十一陵 (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1987), 42. But Luojing shi 羅經石 is more widely used and accepted.
9) Among the previous investigations, the conclusions about the Stone were made by Yang Kuan 楊宽, Wang Zhankui 王占魁 and Li Ling 李零 are more persuasive than others. Yang Kuai confirms the site where the Stone was located is indeed a location of the resting hall of Yangling Mausoleum in the Zhongguo gudai lingqin zhidushi yanjiu 中國古代陵寢制度史研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), 16. Wang Zhankui demonstrates the sacrificial characteristics of the Stone’s site in the “Shilun Han Yangling ‘Luojing shi’ yizhi de jisi xing tezheng 試論漢陽陵‘羅經石’遺址的祭祀性特徵,” Kaogu yu wenwu 考古與文物 2 (2002): 61-5, 69. In the “Shuo Han Yangling ‘Luojing shi’ yizhi de jianzhu sheji 說漢陽陵‘羅經石’遺址的建築設計,” Kaogu yu wenwu 考古與文物 6 (2002): 51-60. Li Ling concludes three points: firstly, the square building on the site is very similar to the design of the board of Liu Bo 六博 game that was very popular in the Han dynasty; secondly, it is also closely related to the design of the Han mirror with Liu Bo pattern; the third one is that this site has a similar layout to a famous ritual building Wang Mang’s Mingtang Hall 王莽明堂.
羅經石 in the following argumentation.

In this paper, I try to provide another answer or interpretation to the riddle in this stone, that is the stone is likely to be a central plinth of a ritual building in Yangling, Mingtang Style Building——similar to the Mingtang appeared in the reign of Wang Mang 王莽10, but not the same in their configurations. In addition, this paper also aims at providing more perspectives or possibilities on this issue, a seemingly mysterious stone excavated in Yangling.

2. All About the Stone

The Stone is placed about 400m to the southeast of the Emperor Jingdi’s tomb and about 700m to the southwest of the Empress’s tomb. The unearthed relic consists of a rammed earth base with a perimeter of 1.7m and a round stone with a diameter of 1.35m, a 3cm-width and 2cm-depth cross carved on the stone’s face pointing to the four directions, east, south, west and north.11) In the first batch of archaeological reports, the Stone was defined as a standard point to determine the directions and distance, therefore named Luojing Shi 羅經石. However, the nature and function of the Stone is debated to this day.

We can see its specific location within Yangling and position relative to the

Finally, the author explores the nature of this site, and suggests that it should be the Mausoleum Temple of Han Emperor Jingdi, that is De Yang Temple 德陽宮, and indicating that there is a close relationship between the early plan of the Mingtang Hall before Emperor Jing di and later Mausoleum temples.

In addition, Yang Zhefeng 楊哲峰, in the “Weibei Xihan diling buju sheji zhi guancha 渭北西漢帝陵佈局設計之觀察,” Wenwu 文物 4 (2009): 61-8, reflects the layout of the 11 Royal Mausoleums of Western Han on the basis of the techniques by googleearth.com, which also opens a new perspective on the issue of the Stone and the site where it was located.

I, in this paper, will argue that the architecture built on the Stone’s site is most likely a Mingtang style ritual complex and the Stone is the central plinth of this ritual architectural complex by means of more evidence, in both archaeological and written forms.

11) The data of the Stone is of subtle difference in different articles or archaeological reports. The citation here is from Ma Yongying 馬永赢 and Wang Baoping 王保平, Zou jin Han Yangling 走近漢陽陵 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2001) 33-4.
Emperor’s and Empress’s tombs in the following two figures. According to the visual archaeological evidence, it seems that the Stone was located at the extension cord of the midpoint of the two tombs, although the linear distances to the two tombs from the Stone are not the same. It is, however, only an intuitive conclusion on the base of the maps shown below, there is not any written evidence found in any archaeological reports.

<Map 2> The Location of the Stone within Yangling\textsuperscript{12)}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{map.png}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{12)} Han Yangling Archaeological Museum 漢陽陵考古陳列館, 8.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure.png}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{13)}
It is undeniable that the Stone occupied a very important location in the Mausoleum. If it was placed there only for confirming the direction and distance, the importance of its location seems to be unpersuasive to the simple purpose of using this stone, not to mention that surrounding objects probably blocked the sight of measurement on the basis of this Stone. On only this point, it can be denied that the Stone was placed for only the purpose of measurement. The follow-up archaeological data also supports this view.

Besides the importance of its location within the Mausoleum, the Yangling archaeological team also excavated more architectural relics in the area where the Stone is located. The details of these architectural relics, such as entrenchments, square winding-corridor, wells, pebble-stone aprons, rammed earth base and gates, are listed in the images shown below. According to these pieces of archaeological evidence, combined with its important location, it can be inferred that this Stone should be located at a site where a significant and large architecture in this Mausoleum was built.

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13) *The Yangling Mausoleum of Emperor Jingdi of the Western Han Dynasty* 漢陽陵，18.
In addition, there is another ruin of an architectural complex which was found at about 250m to the east of the Stone, and directly to the south of Empress Wang’s tomb, as well as the other five architectural compounds distributed around the main area of the Mausoleum. The area east of the main graveyard is the burial ground of the nobles. Therefore, we can now put the Stone and its location in the plan map of Yangling to study the overall layout of the Mausoleum, which more clearly display that the location of the Stone and the architectural compounds to which the Stone belongs enjoy extreme importance in the main graveyard of the Mausoleum.

Relying on the above archaeological data and historical evidence, can we determine that the area where the Stone located was once a site of a ritual architectural compound, and that the Stone is the central plinth of this ritual architecture? For this assumption, I will provide more textual records as supporting evidence.

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14) The data of the excavations is from *Han Yangling Archaeological Museum* 漢陽陵考古陳列館, 76. The image is from *The Yangling Mausoleum of Emperor Jingdi of the Western Han Dynasty* 漢陽陵, 18.
15) The data of the ruins is from Ma Yongying 馬永赢 and Wang Baoping 王保平, *Zou jin Han Yangling 走近漢陽陵* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2001), 34.
16) The image is from *Han Yangling Archaeological Museum* 漢陽陵考古陳列館, 81.
3. Analysis on Archaeological Evidence: Ruins VS Texts

In the previous part, it displays that there are totally five types of architectural relics excavated in the area where the Stone was located, which are entrenchments, square winding-corridor, eight wells, pebble-stone aprons, rammed earth base and twelve gates. All these pieces of archaeological evidence suggest the Stone might be a central plinth of a magnificent architecture. After collecting and showing all archaeological data about the Stone and the area where it was located, we must return to the written textual passage to explore reliable historical evidence to support

Notes:
1. The Stone;
2. Another ruin of a complex is set at about 250m to the east of the Stone, and directly to the south of Empress Wang’s tomb;
3-7. Ruins of architectural compounds in Yangling Mausoleum;
8. Accompanying burial grounds of the nobles in Yangling Mausoleum;
   A. Emperor Jingdi’s tomb;
   B. Empress Wang’s tomb.

17) The map is from Ma Yongying 马永赢 and Wang Baoping 王保平, Zou jin Han Yangling 走近汉阳陵, 8.
the previous conjecture about the Stone. No doubt, it is crucial to identify the Stone and the extant excavations around it.

According to the archaeological reports published in 2001 and 2004, and an article of 2005,18) we can be informed with newly updated data about the whole area where the Stone was located. This area is about 67000m², whose outermost boundary was surrounded by entrenchments. Each side of these entrenchments is 260m long and L-shaped. In other words, the site of this magnificent architecture was shaped as a square cistern by means of the outermost entrenchments. In the center of this area, the Stone in a round shape with a carved cross was placed on a square rammed earth base. Therefore, the Stone and a rammed earth base together formed the most prominent part of the center of this delineated area. The outermost entrenchments, likely to be the symbols of water, and the central prominent part, which consists of square rammed earth base and a round stone make us easily think of Square Cistern (Fangze 方澤) and Round Mound (Yuanqiu 圓丘). The archaeological data and visual details see Figure 1:

In the first day of winter’s arriving, (sacrifice is performed) at Yuanqiu 圓丘 on the ground; In the first day of summer’s arrive, (sacrifice is performed) at Fangze 方澤 in the water.

冬日至，於地上之圓丘；夏日至，於澤中之方丘。19)

From the above citation in the Zhouli 周禮, we can learn about the function of the Fangze and Yuanqiu. In other words, the delineated area by entrenchments, the center of which is the prominent part where the Stone was placed, is likely to be a site for performing sacrifice in Yangling Mausoleum.

Furthermore, in his proposal to construct ritual compounds in the northern and southern skirts of Chang’an長安 Capital City, Wang Mang 王莽 mentioned that:

_Liji_ says: Burning firewood at Great Altar to sacrifice the Heaven. Burying cereals at Grand Bend to sacrifice the Earth. … Sacrificing the Earth at Grand Bend, which is located in the northern skirt (of the capital city) to match the position of Yin.

19) _Zhouli·Da siyue_ 周禮·大司樂.
《礼记》曰：“燔柴于太坛，祭天也。瘗雝于大坙，祭地也。...祭地于大坙，在北郊，就阴位也。”⑴

Yan Shigu 颜师古, cited the explanation by Wei Zhao 韦昭, defined Dazhe 大折 in his Commentary on the Hanshu 漢書注 as:

Grand Bend refers to the altar which is set on a brilliant land.

大折，謂壇於昭晰地也。

And further interpreted Zhe折 below:

Bend is a curved shape. It is used to describe the shape of Fangze, its four corners are in bend shape.

折，曲也。言方澤之形，四曲折也。

In the Hanshu 漢書, the following record can still be found about Fangze 方澤:

On the first day of the arrival of winter, completing six different movements at Yuanqiu on the ground, then all Heavenly Deities descend; on the first day of the arrival of summer, completing eight different movements at Fangqiu in the water, then all Earthly Gods appear.

冬日至，於壝上之圜丘奏樂六變，則天神皆降；夏日至，於澤中之方丘奏樂八變，則墬衹皆出。⑵

Later generations of historians provided concrete and detailed explanation about the function and shape of Fangze cited below:

Round Mound, Great Altar, is for sacrificing the Heaven. Square Cistern, Grand Bend, is for sacrificing the Earth.

圜丘大壇，祭天也。方澤大折，祭地也。⑶

⑴ Hanshu·Jiaosi zhi 漢書·郊祠志下.
⑵ Ibid.
⑶ Yiwen leiju·Jisi 藝文類聚·祭祀.
The Lord is as numinous as the Sun and Moon, and as trustable as four seasons. Therefore, serve the Heaven like a father; serve the Earth like a mother. Treat the Sun like a brother; treat the Moon like a sister. Sacrificing the father-like Heaven with the rite at Yuanqiu. Sacrificing the mother-like Earth with the rite at Fangze. Sacrificing the brother-like Sun at eastern suburb. Sacrificing the sister-like Moon at western suburb.

During the reign of Emperor Wudi, he revised the rites of suburban sacrifice. Sacrificing Taiyi 太一 at Ganquan 甘泉 to match the position of Qian 乾. Sacrificing Houtu 后土 by the south of Fenshui 汾水, which is Fangqiu in the water.

By the Fenshui汾水, the soil was deliberately piled up, which refers to Fangqiu in the water. Symbolizing the Earth by the shape of square to sacrifice the Earth. The establishment of Yuanqiu is the imitation of the shape of Heaven.

When we compare the written textual records with the visible archaeological data, it seems to be sure that this delineated area was designated for sacrificing the Heaven and Earth. However, more released unearthed relics in this area enrich the archaeological evidence for the investigation of the Stone, but also add complexity. Among them, the eight wells and the square winding-corridor with twelve gates excavated in this area are very important archaeological discoveries.

In the excavation site of the delineated area, there are totally eight wells totally excavated and each side of the two. One of the wells has already been proven to be more than 24m in depth. In the Guanzi 管子, we can find the specific regulations on what color clothing the Emperor should wear in different seasons. Correspondingly,
from which well the Emperor should drink water was also conditioned by the seasons and directions:

During the season of Wuhe, the Lord is in yellow color, and drinks water from the well located at the center.
During the season of Baju, the Lord is in green color, and drinks water from the well located in the east.
During the season of Qiju, the Lord is in red color, and drinks water from the well located in the south.
During the season of Jiuhe, the Lord is in white color, and drinks water from the well located in the west.
During the season of Liuxing, the Lord is in black color, and drinks water from the well located in the north.

As for the square winding-corridor with twelve gates, the shape of the corridor and the number of the gate are more likely to be connected to the hall in which the Emperor would dwell in different seasons. The specific regulations about this issue can be seen in the Liji:

In the first month of Spring, dwelling in the chamber on the left of the Qingyang.
In the second month of Spring, dwelling in the Qingyang Great Fane.
In the last month of Spring, dwelling in the chamber on the right of the Qingyang.

A similar order of the chamber for the Emperor’s resting can be seen in other three seasons: summer, autumn and winter. Each season starts from dwelling in the

26) Guanzi·Youguan 管子·幼官 and Guanzi·Youguan tu 管子·幼官圖.
27) Liji·Yueling 禮記·月令.
left chamber first, Zuoge 左個 and then to the central hall, Mingtang 明堂, finally ends in the right chamber, Youge 右個. The difference lies in the fact that each of the dwelling halls located in four directions has its own title: Qingyang 青陽 in the east, Mingtang 明堂 in the south, Zongzhang 總章 in the west and Xuantang 玄堂 in the north. In the *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, a record about the tour to the east by Emperor Zhangdi 漢章帝 says:

(Figure 4) (A) Pebble–Stone Aprons at the Ruins of the Stone (B) Hollow Brick with Green Dragon Design at the Ruins of the Stone (C) Eternal Happiness Eaves Tile at the Ruins of the Stone

28) The image is from *Han Yangling Archaeological Museum* 漢陽陵考古陳列館, 80.
29) The image is from *The Yangling Mausoleum of Emperor Jingdi of the Western Han Dynasty* 漢陽陵, 68.
In addition, [Emperor Zhangdi] wrote poems for the twelve gates of Spiritual Altar, and performed each poem respectively according to the rite of each month. Emperor Hedi did not increase or revise [the content of] them.

又為靈台十二門作詩，各以其月祀而奏之。和帝無所增改。31)

All these cited records, together with the excavations, imply that the wells and the number of the gates should have great connections to four seasons and five directions with strong symbolic and ritual characteristics. In addition, the excavations of pebble-stone aprons, hollow bricks with auspicious animals, and eave tiles show this area is not only a delineated rammed earth altar, but also a site of a magnificent architecture. The strong symbolic characteristics of the above-mentioned excavations indicate that the architecture built in this area should be for the ceremonial purpose rather than a functional use of a building, as in, for example, the resting hall in Emperor’s mausoleum (Lingqin 陵寢).32)

4. Conclusion: The Central Plinth of a Mingtang Style Ritual Architecture in Yangling Mausoleum

This above inference, that the area where the Stone was placed is a site of a magnificent ritual architecture, can be further evidenced by archaeological discoveries in other mausoleums of Western Han. In Maoling茂陵 Mausoleum of Emperor Wudi 漢武帝, a rammed earth base and a round stone is also excavated, but there is no cross carved on the face of the stone.33) Similarly, another rammed earth altar is unearthed in Duling 杜陵 Mausoleum of Emperor Xuandi 漢宣帝. Whether there is a round-shape stone on this altar in Duling needs to be supported by further released archaeological data.34)

31) Hou Hanshu·Zhi·Jisi 後漢書·志·祭祀.
32) Some scholars, such as Yang Kuan 楊寬, suggest that this area should be the site of Deyang Palace 德陽宮 in Yangling. Among all assumptions for this area and the Stone, this one is very persuasive. However, on the basis of newly released archaeological data, I am more inclined to think that the architecture in this area is for performing sacrifice rather than only for functional use of a building.
These archaeological excavations suggest that the Fangze and Yuanqiu style rammed earth base and the Stone may be a standard architectural composition in the mausoleums of Western Han. As for pebble-stone aprons, hollow bricks with auspicious animals and tiles excavated in the ruins around the Stone further demonstrate that there was once a magnificent architecture located here rather than only a delineated square area with a prominent part consisting of a square rammed earth base and a round stone carved a cross on its face.

It is particularly worth pointing out here the excavations of tiles are only in the area around the winding-corridor. Indeed, no ruins of tiles are excavated in the central area around the Stone. In the Hou Hanshu 後漢書, there is a record about the layout of Mingtang, which 明堂 describes as the following:

The Lord intended to build a Mingtang near Feng’gao 奉高 county, and had no idea about the configurations of Mingtang. Gongyu Dai 公玉帶, a native of Jinan 濟南, presented the illustration of Mingtang in the period of Yellow Emperor. [The illustrations show that] there is a hall in the center of Mingtang. The hall has no walls all around and its rooftop covered by thatch. Around Mingtang is a drainage system, and its water encircles the walls, and forms a channel in two layers. [On the top of the channel] there is a tower with an entrance in the southwest, and named Kunlun 昆侖, from which the Son of Heaven enters into Mingtang to worship the Highest Thearch. Accordingly, the Lord commanded to build a Mingtang by Wenshui 汶水 in Feng’gao following the style in the illustration of Gongyu Dai.

The citation above is a record about Emperor Wudi’s reconstruction of Mingtang 明堂. It says that the central hall of Mingtang had no walls and its rooftop was covered with thatch rather than tiles. Obviously, the Mingtang in the above citation is a ritual architecture. This evidence may explain why no tiles were excavated in

35) Hanshu·Jiaosi zhi 漢書·郊祀志下.
the central site where the Stone was placed, although historical records say that Emperor Shi Huangdi of Qin Dynasty 秦始皇 once constructed a Mingtang and that it became the model for Western Han ritual structures. Some believe the structure in Chang’an on which modern scholars have focused attention since excavation in the 1950s is the ritual building constructed by Wang Mang 王莽 instead of by Emperor Wudi 漢武帝. Therefore, it is necessary to compare the architectural excavations around the Stone with the structures of Wang Mang’s Mingtang.

According to the *Hanshu*, Wang Mang proposed to “construct Mingtang 明堂, Piyong 辟雍 and Lingtai 靈臺, and build residence for scholars” to implement ritual reform and enhance education in 4 BC. In the *Mingtang qinmiao tongkao 明堂寢廟通考*, Wang Guowei 王國維 illustrated the structure of Mingtang in that the internal configurations of Mingtang include fourteen columns along the walls and three pylons on each side. The steps of the pylons were paved with hollow bricks with the pattern of four gods. The bricks, walls and rooftops were painted blue, red, white, and black respectively corresponding to the four directions of east, south, west, and north. There are three chambers respectively at each side from east to north. The central chamber in the east is named Dongyang 東陽; the one in the south named Mingtang 明堂; the western central chamber named Zongzhang 總章; and the one in the north named Xuantang 玄堂. As for the two side chambers at each side, the left one is named Zuoge 左個; the right one is named Youge 右個. Great Chamber 太室 refers to the one that is located at the center. All is identical with the previous citation from the *Yueling* 月令.

The configurations of chambers of Mingtang and their symbolism might be still debated to this day. Here, 12, the quantity of the chambers of Mingtang as well as of the gates located at the winding-corridor, probably signifies the number of the months in the Chinese lunar calendar and divisions of a day. From this point, the archaeological remains discussed in this article have a great association with the architectural structure and symbolism of Mingtang.

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37) *Hanshu·Pingdi Ji 漢書·平帝紀* and *Hanshu·Wang Mang Zhuan 漢書·王莽傳*.
In 1956, the archaeological team of Shaanxi Province explored a relic approximately 1 km to the south of the capital city, Chang’an, of Han Dynasty. The site of excavations and architectural details of the remains are identical with the records in the Sanhuang futu and Shuijing zhu, and verified as the relic of Mingtang, a ritual building constructed by Wang Mang in 4 BC in the southern suburbs of Western Han Chang’an. The excavated configurations of Mingtang are also very similar to the remains excavated in the area concerned in this article, for example, wells, circular closed ditch, gates and side rooms, even hollow bricks and tiles with auspicious pattern.39)

The Institute of Archaeology Chinese Academy of Social Science ed., The Western Han Ritual Architectural Compound Sites 西漢禮制建築遺址 (Beijing: wenwu chubanshe, 2003), 20-61.
From the two selected illustrations above, we can know that as yet there is no consensus made in the academia on the reconstruction of Mingtang. On the basis of archaeological excavations, it is reasonable to compare the plan map of the configurations of Mingtang with it to the configurations of the area discussed in this article.

43) Ibid.
Relying on reliable textual passages and objective archaeological data, we can verify the great similarities in configurations and symbolism of the two ritual compounds, Mingtang and the architecture inside which the Stone was located. We can almost assert that the architecture in the area where the Stone is located is not just a ritual compound, but a Mingtang style building. As for the answer to the riddle in the Stone, that it should be the central plinth of this Mingtang style ritual building in Yangling Mausoleum, the photo of another central plinth of Mingtang building in the reign of Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 of Tang Dynasty excavated in 1988 near Luoyang city shown below is one more piece of crucial supportive visual evidence for this inference.  

![Figure 9.1] Photo of the Stone in Yangling

![Figure 9.2] Photo of a Central Plinth of Mingtang in Tang Dynasty

This article aims at an answer to the riddle in the Stone in Yangling Mausoleum with more certainty. All previous studies and increasing accessible archaeological data make it possible to conduct a more comprehensive investigation of the nature and function of the Stone and the architecture inside which the Stone was placed. Compared to other speculations, I am more inclined to suggest that the Stone is a central plinth of a Mingtang style ritual architecture in Yangling. Therefore, I prefer to name it as Plinth of Yangling 陽陵柱礎 rather than Luoqing shi 羅經石, which is too misleading.

45) Su Bai 宿白, Great Archaeological Discoveries of the People’s Republic of China 中華人民共和國重大考古發現 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1999), 382.
Identifications of excavated remains depend on the ability to associate the archaeological sites with textual records, and whether the materials and texts can confirm each other. I only name the architecture as Mingtang style instead of Mingtang, because there are still many differences which can be observed in both ritual architectures, despite implications in textual passages or from excavated remains. In addition, Li Ling 李零, Michael Loewe, and other scholars have conducted preliminary studies to clarify the specific gods or deities of worship in this ritual architecture and other pertinent issues. Both might be new stories relying on more released and accessible archaeological data that cannot be covered in this article.

(Figure 10) Reconstruction of Mingtang Style Ritual Architecture in Yangling and Reconstruction of Plinth of Yangling by 3D Scanning Model

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The illustrations shown here do not mean that I agree with the reconstruction of the architecture but show a possibility of the reconstruction. However, I endorse the conclusion about the Stone shown in the figure below: a central plinth of a ritual architecture.
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47) Ibid.


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