

Intentional Identities: Liao Women's Dress and Cultural and Political Power

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Before the tenth century, the dress of elite women in and around China often reflected “Han” Chinese fashions and preferences. In funerary paintings and relief sculptures of Sogdian and Xianbei couples from the sixth century, for example, women wear “Han” Chinese-style clothing. Even in the Tang dynasty (ca. 618-907), when exchange with Central Asia via overland Silk Road trade impacted the styles and patterning of elite dress and men incorporated clear Central Asian attributes into their dress, elite women in the Tang sphere wore recognizably Tang fashions. Chinese-style dress in these centuries clearly conveyed cultural import and, likely, political power, especially after the founding of the Tang dynasty. However, the straightforward borrowing of Tang women's dress shifted in the Khitan Liao dynasty (ca. 907-1125). The Liao, in contrast to other states that shared a border with China in previous centuries, saw themselves as political equals to the Song dynasty (ca. 960-1278) court in the south. The Liao court was interested in Song customs and culture and incorporated artistic motifs and practices from the Song court. However, the Liao courtly idiom was never fully subsumed into the greater world of the Song – rather, the Liao used facets of Song courtly culture for their own ends. One way this is manifested is through the dual administrative system, a bureaucratic organization that, among other things, regulated and distinguished between who was permitted to wear Khitan and non-Khitan dress. In this paper, I will examine the material evidence from funerary contexts for how the dress of elite Liao women both engaged with the dress of the Song, while also maintaining a certain amount of cultural autonomy. Through their dress, elite Liao women signaled clear messages about their status, identity, and difference to their Song counterparts.

Keywords: Liao dynasty; Khitan women; women's dress; funerary art

Introduction

Prior to the founding of the Liao dynasty (ca. 907-1125), the dress of elite women in and around China often reflected “Han” Chinese fashions and preferences.¹ The women wear “Han” style clothing, for example, in funerary paintings and relief sculptures of Sogdian and Xianbei couples from the sixth century. Even in the Tang dynasty (ca. 618-907), when exchange with Central Asia via overland Silk Road trade impacted the styles and patterning of elite dress and Tang Chinese men incorporated clear Central Asian attributes into their dress, elite women in the Tang sphere wore recognizably Tang fashions, albeit with patterning derived or inspired by Central Asia and cultures along the “Silk Roads.” Chinese-style dress in these centuries clearly conveyed cultural import and, likely, political power, especially after the founding of the Tang dynasty. However, the straightforward borrowing of Tang women’s dress shifted in the Khitan-ruled Liao dynasty. The Liao, in contrast to other states that shared a border with China in previous centuries, were political equals to the Song dynasty (ca. 960-1278) in the south. Indeed, treaties such as that signed after the Battle of Shanyuan 澶淵之盟 in 1005 favored the Liao and declared that the Song was obligated to send the Liao 200,000 bolts of silk and 100,000 taels of silver per year.² The comparable status of the Liao and Song was further expressed by the Liao’s continual assertion of Khitan identity through the dress of royal Khitan women.

As part of identity formation for the newly established Liao Empire, Khitan elites were interested in Song customs and culture and incorporated artistic motifs and practices from the Song court into that of the Liao. However, the Liao courtly idiom was never fully subsumed into the greater world of the Song. Rather, the Liao used facets of Song courtly culture for their own ends. A significant instance of this practice was the dual administrative system, a bureaucratic organization that, among other things, regulated and distinguished between who was permitted to wear Khitan or non-Khitan dress. Other culturally significant practices such as hunting, and equestrian activities more broadly, were also maintained. The Khitan language was used by the Liao court and written versions were established in 920 (Khitan large script) and in 925 (Khitan small script).³ One of the most visually striking ways of establishing and maintaining a Khitan courtly identity was, however, through dress. In addition to discussing what, exactly, elite Liao women wore, this paper examines material evidence for how elite Liao women engaged with Song dress and cultural interests while also maintaining clear cultural autonomy. Through their dress, elite Liao women signaled strong messages about their status, identity, and difference to their Song counterparts.

¹ The term “Han,” which refers to the historical Han dynasty, is unstable and imprecise as its meaning changes at different moments in Chinese history. I will use it here as it is used in the historical sources such as the *Liao shi* referring to specific Chinese customs and dress usually synonymous with the Tang dynasty and later, the Song dynasty. For a discussion of the term “Han” see Elliott, “Hushuo,” 173–190.

² Wright, “The Sung-Kitan War,” 25. See also Tuotuo, *Liao shi*, 14:160.

³ Kane, *The Kitan Language*, 3.

Recent historians have become increasingly interested in the roles of women in the non-“Han” groups and dynasties that ruled in the north of China and the Mongolian steppe beginning in the third century CE with the Xianbei 鮮卑 and spanning through the Mongol period in the fourteenth century.⁴ Women, and especially elite women, from groups tied to steppe and Turkic cultures enjoyed a much more active role in both household affairs and politics than those who lived to their south in China. This was certainly the case with the relatively autonomous and politically active women living in the Liao Empire and their increasingly sequestered southern neighbors living in the Northern Song. Liao Empresses, acting in concert with their husbands, as regents for their sons, or wielding power as empress dowagers after the deaths of their husbands, such as the famous Empress Dowagers Yingtian 應天 (878-953) and Chengtian 承天 (953-1009), not only played significant roles in Liao politics and policymaking but also led troops in battle and negotiated major treaties. For example, the aforementioned treaty after the Liao victory during the Battle of Shanyuan was partially negotiated by Empress Dowager Chengtian.⁵ This was in stark contrast to the increasingly inward-looking role of women at all levels of society in the Northern Song.⁶ Despite the fact that Liao women often played a significant role throughout the dynasty, evidence for these women in textual sources, such as the *Liao shi* 遼史, generally written in Chinese and compiled by Confucian officials in subsequent dynasties, is much less abundant than is the case for Liao men. Although several empresses and notable consorts have biographical entries in the *Liao shi*, these are shorter and less detailed than the biographies of Liao emperors.⁷ Unsurprisingly, historical texts such as the *Liao shi* provide much less information on women’s court dress than men’s court dress. While we may be able to extrapolate a certain amount of information about women’s court dress from descriptions and regulations applied to men, texts do not give us a full picture. To discover more about the clothing that courtly and elite Liao women were wearing, material evidence must be examined in concert with the texts.

As with dress from the Middle Period in China more generally, material evidence for women’s dress during the Liao dynasty comes from funerary contexts, which provides its own set of challenges. Few actual garments from the Liao period remain because many tombs from the period were looted before proper archaeological excavation.⁸ Thus, much

⁴ For a survey of women’s dress in China and the Steppe from the pre-Tang through Mongol periods see Shea, *Mongol Court Dress*, 72-95. For the dress of Tang and pre-Tang women see Lingley, “Naturalizing the Exotic,” 50-80; Chen, “Material Girls,” 5-33; Chen, *Empire of Style*. For women in the Liao and Jin dynasties see Johnson, *Women of the Conquest Dynasties*. For Mongol women, see Rossabi, “Kubilai Khan,” 153-180; Zhao, *Marriage as Political Strategy*; May, “Commercial Queens,” 89-106; Birge, *Marriage and*; Shea, “Painted Silks,” 36-55.

⁵ Johnson, *Women of the Conquest Dynasties*, 129-130; Lin, “The Khitan Empress Dowagers,” 191.

⁶ Johnson, *Women of the Conquest Dynasties*, xix-xx; Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 21-27.

⁷ The *Liao shi* devotes one fascicle (*juan* 卷) out of forty five in its biographies section to “Empresses and Imperial Concubines” 后妃. See Tuotuo, *Liao shi*, 71:1197-1207, which gives biographies of 20 of these imperial women.

⁸ Three undisturbed Liao tombs containing women’s clothing are the Yemaotai tomb, Princess of Chen State tomb, and Tuerji shan tomb. The archaeological reports for these tombs list the clothing found within the tomb but good color photos have not been published of most of the garments, nor has any textile analysis that may have been undertaken on the garments, which limits what research may be done with them. For the Yemaotai

of the evidence for dress type is not from surviving textiles but from tomb murals. Tomb wall paintings are idealized representations meant to accompany the deceased in the afterlife or to serve as loci for ancestral worship, not snapshots of above-ground life. They are also not ubiquitous in the Liao period – not all tombs contained paintings. Nonetheless, pictorial evidence from tombs gives some sense of cultural practices and dress that likely reflect a version of above-ground life, as is the case with funerary art from other periods in China. Women and men are depicted in specific and conventional ways that can give us insights into prototypical clothing worn by people of varying status – from elite tomb occupants to maids, attendants, soldiers, musicians, and children.

The corpus of tombs for the Liao period with evidence for women’s dress can be broadly categorized into two groups: tombs of the Khitan elite, including royal tombs of the imperial Yelü 耶律 family and consort clan, the Xiao 蕭, most of which are in present-day Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, Jilin, and Liaoning Provinces; and tombs of the Chinese, non-Khitan elite living under Liao rule, the most famous of which are the Xuanhua 宣化 tombs of the Zhang 張 and Han 韓 families in present-day Hebei Province. Clearly, there are some gaps in the material. The first group of tombs provides visual evidence of dress for the imperial Liao court, the royal families, or highly ranked nobles and their attendants. The second group of tombs depicts the dress of non-Khitan elites, living in Southern Liao territories, and their attendants. Significantly, these “Han” elites living in Southern Liao territory along with Northern Song elites were themselves representatives of a new flourishing class – wealthy elites, but not associated with the court or with the bureaucratic literati class who were traditionally of higher social status than “commoners” such as merchants.⁹ Thus, there are different types of identity expression legible in these tombs. Nonetheless, as we will see comparatively, there are some similarities and basic differences that may allow us to extrapolate the meanings behind specific types of dress for different people living under Liao rule.

The Dual Administrative System and Its Impact on Dress

Before diving into the material evidence for women’s dress, it is useful to have some idea of the cultural and legal framework that characterized life during the Liao dynasty. Shortly after the Liao dynasty was founded by Abaoji 阿保機 (872-926) in 907, a dual administrative system

tomb see Liaoningsheng bowuguan, “Faku Yemaotai,” 26-36; Yang, *New perspectives on China’s Past*, 464-467. For the Tuerji shan tomb see Neimenggu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo, “Neimenggu Tongliao shi,” 50-53+106-108; Ta and Zhang, “A Liao-dynasty tomb,” 60-65. For the Princess of the State of Chen tomb see Neimenggu wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo, “Liao Chenguo gongzhu,” 4-24+97-106; Zhang, “Liao Chenguo gongzhu,” 25-28+99; Yang, *New perspectives on China’s Past*, 459-463; Sun, “The Discovery and Research,” 66-73. The most extensive textile analysis on Liao period garments has been undertaken by the Abegg Stiftung in Riggisberg, Switzerland, which published their findings alongside detailed color photos in the book *Dragons of Silk, Flowers of Gold*. However, as these garments were not scientifically excavated but rather bought on the art market, important information about the context of their production and use has been lost. See Schorta, *Dragons of Silk*.

⁹ Hong, “Changing Roles of the Tomb Portrait,” 206; Kuhn, *Burial in Song*, 12.

was established, the Northern Administration for the pastoral groups (Khitan and Xi 奚) that populated the northern part of Liao territory (including parts of present-day Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, Jilin, and Liaoning Provinces) and a subordinate Southern Administration, for the sedentary, agriculturalist groups, mostly Chinese subjects (*hanren* 漢人), who populated the Southern Circuit of Liao territory (present-day Hebei province).¹⁰ The Northern Administration was based on Khitan customs and law, while the Southern Administration borrowed from the Tang code (*Tanglii* 唐律).¹¹ Directly related to this was the dual dress system adopted by the Liao court, which categorized dress into “State-Style” (*guofu* 國服), or Khitan-style dress, and “Han-Style” (*hanfu* 漢服), or Chinese (Tang/Song) style dress.¹² As stated in the *Liao shi*, during the reign of Abaoji, “the system for official dress was regulated. The Khitan style was worn in the north, and the Han style worn in the south; each was determined according to convenience.”¹³

Although, as we shall see, the material evidence does correspond in general to this basic division of Khitan-style dress in the north and Tang/Song-style dress in the south, the division may not have been as neat as this description implies. Certainly, when it came to court dress, the *Liao shi* records major shifts in the types of dress worn at court and by different officials during different reign periods, not always along north/south lines. As recorded in the *Liao shi* section on court dress:

After the fifth year of the Qianheng 乾亨 reign [983] when the Shengzong 聖宗 Emperor [Yelü Longxu 耶律隆緒] conferred the title of Empress Dowager on Chengtian, all of the officials above 3rd rank wore Han-style formal dress [*fafu* 法服]... According to the record of the *zunbao* ceremony 尊號冊禮 [in which a title was conferred on the emperor] in the 5th year of Chongxi 重熙 [1036], following [the *zunbao* ceremony] the Emperor [Xingzong 興宗, Yelü Zongzhen 耶律宗真] wore the dragon robe and the officials from both the north and south wore [Han style] court dress... During the Huitong 會同 period [937-947] the Empress Dowager [Yingtian] and Northern officials wore Khitan state-style dress; the Emperor [太宗, Yelü Deguang 耶律德光] and southern officials wore Han-style dress... In important rituals after the Chongxi period [1032-1055], everyone [all court officials] wore Han dress. The daily ceremonial dress still used the same one as the Huitong period.¹⁴

What is striking is the use of Han-style dress at various times by both the Liao emperor and his officials – sometimes all of them would wear Han-style court dress, sometimes just the southern officials and the emperor, while it seems that the empress and the empress

¹⁰ Johnson, *Women of the Conquest Dynasties*, 26; Lin, “The Khitan Empress Dowagers,” 185; Wittfogel and Fêng, *History of Chinese Society*, 227; Tuotuo, *Liao shi*, 73: 1224-1225.

¹¹ Lin, “The Khitan Empress Dowagers,” 190.

¹² Shea, *Mongol Court Dress*, 15; Tuotuo, *Liao shi*, 56: 905-907.

¹³ Tuotuo, *Liao shi*, 56:905; See also Wittfogel and Fêng, *History of Chinese Society*, 228.

¹⁴ Tuotuo, *Liao shi*, 56: 908. Parts of this are also cited in Wittfogel and Fêng, *History of Chinese Society*, 227-228.

dowager continuously dressed in Khitan fashion. Indeed, this was the case in the account of the Northern Song envoy Song Shou 宋綬, who reported that during his visit in 1020 the emperor and his southern officials wore Han-style court dress while the Khitan officials and the empress wore Khitan-style court dress.¹⁵ The use of Han-style court dress by the emperor and his officials was probably indicative of the Liao emperor's understanding and use of Tang/Song-style ritual for symbolic and political means. This is underscored by the fact that Liao Taizong (Yelü Deguang) confiscated and used Tang ritual implements for use in Liao court ceremonies. As recorded in the *Liao shi*:

On the first day of the first month of the first year of Datong [947], emperor Taizong entered into Jin territory and prepared his imperial carriages, received the congratulations of the civil and military officials at the Chongyuan hall of Bianjing,¹⁶ from that day [Tang style court dress] was considered the norm. When they returned to the north, the Liao took with them Tang and Jin objects and used them.¹⁷

By co-opting the sartorial and ceremonial vocabulary of the Tang, and later the Song, to use in the Liao court, Abaoji and his successors crafted a clear message – that the Liao was as powerful as the Song and should be approached as an equal. The Liao court's adopting of Tang style court dress when it suited them showed their ability to code-switch between their Khitan pastoral identity and a Chinese court identity. But what was being communicated by empresses and empress dowagers in the practice of wearing Khitan-style clothing at court?

Khitan Women's Dress and Political Power

I have argued elsewhere that elite Khitan women wore Khitan-style dress when engaging in culturally significant activities such as the hunt.¹⁸ But upon further review of the available evidence, it appears that elite Khitan women in fact never wore Tang/Song-style dress at all. Indeed, there is no evidence of Khitan women living in the northern part of the Liao state wearing anything but Khitan-style clothing. This stands in contrast to elite women from groups living to the north of China from the centuries prior to Liao rule. In the murals of banqueting and musical performances from the tomb of the elite Xianbei military official, Xu Xianxiu, for example, everyone depicted, including the male tomb occupant, wears Xianbei dress. The only exception is Xu Xianxiu's wife, who is dressed in markedly Han/Chinese-

¹⁵ Wittfogel and Fêng, *History of Chinese Society*, 228.

¹⁶ Bianjing (present-day Kaifeng) was the capital of the Later Jin 後晉 (936-946), Later Han 後漢 (947-950), and Later Zhou 後周 (951-960) of the Five Dynasties Period; it then became capital of the Northern Song when they overthrew the Later Zhou in 960.

¹⁷ Tuotuo, *Liao shi*, 56: 907.

¹⁸ Shea, *Mongol Court Dress*, 74-77.

style robes.¹⁹ Kate Lingley, following a hypothesis put forth by Judith Lerner about Sogdian women dressing in Han/Chinese-style, posits that since Central Asian style dress (which was similar to the dress worn by Steppe/Turkic peoples or other northern groups) was associated in China with singing girls and other lower class entertainers, upper class Sogdian and Xianbei women preferred to wear Chinese-style robes to signify their higher status and difference from such entertainers.²⁰ Although this may have been true for various groups through the end of the Tang dynasty, there was a shift in the early tenth century, when the Khitan established the Liao dynasty. Indeed, that elite Khitan women continued to wear Khitan-style clothing – which would have been coded similarly to Steppe/Turkic/Central Asian dress in the Chinese context – in various settings, including court audiences, signified a shift in the way the Khitans saw themselves in relation to Song China compared to these earlier groups.

In her book, *Women of the Conquest Dynasties*, Linda Cooke Johnson argues that the fact that women living in the southern part of Liao territory of Chinese origin (*hanren* 漢人) continued to wear Tang/Song-style clothing while their husbands and servants wore Khitan dress indicates that they were preservers of cultural identity.²¹ However, this pattern seems to be the norm across much of Chinese history rather than an exceptional act by these Han women. Looking at the broad historical trend amongst elites from groups originating from places peripheral to the central Chinese state, elite women wore Chinese-style dress while their husbands wore northern, or steppe-style dress. Evidence for *hanren* and, in fact, Khitan women living in the southern part of the Liao state wearing Tang/Song-style dress exists in tomb paintings, notably in the Xuanhua tombs. The only instances of tomb murals from the Northern part of the Liao state featuring women in Tang/Song dress are those that illustrate specific stories of women from the south of China, or of musicians and servants, not images of Khitan women themselves.

Khitan and Tang-Style Women's Dress

Visual representations of Khitan-style women's dress show that its most defining feature was a long-sleeved exterior robe that closed to the left. In the early part of the Liao, the fabric borrowed patterns from Tang silks, such as the repeated floral roundel, which we see in attendant figures in Baoshan tombs one and two (fig. 1). In the middle and later Liao, monochrome or smaller-patterned fabrics became more widespread. The cuffs and collar of such robes were made in a contrasting color or altogether different material from the main fabric of the robe. Contrasting collars and cuffs was a style used by many groups before, during, and after the Liao dynasty in the vicinity of China and allowed for a more expensive fabric to be used in smaller quantities but in an eye-catching way. The fabric belt that tied the robe closed could be tied just under the breasts, as in the examples of the female attendant

¹⁹ Lingley, "Silk Road Dress," 5, fig.8.

²⁰ Lingley, "Silk Road Dress," 9-10.

²¹ Johnson, *Women of the Conquest Dynasties*, 48.

figures from Baoshan tombs one and two (fig. 1), or at the waist, as in Kulunqi tomb M2 (fig. 2). Presumably, under this robe women wore other layers of clothing, including trousers and boots, suitable for life in the cold climate of north China and Mongolia.



Figure 1. Mural of attendant with floral medallions, Southern wall of the antechamber (partial view), Baoshan Tomb 1, Liao Dynasty (923 CE), Chifeng, Inner Mongolia, China. After Xu Guangji, *Zhongguo chu tu bi hua quan ji*, vol. 3, fig. 77.



Figure 2. Woman (princess?) looking in a mirror, Liao dynasty (907–1125 ce), tomb M1 at Qianweulibugecun in Nailingagongshe, Kulunqi, Inner Mongolia. Height: 297 cm; width: 160 cm; figure height: ca. 158 cm. Excavated in 1972, preserved in the Jilin Provincial Museum. Replica in Tongliao Museum. After Xu Guangji, *Zhongguo chu tu bi hua quan ji*, vol. 3, fig. 169.

Although pictorial examples only represent the exterior robe, the idea that these women wore multiple layers of clothing is supported not only by the logic of how people would dress for life in the cold climate of north China and Mongolia but also by excavated material from the Liao period. The Yemaotai, Tuerji shan, and Princess of the State of Chen tombs preserved not only exterior robes but also leggings, undergarments, underrobes, hats, and women’s boots, as will be discussed below. The basic side-closing outer robe and a close-fitting black cap seems to have been the main style for Khitan women’s dress, probably made of finer materials such as silks woven with gold thread for court use and more practical materials such as coarser silk or felt for everyday use. Although the *Liao shi* and the *Qidan guozhi* 契丹國志 (“Record of the Khitan Empire”) give information about regulations of certain patterns, styles, and colors for court officials and the royal family, few of these regulations pertained explicitly

to women's dress.²² Rather, specific regulations for patterns and styles of clothing allowed to women, outside of regular remarks noting that the empress wore Khitan dress, were vague. Regarding ceremonial dress, the *Liao shi* records, "The clothing style of the court officials and the noble women follow the colors of the flags of their tribes."²³

Like Khitan women, Tang women had two general categories of dress available to them, quotidian dress and ceremonial attire.²⁴ BuYun Chen describes the components of Tang women's clothing succinctly: "A woman's ensemble, for both ceremonial and every day wear would have included an unlined short robe (*shan* 衫) or a short jacket (*ru* 襦), a skirt (*qun* 裙), and shawl (*pibo* 披帛)."²⁵ As with Khitan women, the style of quotidian and ceremonial dress would have been similar but the materials and patterns were dictated by the occasion and status of the wearer. Elite women were subject to the same regulations as their husbands, which, as in later dynasties such as the Song and the Yuan, were ordered by courtly rank.²⁶

Tracing the impact of Tang culture on both the Liao and the Song is complex, especially regarding clothing and textiles. In the Tang period, which was well-known for its cosmopolitanism and contacts with the north and Central Asia through the overland trade routes known as the "Silk Roads," specific types of Central Asian designs, such as the roundel, and clothing types, such as the fitting riding coat with trousers and boots, were adapted into Tang clothing and over the course of the dynasty blended with Chinese-style dress.²⁷ The wearing of a riding coat, boots, and trousers in the Liao context, especially by male figures, thus does not only indicate Khitan identity but may also allude to the fashion for such Central Asian dress during the Tang. Although clothing was certainly a significant cultural marker, in the Liao framework the hairstyle of figures often reveals as much about the identity of the wearer as their clothing.²⁸

Material Remains - Royal and Elite Liao Tombs

Several tombs made for elite or royal Liao women have been excavated and, in this section, I will consider the Baoshan 寶山 tombs (Ar Horqin Banner, Inner Mongolia, ca. 923-after 926), Tuerjishan 吐尔基山 tomb (Kezuo Rear Banner, Inner Mongolia, ca. 10th century), Yemaotai 葉茂台 tomb 7 (Faku, Liaoning, ca. 959-986), Princess of the State of Chen 陳國 and her husband Xiao Shaoju's 蕭紹矩 tomb (Naiman Banner, Inner Mongolia, 1018), the Kulunqi

²² See, for example, Tuotuo, *Liao shi* 56: 906-907 for description of the emperor's dress and dress of court officials and regulations regarding patterns, materials, and styles. This can be compared to a very similar passage in *Qidan guozhi jian* 23 (*yifu zhidu* 衣服制度): 225.

²³ Tuotuo, *Liao shi* 56: 906.

²⁴ Chen, *Empire of Style*, 51.

²⁵ Chen, *Empire of Style*, 51.

²⁶ Ouyang, *Xin Tang shu*, 24:530, also cited in Chen, *Empire of Style*, 51. For regulations of pattern according to rank between the Tang and Yuan dynasties see Shea, *Mongol Court Dress*, 45.

²⁷ Lingley, "Naturalizing the Exotic," 70; Chen, "Material Girls," 14-16; Chen, *Empire of Style*, 92-97.

²⁸ Shea, *Mongol Court Dress*, 21.

tombs (Zhelimu, Jilin, ca. 1080), and the Xuanhua 宣化 tombs (Xiabali, Xuanhua, Hebei, ca. 1093-1117).²⁹ Before investigating the representations of elite women in the funerary context of the Liao dynasty, a brief note should be made about Liao funerary practices. One of the reasons the Liao are so interesting to study is that they elude broad generalizations. Funerary traditions were extremely diverse and include a variety of treatments for the body of the deceased and there was no definitive decorative scheme for painted tombs, although there are some commonalities as we shall see.³⁰ It appears that royal bodies were buried in silver mesh suits and metallic face masks, as in the Princess of Chen tomb, and what the excavators estimate was the case in the Baoshan tombs.³¹ However, the sarcophagus, shape of the tomb, and decorative programs were not consistent, even within elite and royal tombs. The Baoshan tombs (for royal occupants) and Yemaotai tomb (for an elite occupant), for instance, are brick tombs that contained an interior house-like structure that functioned as a sarcophagus. However, in the Yemaotai tomb the sarcophagus was called a *xiaozhang* 小帳, was made of wood, and contained a carved stone sarcophagus, while the Baoshan tombs featured house-like structures made of stone, called a *shifang* 石房, without an interior sarcophagus.³² The Yemaotai tomb was a multi-chambered tomb accessed by a ramp, with an entry chamber, two side niches or “ear” chambers, and a main, square-shaped and domed burial chamber, similar in structure to the Princess of the State of Chen’s tomb. The Kulunqi tombs and Xuanhua tombs, too, are variations on this basic structure although the rooms are slightly different in shape and size in each case (some of the funerary chambers of the Xuanhua tombs were octagonal, for instance).³³ The Baoshan tombs, on the other hand, were single-chambered brick tombs accessed by a ramp; the main burial chambers were approximately square with domed ceilings. In addition, while the Baoshan, Yemaotai, Princess of the State of Chen, and Kulunqi tombs all feature murals of attendants and horses, the Baoshan tombs’ interior murals of Tang dynasty court scenes and the Yemaotai’s tomb interred hanging scroll paintings of animals and a landscape in Five Dynasties style have not been found in any other elite or royal tombs of the Liao dynasty.

²⁹ For the Baoshan tombs Neimenggu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo, “Neimenggu Chifeng Baoshan,” 73-95; Yang, *New perspectives on China’s Past*, 448-452; Wu, *Art of the Yellow Springs*, 185-188. For Kulunqi tomb one see Chen, “Jilin Zhelimu Kulunqi, 2-18; Johnson, “The Wedding Ceremony,” 107-136; Johnson, *Women of the Conquest Dynasties*, 81-83. For Xuanhua/Xiabali tombs see Elisseeff, “À propos d’un cimetière Liao,” 70-81; Steinhardt, “Liao Archaeology,” 237-239; Hebeisheng wenwu yanjiusuo, *Xuanhua Liao mu bibu*; Yang, *New Perspectives on China’s Past*, 469-474; Shen, “Body Matters,” 99-141; Wu, *Art of the Yellow Springs*, 142-148. For the Tuerji shan tomb, Yemaotai tomb, and Princess of Chen State tomb see note 8 above.

³⁰ For treatment of the deceased body during the Liao dynasty see Steinhardt, “Liao Archaeology,” 225-227; Kuhn, *How the Qidan reshaped*, 142-145.

³¹ Su, “The Discovery and Research,” 72.

³² Examples of *xiaozhang* have been found in a number of elite tombs datable to the Liao period, see Pauline Sebillaud et al., “A Glimpse into Burial Practices,” 285-287. See also Kuhn, *How the Qidan reshaped*, 36-37.

³³ For a typology of Liao/Jin tombs see Kuhn, *How the Qidan reshaped*, 32-36; see also Sebillaud et al., “A Glimpse into Burial Practices,” 258.

The house-shaped sarcophagus seems to have disappeared from Liao tombs by the eleventh century. In the context of later royal burials of the Liao, neither the Princess of the State of Chen tomb, made for a royal woman from the Yelü clan and her husband, nor the Kulunqi tombs, which were for members of the Xiao royal consort clan, contain sarcophagi at all. Rather, the Princess of the State of Chen and her husband were buried side by side on a burial couch while remains of multiple bodies have been found in the Kulunqi tombs showing evidence of cremation.³⁴ Meanwhile, the Xuanhua tombs stand out for their innovative combination of Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist aspects with manikins made representing the deceased taking the place of corporeal remains of the deceased, which were cremated.³⁵ In the Xuanhua tombs, these manikins were entombed in *dhāranī* coffins – wooden coffins inscribed with Sanskrit and sometimes Chinese translations of *dhāranīs*, or Buddhist spells referring to the preservation of Buddha's teachings, on the sides of the coffin.³⁶ In other words, while there are certainly similarities to be drawn between the various known tombs of the Liao elite, they are often more different than they are alike.

Despite the diversity of funerary practices found in the Liao context, something that is found in all these tombs is varying degrees of cultural synthesis, between the Khitan and southern Chinese, as well as between religious beliefs such as Buddhism, pastoral shamanism, Daoism, and Confucianism. Because this article centers on women's dress and identity, I focus on those aspects of the tombs that address the ways in which women's identities were expressed in the funerary context and what this might tell us about female identity in the above-ground context. I hope to show that Khitan identity was something Khitan women expressed through their clothing while also maintaining an appreciation and knowledge of Chinese culture. I begin with an investigation of some of the earliest known Liao royal tombs, Baoshan tombs one and two (with a special focus on tomb two, since the deceased was a woman), before expanding the discussion to incorporate evidence from other elite Liao tombs.

Khitan Identity and the Synthesis of Han Elements in Liao Tombs

Baoshan tombs one and two

Part of a larger Khitan royal cemetery complex, Baoshan tombs one and two may have belonged to a mother-son pair; according to an inscription from the tomb, the occupant of tomb one was Qinde, the second son of the "Great Shaojun" 大少君, a title that may refer to the third son of Abaoji, meaning Qinde was Abaoji's grandson.³⁷ Qinde died in 923 at the age of 14, and it is possible that tomb two was his mother or an older female relative; she appears to have been buried slightly later (after 926).³⁸

³⁴ Wu, *Art of the Yellow Springs*, 144; Johnson, "The Wedding Ceremony," 111.

³⁵ Shen, "Body Matters," 102-103; Wu, *Art of the Yellow Springs*, 142.

³⁶ Shen, "Body Matters," 103-106; Wu, *Art of the Yellow Springs*, 146-147.

³⁷ Neimenggu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo, "Neimenggu Chifeng Baoshan," 82, 94.

³⁸ Yang, *New perspectives on China's Past*, 449.

The tombs had been looted prior to excavation but their wall paintings give a startling picture of the synthesis that characterized Khitan royal culture from the beginning of the Liao dynasty. Both tombs are single-chambered brick tombs accessed by a ramp. In the chamber of both tombs, there was a smaller “stone house” (*shifang*) made of polished stone slabs that served as an exterior sarcophagus. Both interior and exterior walls of the “stone house” were painted, as were the walls of the brick tomb. The walls of the brick tombs feature attendant figures and horses, typical features of Chinese painted tombs from at least the Han dynasty. The large scale of the horses and the detail accorded to the depiction of their tack may be connected to the important place of the horse within Khitan culture. The “stone house” sarcophagi each feature attendant figures flanking the door of the structure, a man and a woman in Baoshan tomb one, and two women in Baoshan tomb two, with the women all dressed in recognizably Khitan-style, albeit with a nod to Tang textiles in the depiction of floral roundels on their robes. Large floral medallions, often combined with smaller (quatrefoil) flowers, were a popular motif that originated at the beginning of the eighth century in Tang China.³⁹ The depiction of these large floral roundels on various Khitan attendant figures in the Baoshan tombs indicates their continued use by elites and members of their household at the beginning of the Liao dynasty. While the depiction of attendant figures and horses may be typical of tomb paintings in and around China, the paintings within the “stone house” sarcophagi, however, are extraordinary from the perspective of funerary art and especially in the context of early Khitan royal burials.

Both tombs depict Tang-style courtly women in scenes alluding to southern Chinese painting and literary traditions. Those in tomb one seem to have a religious valence, with a depiction of the Daoist Queen Mother of the West descending to a Han emperor, while those in tomb two illustrate scenes from the lives of two famous women from Chinese history, Yang Guifei 楊貴妃 (719-756), the concubine of Emperor Tang Xuanzong 唐玄宗 (r. 712-756), and Su Hui 蘇蕙 (also known as Su Ruolan 蘇若蘭), the fourth-century poet.⁴⁰ The painting on the east wall of the stone house in tomb one is the best preserved of the murals in this tomb (fig. 3) and shows a series of four female immortals arriving from the right side of the composition and descending on a scrolling cloud towards a seated figure. The seated figure is identified as Han Wudi 漢武帝 (ca. 156-87 BCE), while the first of the female immortals is identified as the Queen Mother of the West.⁴¹ The women have their hair in elaborate, butterfly-wing style coiffeurs and wear flowing robes with oversized sleeves. Their outer robes are secured under the bust and are also tied with ribbons to close around the knee. The complex hairstyles and flowing layers of silken robes of varying patterns are not unlike those worn by Tang dynasty court beauties in paintings attributed to Zhou Fang (ca. 730-800) such as *Tuning the Lute and Drinking Tea* or *Court Ladies with Flowers in their Hair*.⁴²

³⁹ Wardwell and Watt, *When Silk Was Gold*, 37-38.

⁴⁰ Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs*, 185.

⁴¹ Neimenggu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo, “Neimenggu Chifeng Baoshan,” 82.

⁴² For images see Chen, *Empire of Style*, 100 fig 3.19 and 112 fig 3.31.



Figure 3. Detail from mural of descending immortals, eastern wall of east side chamber, Baoshan Tomb 1, Liao Dynasty (923 CE), Chifeng, Inner Mongolia, China. After Xu Guangji, *Zhongguo chu tu bi hua quan ji*, vol. 3, fig. 75.

The murals in tomb two are better preserved, with the scene featuring Yang Guifei depicted on the northern wall on the interior of the stone house and Su Hui on the southern wall. Each scene is identified by a poetic inscription accompanying the painting. Both scenes are of well-known stories; that featuring Yang Guifei depicts her teaching the *Heart Sutra* to her favorite pet parrot, while Su Hui is shown sending a woven silk featuring a secret message to her husband, in exile at the northern frontier.⁴³ On the northern wall, Yang Guifei is depicted sitting at a red table with a scroll unrolled in front of her and a small white bird perched to the side. Yang Guifei sits in a high-backed chair and her centrality is underlined by a red and yellow-bordered carpet with a blue central section under the desk, chair, and her feet. She is surrounded by four female attendants as well as bamboo, a bifurcated tree to the right, another exotic tree to the left, and a Lake Tai style rock, in the lower-left corner, identifying the scene as an outdoor one, despite the carpet, table, and chair. As with the scene of descending immortals from tomb one, one of the most striking aspects of this painting and the one opposite it on the southern wall is the richly decorated and carefully depicted textiles and hairstyles.

The presence of these very specific scenes alluding to Chinese culture and history, and Tang court styles in particular, on the interior of the sarcophagi of Khitan royals from the

⁴³ Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs*, 186.

early Liao dynasty raise more questions than they answer. The themes and the style of these paintings make it likely that they were painted by artists trained at the Tang court, or one of the southern courts of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, captured by the Liao and brought into service to the royal family. As to what they signified, it may be that those who commissioned the tombs had an affinity for southern Chinese culture that was not seen as being at odds with identifying with Khitan culture. Wu Hung argues that the differences in the types of paintings executed on the interior walls of the stone house in Baoshan tomb two created a “feminine space” for the tomb occupant, surrounding the deceased lady with stories of historically famous and cultured women.⁴⁴ But I wonder what, exactly, constituted a “feminine” space for a Liao noblewoman. As I noted above, Liao women were active participants in important political and cultural activities, including hunting and warfare. Indeed, instead of stories about famous women from Chinese history, horse culture and shooting with a bow and arrow are explicitly depicted in paintings and alluded to in the choice of funerary objects in the tombs of other elite Liao women from later periods, including the Yemaotai tomb (ca. 959-986) and the Princess of the State of Chen’s tomb (1018). In the Liao context, allusions to culturally significant activities, such as riding and shooting and the wearing of Khitan-style clothing, seem to be essential markers of a feminine space, alongside an appreciation for Chinese culture.

The Yemaotai Tomb and Princess of the State of Chen’s Tomb

Indeed, elite Liao women were educated and interested in Chinese literature, painting, and calligraphy in addition to their well-known ability as horsewomen and, in the funerary context, if Chinese cultural elements are present there is a balance between these and culturally pastoral attributes, as Linda Cooke Johnson has shown.⁴⁵ Because the Baoshan tombs were robbed prior to excavation, it is impossible to know what objects may have been interred with the deceased, although there is evidence that the corpses of both bodies wore metallic mesh suits, typical of Khitan royal burials during the Liao dynasty, giving some indication that a balance of Khitan and Chinese cultures were originally present in these tombs – something already indicated by the Khitan-garbed attendants and detailed depictions of horses painted on the brick walls of the tomb outside of the sarcophagi.⁴⁶ Dating slightly later than the Baoshan tombs, the Yemaotai tomb, which was not robbed, contains both Khitan and Chinese cultural objects. Like the Baoshan tombs, Yemaotai and the Princess of Chen tombs were located in the northern part of the Liao state. The deceased in the Yemaotai tomb was an older woman clothed in Khitan-style garb including gold-embroidered boots; horse tack and weapons were preserved in the tomb alongside porcelain vessels, books in Chinese, and Chinese-style hanging scroll paintings.⁴⁷ Although the deceased lacked a mesh suit and metallic mask, the excavators nonetheless hypothesize that she was associated with the imperial family due to

⁴⁴ Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs*, 185, 188.

⁴⁵ Johnson, *Women of the Conquest Dynasties*, 11-12.

⁴⁶ Yang, *New Perspectives on China’s Past*, 449.

⁴⁷ Liaoningsheng bowuguan, “Faku Yemaotai,” 26-36; Johnson, *Women of the Conquest Dynasties*, 13.

the fine quality of the textiles interred with the body.⁴⁸ The presence of this diversity of culturally specific objects seems to indicate an interest and fluency in Chinese language and culture while maintaining a Khitan/pastoral identity in death via dress and objects such as horse tack and weapons.

The Yemaotai tomb and the tomb of the Princess of Chen State, significantly both undisturbed prior to excavation, are two excellent examples of elite Liao women buried wearing Khitan dress. The woman entombed in Baoshan tomb two may also have been wearing Khitan dress, as indicated by the remains of the mesh bodysuit found in the tomb, but this is speculative since the tomb was looted. Although the female corpse in Yemaotai is unidentified, there are similarities in terms of burial equipment and dress between this tomb and the Princess of the State of Chen tomb. However, the Yemaotai occupant was an elderly woman while the Princess of the State of Chen, the granddaughter of Liao emperor Jingzong 景宗 (Yelü Xian 耶律賢 r. 969-982), was only seventeen when she died in 1018. Although some of the burial items are similar, if more elaborate in the royal tomb of the Princess of Chen, it could be argued that the objects buried with the occupant in the Yemaotai tomb reflected the occupant's interests in life – as mentioned above, Chinese language books and hanging scroll paintings were found alongside the more standard riding equipment and valuable ceramics. In her short life, the Princess may not have had the opportunity to develop specific interests and the fact that hers was a royal burial may have necessitated a more rigid adherence to protocol regarding burial goods. Nonetheless, the similarities regarding the garments of the women in each burial are striking.

In the case of Yemaotai, the tomb occupant wore ten distinct garments including a long robe (*changpao* 長袍), short coat (*duanao* 短袄), skirt (*qun* 裙), trousers (*ku* 褲), leggings (*taoku* 套褲), a tall cap in the shape of a crown, embroidered gloves, and boots made of *kesi* 刻絲, silk tapestry embroidered with gold thread.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, color images of most of these clothing items have not been published, although the excavation report gives details about the patterns, textile types, and colors of the individual garments. The robe, for instance, closed to the left and was made of a yellow-brown *luo* 羅 silk gauze with embroidered patterns of dragons, phoenixes, immortals, and floral scrolls.⁵⁰ *Luo*, or complex silk gauze, was used in other Liao contexts, such as the skirt of an elite woman buried in the Tuerji shan tomb, which was embroidered with pairs of phoenixes.⁵¹ In addition, embroidered complex gauze, radiocarbon dated to the Liao period, has been well-studied and conserved in the Abegg Stiftung – the same material appears to have been used to create a variety of garments including trousers, large decorative bows, and a tall hat (fig. 4).⁵²

⁴⁸ Liaoningsheng bowuguan, “Faku Yemaotai,” 33.

⁴⁹ Liaoningsheng bowuguan, “Faku Yemaotai,” 28-29.

⁵⁰ Liaoningsheng bowuguan, “Faku Yemaotai,” 29.

⁵¹ Neimenggu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo, “Neimenggu Tongliao shi,” fig. 3; Schorta, *Dragons of Silk*, 46, fig. 36.

⁵² Schorta, *Dragons of Silk*, 54. Images cats. 5, 6, 7, 14.



Figure 4. Headdress, silk gauze and tabby with gold thread
(gilded paper wrapped around a silk core) couching embroidery.

H. approx. 72 cm, circumference 63.5 cm.

Location and owner: Abegg-Stiftung, CH-3132 Riggisberg, Switzerland,
inv. no. 5250. Photo credit: © Abegg-Stiftung, CH-3132 Riggisberg.

*** (photo: Christoph von Viràg)

Black and white images of the tall hat in the Yemaotai excavation report show that it is similar in style to other known Liao women's hats and crowns, such as embroidered, complex-gauze woman's hat in the Abegg Stiftung (fig. 4) and the metal crown found with the corpse of the Princess of the State of Chen.⁵³ As we see in the fabric headdress in the Abegg collection, (fig. 4) these hats and the crown have a tall rounded central cap with two flaps on each side, elevated above the central cap. The Yemaotai corpse also wore an amber and rock crystal necklace and had a variety of other jewelry and decorative objects made of rock crystal, agate, gold, and silk.⁵⁴ In addition, the corpse was covered by a *kesi* coverlet embroidered with patterns of flaming jewels, water, mountains, and dragon patterns in gold thread.⁵⁵ As in several of the other elite tombs under consideration here, a set of horse tack was also found in one of the side rooms of the tomb.⁵⁶

Many similar items were found in the Princess of Chen State's tomb, including the

⁵³ Liaoningsheng bowuguan, "Faku Yemaotai," figs. 16 and 17; For Princess of Chen State's crown see Shen, *Gilded Splendor*, 102-103 cat. 3.

⁵⁴ Liaoningsheng bowuguan, "Faku Yemaotai," 28.

⁵⁵ Liaoningsheng bowuguan, "Faku Yemaotai," 29.

⁵⁶ Liaoningsheng bowuguan, "Faku Yemaotai," 33.

aforementioned horse tack (as in Yemaotai, found in a side chamber), but also an amber necklace in addition to jewelry made of gold, silver, jade, pearls, and agate, as well as similar, yet more elaborate clothing items.⁵⁷ The Princess of Chen State's tomb was a double burial for the prince and princess; the princess died about a year after her husband and funerary objects were thus included for both members of the royal couple. Both bodies wore clothing under silver mesh burial suits. Their faces were covered in gold burial masks and each wore a gilded silver crown and gilded silver boots. Unlike the Yemaotai occupant, whose clothing might have been worn in life, the Princess of Chen State and her husband clearly wore objects made for a specific burial context. The metallic boots made for burial took the form and decoration of Liao *kesi* embroidered boots, such as those in Yemaotai, and were decorated with a pattern of soaring phoenixes in what seems to be a metallic imitation of embroidery. Both royal corpses also wore belts with useful articles hanging from them, a typical feature of Khitan dress called a *diexie* 蹠鞢 belt, although this material evidence indicates that they were worn by women as well as men, something not mentioned in texts, where they are described as an attribute of men's attire.⁵⁸

Kulunqi and Xuanhua Tombs

None of the painted representations of Khitan women in the funerary context give exact correspondences to the clothing items preserved in Yemaotai and the Princess of the State of Chen's tomb. In Kulunqi tombs one and two, also found in the northern part of the Liao state, painted representations of both attendants and elite Khitan women are dressed for the outdoors with very little to distinguish their status. They wear heavy-looking monochrome robes that close to the left with a belt at the waist. Their feet are obscured beneath their robes, their hands often hidden in their sleeves, and they wear either fur caps or black rounded caps on their heads. We can only speculate on the layers of clothing under their heavy robes. The represented figures are painted using a clear line to define the subjects, with great attention paid to individual attributes and the horses and carts in the entourage. The burial vestments of the occupant in Yemaotai and the Princess of Chen not only represent specific types of wear appropriate for a burial context but if they reflect above-ground styles, they likely correspond to the finest clothing worn in an elite setting, rather than the travel wear depicted in the Kulunqi tombs. Alternatively, the Xuanhua tombs, in the southern part of the Liao state, contain painted representations of a greater diversity of textiles within the dress available to women in the southern Liao territories but do not represent Khitan clothing. The style of these paintings also makes use of a clear calligraphic line, with attention paid to individualizing features and attributes of the figures. Compared to the Kulunqi tombs, more pigment has been preserved, lending a more colorful aspect to the figures. While the Kulunqi figures are depicted in an outdoor setting, those in the Xuanhua tombs are depicted indoors,

⁵⁷ Sun, "The Discovery and Research," 71-72.

⁵⁸ Belts with useful objects hanging from them were used by a variety of groups in China, Central Asia, and the Steppe from at least the second century BCE. For Liao *diexie* belts see Bunker and White, *Adornment for Eternity*, 164-168; Laursen, "Leaves That Sway," 183.

with figures engaged in a variety of domestic tasks. Even more than in the Kulunqi tomb paintings, great attention to detail has been paid to the vessels and furnishings of the scenes in the Xuanhua tombs.

While Khitan dress is not depicted in Xuanhua, Khitan women are represented in the depictions of servants as hairstyle was used as an indicator of ethnicity during the Liao period. However, the women in the Xuanhua tombs, servants and elites alike, are clothed in something closer to Song-style dress than Khitan clothing. For example, in a scene of tea preparation from the tomb of Zhang Kuangzheng 張匡正 (d. 1058, cremated 1093), Xuanhua tomb M10, the female servants are depicted with a distinctive hairstyle of three topknots tied with bows, which likely indicates a Khitan hairstyle. They also wear long narrow skirts topped by jackets closing to the right, a style of dress current in Song China, as indicated by depictions of women in contemporaneous tombs such as Zhao Daweng's 趙大翁 tomb in Baisha, Henan (1099 CE).⁵⁹ Their skirts are either pleated, or perhaps striped in the style of Tang dynasty court women in the seventh century, such as those depicted in the tomb of Princess Xincheng 新城 (663 CE) – not a style current in the northern part of Liao territory. In Zhao Daweng's tomb, the female occupant may be wearing a skirt or apron that is striped or pleated, so it is possible that vertical stripes or pleats had made a comeback by the second half of the Northern Song dynasty.⁶⁰ As with other cultural practices indicated in the Xuanhua tombs, such as the use of manikins and cremation to mediate between Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist funerary rituals, the wearing of striped skirts harking back to early Tang styles might have been something unique to residents in the southern Liao territories.

Women in the Xuanhua tombs are consistently depicted in similar types of clothing – narrow skirts with waist-length jackets that close to the right (fig. 5). The only indication of Khitan or Han origin is in their hairstyles, which range from the topknots of the Khitan women to something approximating a large chignon, sometimes with hair ornaments, or partially covered by a head covering, for the Han women, reflecting contemporaneous tastes in clothing and hair in the Song dynasty. This contrasts with the depictions of women wearing Han style clothing in northern Khitan tombs, such as those painted in Baoshan tombs one and two, who adhere to Tang dynasty court beauty types rather than referencing styles current in the Song dynasty. This is not only the case for depictions of historical beauties from Chinese history – in Kulunqi tomb six, for example, female musicians with Tang style dress and hairstyles adorn the wall above the tomb's entryway (fig. 6). Their sleeves are overlong and flowing and their hair, in an elaborate coiffeur resembling butterfly wings, is adorned with several ornaments similar in style to those depicted in the Baoshan tombs. In other words, women dressed in “Han” style in northern Liao tombs are represented in the archaic mode of the Tang dynasty, while those in the southern Liao tombs echo current fashions of the Song dynasty. This might signal that while the Han residents of southern Liao territory felt a continued cultural affinity with their Song neighbors, keeping up with

⁵⁹ Xu, *Zhongguo chutu bishua* Vol. 5, 143-147.

⁶⁰ Chen, *Empire of Style*, 88, fig. 3.5; Xu, *Zhongguo chutu bishua* Vol. 5, 143 fig. 135.

contemporaneous clothing styles worn in China, the Khitan elite in the north were more interested in referencing and evoking the legacy of the Tang dynasty in a historicizing way rather than engaging with the current Song practices.



Figure 5. Preparing Tea, Liao dynasty (1093 CE), H. 152 cm, w. 181 cm. Unearthed from Zhang Kuangzheng's tomb (M10) at Xiabali, Xuanhua, Hebei, in 1993. Preserved on the original site.



Figure 6. Musicians (Replica), Liao dynasty (907–1125 CE), tomb M6 at Qianwulibugecun in Nailingagongshe, Kulunqi, Inner Mongolia. After Xu Guangji, *Zhongguo chu tu bi hua quan ji*, vol. 3, fig. 200.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence available, it seems reasonable to conclude that elite Khitan women, especially those related to the royal family and living in the northern part of Liao territory, consistently wore Khitan dress, even while their husbands and the emperor may have dressed in Tang/Song-style. This stands in contrast to the dress of elite women who lived within the Chinese cultural sphere in earlier periods, who tended to adopt Chinese-style dress in certain formal contexts. In the funerary context as well as the courtly context, elite Liao women appear to have maintained strong connections to their Khitan pastoral identity while often showcasing their knowledge and understanding of southern Chinese culture and, in particular, cultural materials related to the Tang dynasty. We know from travel accounts that Khitan dress in the Liao court was striking to visitors and must have conveyed an important message about the maintenance of this core of Khitan identity, even when the court was otherwise engaged in Chinese-style rituals. In contrast, elite Han women living in southern Liao territory, dressing in Song dynasty style, expressed their identity using a different sort of cultural fusion than we see with elite Khitan women. Servant women I have identified as Khitan, based on their hairstyles, also wore this Song-style dress in the southern Liao, more in keeping with the practice of women wearing Chinese-style dress observed in earlier centuries. The choice to dress in Khitan clothing seems to have been available to elite women living in the Liao dynasty, not universally to Khitan women, as servants in southern Liao territory wore Song-style clothing. The act of dressing in Khitan-style dress, therefore, seems to have been connected to the high social status and political power afforded to the elite women of the dynasty, something not available to Khitan women of lower social status, or not desired by those identifying as Han. The fact that elite Khitan women continued to wear Khitan-style dress, even while the emperor and his attendants adopted the garb of the Chinese court, would set an important precedent for the later Mongol-ruled Yuan dynasty (ca. 1279-1368). In the Yuan, Mongol dress would be the dress of power for men and women, especially in a courtly setting, with Chinese dress demoted to definite second-class status. The practice of dressing in a definitively nomadic style, expanded and codified by the Mongols while ruling over China, can thus be traced to the precedent set by the elite women of the Liao court.

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