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Rethinking China's Frontier: Archaeological Finds Show the Hexi Corridor's Rapid Emergence as a Regional Power

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Abstract: The Chinese government's expansion of infrastructure in Gansu province has led to the discovery of a number of important ancient tombs in the Hexi Corridor, a thousand kilometer stretch of the Silk Roads linking China to Central Asia. This study investigates recent finds in the context of older excavations to draw a more cohesive picture of the dramatic cultural and political changes on China's western frontier in the Wei-Jin period (220–317 CE). A survey of archaeological reports and an analysis of tomb distribution along with structural and decorative complexity indicate that after the fall of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), the nexus of regional power shifted from the eastern Hexi Corridor to Jiuquan and Dunhuang in the west. This phenomenon was related in the rise of magnate families, who emerged from Han dynasty soldier-farmer colonies and helped catalyze the region's transformation from a military outpost to a semi-autonomous, prosperous haven that absorbed cultural influences from multiple directions. This dynamism, in turn, set the stage for the Hexi Corridor's ascent as a center of Buddhist art in the fifth and sixth centuries.

Keywords: Silk Roads; Hexi Corridor; Dunhuang; Jiuquan; Han dynasty; Wei-Jin period; Northern Dynasties; tomb; art; China

1. Piecing Together a Regional Picture of the Past

At the turn of the millennium, the Chinese government launched its Great Western Development Strategy to spearhead economic development and lift living standards in the western part of the country. In Gansu 甘肃 province, this initiative spurred the construction of high-speed railways, freeways, airports, and gas pipelines and, as this infrastructure has expanded across deserts and mountains, archaeological sites have been unearthed at an unprecedented pace along the Silk Roads thoroughfare known as the Hexi Corridor (*Hexi Zoulang* 河西走廊). This rush to the future, in fact, has revitalized the commitment to exploring the past as the central government along with provincial and local cultural bureaus support research and display artifacts in palatial museums. Even while new excavations have been studied in isolation or small groups, the work of integrating them with older excavations to form a regional picture of the Hexi Corridor remains incomplete. This study investigates recent finds in the context of older excavations to better understand the Hexi Corridor's sudden transformation from a frontier outpost in the Han 汉 dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) to a prosperous and largely autonomous region in the tumultuous Wei-Jin 魏晋 period (220–317 CE), when northern China was subject first to the kingdom of Wei 魏 (220–66) and then to the Western Jin 晋 dynasty (266–317). A survey of archaeological reports and an analysis of tomb distribution along with structural and decorative complexity indicate that dramatic social and political changes coincided with the shift of regional power from the eastern Hexi Corridor to Jiuquan and Dunhuang in the west. In these two locations, vibrant artistic centers materialized and these were pivotal to the region's ascent as a

center of Buddhist art in subsequent centuries during the Sixteen States (*Shiliu Guo* 十六国 304–439) and Northern Dynasties (*Bei Chao* 北朝 386–581) periods.

2. Reading the Archaeological Record in the Hexi Corridor

The Hexi Corridor is a natural bridge connecting the Chinese heartland (*zhongyuan* 中原)¹ (Dien 2007, p. 80) to both Central Asia and the eastern Eurasian Steppe. Its topography forced the convergence of a network of trade routes today referred to as the Silk Roads. Stretching nearly one thousand kilometers from Wuwei 武威 in the southeast, through Zhangye 张掖 and Jiuquan 酒泉 to Dunhuang 敦煌 at the far northwest end, the Hexi Corridor is pressed between the harsh climates of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau (*Qingzang Gaoyuan* 青藏高原) to the southwest and the Gobi Desert to the northeast (Figure 1). A rain shadow cast by the Himalayas on the southern edge of the plateau is responsible for the arid climate of the Gobi Desert, which extends across the northern border of China. The Hexi Corridor, however, was inviting to settlers and wayfarers in part because the runoff from the escarpment of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau irrigates a string of oases. Since the Han dynasty, these were connected along the path of military expansion, settlement, and trade.



Figure 1. Oasis cities of the Hexi Corridor in Gansu province.²

The dry climate and, until recently, lack of industrial development has left the archeological record in the Hexi Corridor remarkably intact, providing a breadth of data difficult to match elsewhere in China. It allows for close inspection of the placement and design of graveyards, as well as the relationship between aboveground and subterranean plans. This enables broad comparisons to be made and conclusions about historical patterns to be drawn. Relying on the archaeological record, however, has some inherent limitations. First, the excavations to date are not a representative sampling of the vast pool of sites. Each was usually identified by chance, commonly in the course of building (though at least one tomb was discovered after local police arrested modern-day tomb

¹ Defined as the middle Yellow River Basin and neighboring areas.

² Maps, drawings, and photographs by H. Clydesdale.

raiders attempting to sell its painted bricks on the black market) (Shi 1997, p. 44). Often, a cursory examination of a large number of tomb mounds determines which ones will be subject to thorough excavations. This means that, while the archaeological record does not reflect a scientific sampling, it is not entirely random.

Of the excavated sites, many have detailed reports that measure, describe, catalog, and diagram architecture, decoration, and burial goods. Over the last decade, archaeologists have been increasingly diligent in describing aboveground features and formations of tombs, but this information in earlier reports is inconsistent. Since burials are vulnerable to vandalism, theft, and the elements, and because of the ongoing expansion of residential, commercial, agricultural, and industrial zones, the archaeological report is often the last chance to preserve information about these tombs before they are permanently erased.

Changes in the formation of tombs from before and after the fall of the Han dynasty point to the Wei-Jin period as a crucial turning point, more than a hundred years before the magnificent Buddhist cave temples and related art first appeared. A comparison of excavations in the eastern and western sectors of the Hexi Corridor further indicate that the nexus of power shifted westward, away from the heartland, as the region asserted its own identity amid the widespread chaos and rapid rotation of rulers in north China following the fall of the Han dynasty.

3. The Eastern Hexi Corridor

Surveying tomb distribution, size and degree of ornateness in the eastern Hexi Corridor confirms its establishment as a strategic bulwark and launchpad for expansion to what was called the “Western Regions” (*Xi Yu* 西域) over the course of the Han dynasty. Most Han dynasty tombs in the eastern Hexi Corridor are situated in or close to the city of Wuwei, which in 121 BCE was founded as one of the first prefectural-level cities in the Hexi Corridor. One tomb, dated to the late second or early third centuries and believed to belong to a general, stands apart for its size and impressive decor. Archaeologists in 1969 discovered the tomb mound encased in a Ming 明 dynasty (1368–1644) tamped earthen platform and estimated that it initially reached a prodigious six meters in height. As is typical in Chinese tombs, the size of the hummock reflected the proportions of the configuration beneath the surface, which are accessed via a long, ramped corridor. Three underground chambers, each with a tall conical ceiling, were aligned across nearly twenty meters (Figure 2). Crude paintings of stylized plant motifs adorned the corridor walls, while alternating black and white-painted bricks on the chamber walls formed abstract patterns. Scores of skillfully cast bronzes including warriors mounted on so-called heavenly horses and multiple chariots were among the rich burial goods of this tomb (Gansusheng Bowuguan 1974, pp. 87, 90–97, 105–7). The fact that the tomb cleaves closely to heartland conventions and is spectacular in both dimension and decor is a testament to the growing status of Wuwei in the late Han dynasty as diplomatic, trade, and military campaigns flourished along the Silk Roads.

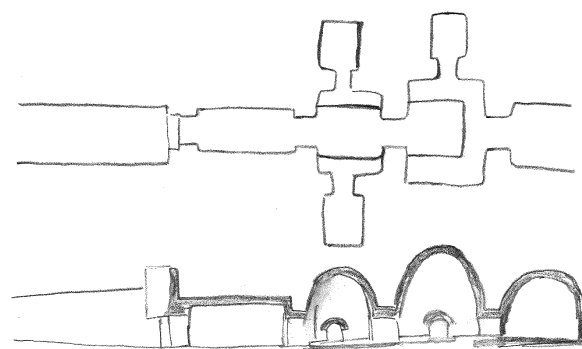


Figure 2. Plan, and cross-section of tomb at Wuwei Leitai, brick, Han dynasty, late second-early third centuries, drawing after Gansusheng Bowuguan (1974, Figure 1).

Small-scale burials surrounding Wuwei, meanwhile, provide insights into broader demographic changes at this time. Scores of tombs of varying size have been found grouped and arranged within a sixty-kilometer radius of Wuwei city center. At the site of Mojuzi 磨咀子, nestled next to the foothills of the Qilian 祁连 Mountains, archaeologists in the 1950s conducted preliminary excavations on seventy such tombs and determined that they were built during a three-century span after the founding of Wuwei. Importantly, the archaeologists found no clear evidence of tombs aligned on parallel trajectories, which would indicate burials of extended-families. Instead, the informal burials suggest that they accommodated soldiers or newly arrived soldier-farmers (and their immediate family members) who came to colonize and defend the region. As with other Han dynasty tombs around Wuwei, larger ones were modeled on the standard design consisting of a ramped corridor leading to one or more underground chambers. Compared to their counterparts in the heartland, however, the construction of these tombs was not sophisticated: most consisted of a single dugout chamber that accommodated husband-and-wife burials. The tombs were furnished with typical burial goods including wood figurines and models of stoves, domestic animals and farm equipment. Only one, thought to be later than all the others and dated to the very end of the Han dynasty, had two chambers and even this was only dugout, not brick, fabrication (Du 1992).

The large number of tombs along the 240-km stretch between Wuwei and Zhangye traces the westward expansion of control over the course of the Han dynasty. Extensive damage from tomb robbers and natural elements makes it difficult to date these tombs precisely and evaluate architectural details, though in general they seem to be larger in scale and more sophisticated in execution than the bulk of their counterparts around Wuwei. One grouping at a cemetery in Minle 民乐 County, roughly midway between Wuwei and Zhangye, is believed to date to the late Han dynasty. Here nineteen tombs were aligned along an arc-shaped trajectory, and each had a notably large mound, one measuring twenty meters in diameter. Excavations of the chambers yielded large numbers of burial goods, including a plethora of utensils involved in the preparation and consumption of liquor (Du 1992, pp. 80–82). Zhangye split off from Wuwei to become a prefectural seat in 111 BCE and the subsequent appearance of large tombs in deliberate groupings and with more burial goods attests to the area's economic development and growth of the civilian population.

The consolidation of authority over the eastern Hexi Corridor was the result of a political strategy that led to the opening of the Silk Roads in the second century BCE. The Emperor Wu 武 (r. 141–87 BCE) had grown exasperated with his predecessors' policies for dealing with the formidable confederation of Xiongnu 匈奴 tribes who lived in the Gobi Desert. Eschewing the so-called "peaceful and friendly relations" (*heqin* 和亲), essentially a "diplomatic smoke screen which disguised the payment of large bribes" (Barfield 1989, p. 4), Emperor Wu leaned toward an aggressive stance. He dispatched the general Zhang Qian 张骞 on two missions to traverse the Hexi Corridor and forge an alliance with other pastoral groups, the Yuezhi 月氏 and Wusun 乌孙. While Zhang Qian failed in his assignment, his journey proved to be the initial thrust that cleared the way for fortification and colonization of the Hexi Corridor and eventually enabled the Han government to exert control over the kingdoms surrounding the Tarim Basin (*Talimu Pendi* 塔里木盆地) in the present day province of Xinjiang 新疆. The large and elaborate tombs around Wuwei and Zhangye imply that government influence was escalating, while the loose dispersal of small tombs in surrounding areas suggest that colonies were spreading. In tombs both large and small, close to the city centers and peripheral, funerary decor remained faithful to established traditions, indicating a persistent cultural allegiance among a population made up mainly of soldiers, conscripts, and pioneers.

The trend towards more abundant and elaborate tombs abruptly ended with the fall of the Han dynasty in 220 CE. The only tomb of note is a brick-chambered tomb in Wuwei and dated to the third or early fourth century. It features designs made with two-toned bricks but is much smaller than its massive counterpart dated to the late Han dynasty. Additionally, it lacks extra details like side chambers and "pinched waist" corridors between rooms (Zhong 1987). This mirrors the trend in the heartland, where lavish structures above and below ground dwindled as China succumbed to civil war

and repeated invasions along the northern frontier. Extravagant funerals were derided as symptoms of moral degeneration and economic excess that precipitated the downfall of the dynasty, and they fell prey to popular iconoclasm and imperial proscriptions (Wu 1995, p. 120).

4. The Western Hexi Corridor

The archaeological record in the western Hexi Corridor, on the other hand, shows a hard turn towards artistic vibrancy and autonomy. In the century after the fall of the Han dynasty, tombs become more numerous and elaborate. Further, they display cohesive and innovative features and styles, especially around Jiuquan, about 450 km to the west of Wuwei, and at Dunhuang, four hundred kilometers further west. This signals that, while nominally under the control of rulers in the heartland, the western Hexi Corridor emerged as an independent and prosperous region in the Wei-Jin period.

4.1. Jiuquan

While Jiuquan was designated a prefectural seat in 121 BCE, the same year as Wuwei, excavations suggest it remained a hardscrabble outpost throughout the Han dynasty. In fact, it appears that building projects emphasized the building of signal towers and defensive walls over tombs. While Han dynasty tombs are still numerous in the surrounding region, they are randomly arranged, suggesting that they were informal graveyards for soldiers (Du 1992, p. 81). The Han government dispatched soldier-farmers to the Hexi Corridor as part of what was called the *tuntian* 屯田 system. Originally intended to provide grain for government envoys traveling to the Western Regions, the program quickly expanded to encompass twin goals of defending and colonizing the frontier (Yu 1967, pp. 147–50).

In the period immediately after the demise of Han dynasty, however, large-scale tombs in organized formation and with a high degree of uniformity and ornamentation suddenly appeared. Detailed reports on two sets of Wei-Jin tombs have been published, but they have not been considered in the context of less widely known reports that shed light on what is Jiuquan's surprising emergence as an economic and cultural center.

One report from 1979 cataloged aboveground features from three tombs outside of Jiuquan. The tombs shared an enclosure about seven meters thick that delineated an area measuring nearly eighty square meters. The entrance to the enclosure was flanked by rectangular earthen mounds, believed to have been platforms for models of watchtowers that in the Han dynasty commonly bordered what were called "spirit roads" (*shendao* 神道) leading to tombs. At this site, low walls bordered the spirit road and extended almost 130 m from the entrance. This immense scale was rivaled by a sacrificial platform over seventeen meters in length (Wu 1979). The sheer proportions of the spirit road and platform mean that they were intended to impress as well as to facilitate large gatherings and public displays of ritual. Underground, each tomb had two chambers. Since the earliest tomb was dated to the second half of the third century and the latest to the fourth century, it appears that the restrictions on ostentatious burials were not observed in the western Hexi Corridor as they seem to have been around Wuwei and Zhangye.

Additionally, two groups that together encompass eleven large-scale burials were found in an area between Jiuquan and the nearby city of Jiayuguan 嘉峪关, and this cluster represents a purposeful and consistent program of artistic approaches in burials.³ Found within an expansive graveyard that included basic pit graves and modest two-chambered burials, the tombs date to the Wei-Jin period and are published in two detailed reports (Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. 1985; Zhao and Ma 1996). Eight of the tombs are uniformly oriented north, and six were built in pairs that shared enclosures (Gansusheng

³ Today, these tombs are usually treated as two separate groups since they straddle the municipal boundary separating Jiuquan from Jiayuguan and hence fall under different jurisdictions. I treat them as a single group due to their mutual proximity (all within five kilometers) and consistent design.

Bowuguan et al. 1985, pp. 3–5). The aboveground features of some tombs remain intact today and can be observed firsthand (Figure 3). Uniformly, aboveground features were modest, consisting of packed sand and earthen mounds surrounded in some cases by low earthen walls. This could be construed as evidence that some people in and around Jiuquan complied with imperial ordinances calling for austerity, however, this interpretation is belied by the novel architecture and décor below ground.



Figure 3. Tomb mound, gravel and sand, Jiuquan, Wei-Jin period, 220–317 CE.

The overall layout of the tombs follow Han dynasty models with an extended ramped corridor leading to two or three underground chambers, yet in other aspects, the tombs incorporate significant ingenuity. Arriving at the threshold to the chambers, the visitor encounters a towering façade made of painted and carved bricks and evoking a watchtower. Soaring up one plane of an airshaft, this feature is between eight and twelve meters tall, and nearly reaches the surface of the earth above. Called a “screen wall” (*zhaobi* 照壁) by archaeologists, a mixture of apotropaic and auspicious imagery endows it with magical purpose, while the presence of a miniature door suggests that it functions as a *tianmen* 天门 or celestial gate (Sun 2008, pp. 33–34). While the screen wall appeared in tombs across the Hexi Corridor and built through the third and fourth centuries, it is at Jiuquan that it coalesces into a uniform and original spatial program. It heralds the entrance to the chambers beyond, which are accessed through a low, barrel-vaulted passageway (Figures 4 and 5). The chambers themselves employ a multi-layered interplay of brick architecture, paintings, and burial goods to replicate a central courtyard, surrounded by a manor and attendant farms, with wildernesses beyond. In these settings, painted servants cheerfully prepare and serve banquets, peasants sow and reap harvests, and images of male and female tomb occupants feast, play instruments and gallivant across the countryside (Clydesdale 2016, ch. 3).

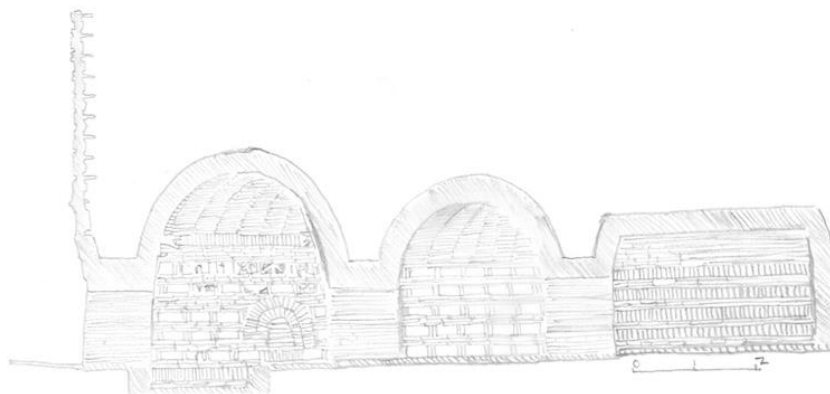


Figure 4. Cross section, Jiayuguan M6, brick, Wei-Jin period, 220–317 CE, after Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. (1985, Figure 15).

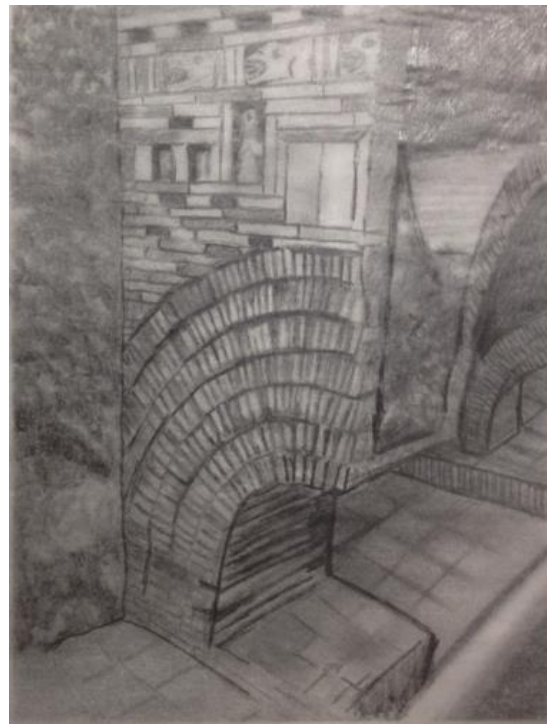


Figure 5. Split view rendering of through screen wall and into front chamber, Jiayuguan M6, Wei-Jin period, 220–317 CE.

The style of these eleven tombs is both consistent and singular. The form and decoration of the screen walls are regimented across the tombs, while the chambers beyond combine similar principles with original variations seen in the interplay of architectural space and painted depictions of the tomb occupants. The importance of Jiuquan as an artistic center is underscored by the fact that contemporaneous tombs at the town of Gaotai 高台, about 150 km to the east, hew to both architectural and painted prototypes found at Jiuquan. They are smaller, however, use less sophisticated technology (dried bricks instead of fired), and display coarse brushwork along with rudimentary figural rendering, all of which suggests that Jiuquan was the origin of the influence (Shi 1997; Gansusheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo and Gaotai Bowuguan 2003). One tomb at Gaotai, however, is both stately and groundbreaking. While comparable in size and arrangement to other chambered tombs, the front chamber encases a large portico and gate with columns, struts, brackets, and beams, all detailed imitations of wooden architecture, but made of carved earth (Gansusheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo and Gaotai Bowuguan 2008). Future excavations may divulge further information about the origin or development of this style.

4.2. Dunhuang

The city of Dunhuang is situated at the western end of the Hexi Corridor. Here, excavations at two graveyards, Qijiawan 祁家湾 and Foyemiaowan 佛爷庙湾, have yielded significant caches of tombs. As at Jiuquan, a range of formats, from simple vertical pits to tombs with ramped corridors leading to either dugout chambers or single and double brick-chambers indicates a high degree of social stratification, while the regular presence of enclosures shows a propensity towards family formations (Figure 6). Aboveground, the mounds and enclosures are similar to those at Jiuquan, but departures in architecture and décor belowground demonstrate that artisans at Dunhuang developed a distinctive style.



Figure 6. Tomb mounds and enclosures at Foyemiaowan, gravel and sand, Dunhuang, Western Jin dynasty, 265–317 CE.

At Qijiawan, although burials vary in size and orientation, many are organized in groups, aligned on the same axis and sharing grave enclosures. These tombs also have screen walls faced with plain adobe bricks or left bare and earthen. The chambers themselves, numbering between one and two, are not constructed of brick but are catacombs dug out of the earth. While they lack paintings and carved ornamentation, their construction approximates the shapes of the brick-chambered tombs at Jiuquan (Dai et al. 1994, pp. 3–12). The second Dunhuang site of Foyemiaowan is a few kilometers east of the city, around and within the grounds of what is now the airport. Tombs here date to the end of the third and early fourth centuries, during the Western Jin dynasty, which tenuously and briefly unified China. In the eastern section of the site, tombs are of dugout construction and appear more makeshift than those at Qijiawan (Sun and Ma 1974, pp. 191–97). Tombs in the western quadrant, however, have tall, ornamented screen walls. The intricate pictorial organization and elegant brushwork depicting protective guardians and auspicious beasts suggest that the screen wall was the most important focus in the burial, even surpassing its significance at Jiuquan (Gansusheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1998, pp. 8–40).

5. From Frontier to Safe Haven

In the Wei-Jin period, both Jiuquan and Dunhuang were titularly subject to sovereigns in the heartland, yet their remote locations enabled locals to consolidate power. A survey of tombs built over this period exhibits an expansion of scale, alignment of formation, surge in refinement, and the establishment of two distinct styles at Jiuquan and Dunhuang. These are signs that, even as other parts of China roiled under what was widespread mayhem and acute deprivation during the third and fourth centuries, the western Hexi Corridor emerged as a region of political stability and artistic inspiration.

Since the Han dynasty, burials in China served a public purpose by increasing a family's prestige and helping its members amass social currency as they demonstrated filial virtue through funerary and sacrificial rituals. The confluence of belief and society represented by tombs and attendant burial rituals does not appear in the western Hexi Corridor until the Wei-Jin period when parallel alignments

of family graves buttressed or elevated the social position of forebears and the newly deceased alike. The size of graves, proclaimed by the mound and ridge of sand and gravel running above the length of the corridor, signaled hierarchies within groups and also between them, thus establishing the status of the occupant or occupants in relation to the extended family and larger community. Enclosures set specific graves apart from the thousands of others in the desert, further distinguishing people by social class and relationships. On the blank canvas of the Gobi Desert, even piles of sand and gravel could communicate ideas of status and relationships. This, coupled with increasing numbers of large and elaborate rooms underground, show that Jiuquan and Dunhuang harbored formidable families with a certain amount of wealth.

The metamorphosis of the western Hexi Corridor was both rooted in its military past and stimulated by events elsewhere in China. Families of means and influence began moving from the heartland to settle in the Hexi Corridor during the late Han dynasty. By the third century, they were able to take advantage of well-developed irrigation and defense systems that had been installed as part of the *tuntian* system (You 1991; You 1992, pp. 80–81). The Han dynasty fragmented at the precise time when the Hexi Corridor was reorganizing from a collection of military-farming colonies into communities in which farming and animal husbandry were augmented by sericulture and trade (Li 2006, pp. 87–88). As rebellion, warfare, and famine wracked populations in the heartland, waves of refugees sought sanctuary in south China and also in the western Hexi Corridor western frontier where the economy was thriving (Li and Zhu 2012, pp. 117–18).

A description of the Hexi Corridor from the *Hanshu* 汉书 may have characterized the region as an exotic frontier when it was written in the second century CE, but amid the upheavals after the fall of the dynasty, it likely beckoned as a sanctuary of peace and prosperity:

West of Wuwei...the land is vast, and people are few. The water and grass are suitable for animal husbandry, and livestock in old Liangzhou 凉州 is the most plentiful under heaven...Officials and the people have mutual affection. Bandits are few; there is an atmosphere of harmony and virtue compared to administrations in China's interior (Ban 1995, pp. 1644–45).⁴

Archaeological evidence shows that the allure of the Hexi Corridor beckoned to peoples from the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, the Gobi Desert and the Western Regions. Scores of paintings from tombs at Jiuquan and Jiayuguan, along with one tomb from Gaotai, depict pastoral groups like the Qiang 羌, Di 氐, and Tufa Xianbei 秃发鲜卑, as well as peoples from the Western Regions such as Qiuci 龟兹 and Sogdians. Many are shown living harmoniously and even farming and practicing sericulture alongside ethnic Han Chinese, the majority group in ancient and present-day China (Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. 1985, pp. 49–50 and 99, plates 46–47, 53 and 86; E Jun and Gao 2009, p. 138; Zheng 2012, pp. 137–38). Textual records from the time also document increasing diversity in the region. The *Jinshu* 晋书 contends that among the peoples in the region “between the passes” (*Guanzhong* 关中), more than half were not ethnic Han Chinese (Fang 1995). The paintings, however, give a view of ethnic relations that conflicts with the one presented by official histories of the time. Those chronicle recurring uprisings, suppressions, land grabs, invasions and enslavement campaigns among ethnic groups (Bai 2011). The openness to cross-cultural interactions on display in the idealized world of the tomb may have helped foster the artistic innovations seen in later Buddhist art.

The importance of the Hexi Corridor along the Silk Roads is widely recognized when it comes to diplomatic and economic exchanges in the Han dynasty, as well due to remarkable artistic developments when the region later burgeoned into a center of Buddhist art and culture. The influence of the Wei-Jin period, however, is often overlooked.⁵ Appreciating the forces that catalyzed the

⁴ Liangzhou is an ancient name for the region. This quote is from the *Dilizhixia* 地理志下. My translation.

⁵ An exception is Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt's examination of the adaptation of tomb architecture into cave temples (Steinhardt 2001).

development of funerary art in the western Hexi Corridor, around Jiuquan and Dunhuang, sheds light on the conditions that laid the foundations for subsequent artistic innovation in the Sixteen Kingdoms and Northern Dynasties periods.

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