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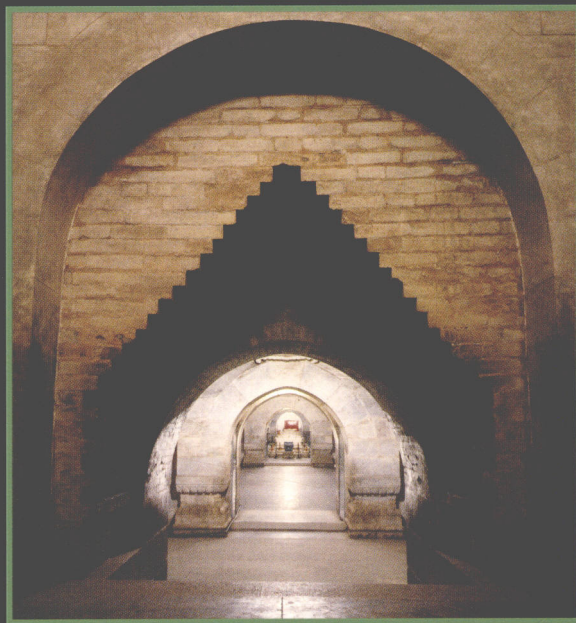


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## Emotions and Desires at the Ming Tombs

Do ghosts have emotions and sensory pleasures? I wonder.

Joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hate and desire are the seven emotions; the sensory pleasures come from looking, listening, smelling, tasting, touching and feeling.

For several hundred years, I have been lingering in the place where countless emperors and their empresses and concubines were buried, and nothing can frighten me. Day and night I spend with the ghosts of the emperors whom I've seen or not seen, and who saw me or did not see me. Extreme extravagance. It seems that this phrase is often used about emperors. And there were many such emperors during the Ming Dynasty, which began in 1368 and ended in 1644.

There are the tombs of 13 Ming emperors several dozen km northwest of Beijing. They are: Deling, Yongling, Jingling, Changling, Xianling, Qingling, Yuling, Maoling, Tailing, Kangling, Dingling, Zhaoling and Siling. They were built over a span of 240 years, the first being Changling, started in 1409, the 7<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Ming Emperor Yongle,

and the last being Siling, completed in 1644, the first year of the reign of Qing Emperor Shunzhi.

Seeing the neglected tombs of emperors, one cannot but be filled with myriad emotions. Once living in extreme extravagance, and ruling the entire country with supreme arrogance, they all ended up as bones and dust. If that's the ending of all emperors, what do I amount to, a ghost girl spending my youth with bones at the orders of Heaven? I only wish that I had seen my mother before I left, and I've waited to see her for 200 years....

I'm not alone here with these piles of bones. There are many special things. For example, in Siling, the tomb of the last Ming emperor, Sizong (r. 1628-1644), who hanged himself from a tree on Jingshan Hill, there are three pine trees with their crowns upside down and leaves drooping like hair. You cannot find a fourth pine tree like that in the entire area of the 13 tombs.

Emperor Sizong wept when he heard the cannon fire of the peasants' insurrectionary army led by Li Zicheng, and saw the sky glowing from the raging



fires outside his palace. How did I lose control of the country? He asked himself.

Why were my officials so inept and my court so undisciplined?

Why was there an unceasing sequence of natural and man-made disasters?

Why is the dynasty collapsing in spite of my efforts and diligence?

Why? Why?

The three upside-down pine trees embody all the questions of the last Ming emperor, which were never satisfactorily answered.

The Xianling Tomb was built behind a hill, which was known as "Cover-up Hill" among the local people. It is said that Emperor Renzong (who reigned for less than one year in 1425) committed incest with his aunt as a crown prince, and his son Zhu Zhanji ordered that his tomb be built behind the hill. In fact the emperor was a rare kind-hearted monarch, solicitous for the people and not indulging in sensual pleasure, and was given the posthumous title "benevolent emperor." The rumor of incest is groundless.

When it rains, I visit Qingling Tomb. The four pits on the plinth of the tablet are filled with water and reflect light on the tablet. According to one story, on an overcast day in the early autumn of 1620, a "magic doctor" came to see the ailing Emperor Guangzong (who had ascended the throne in the same year). He had been invited by the

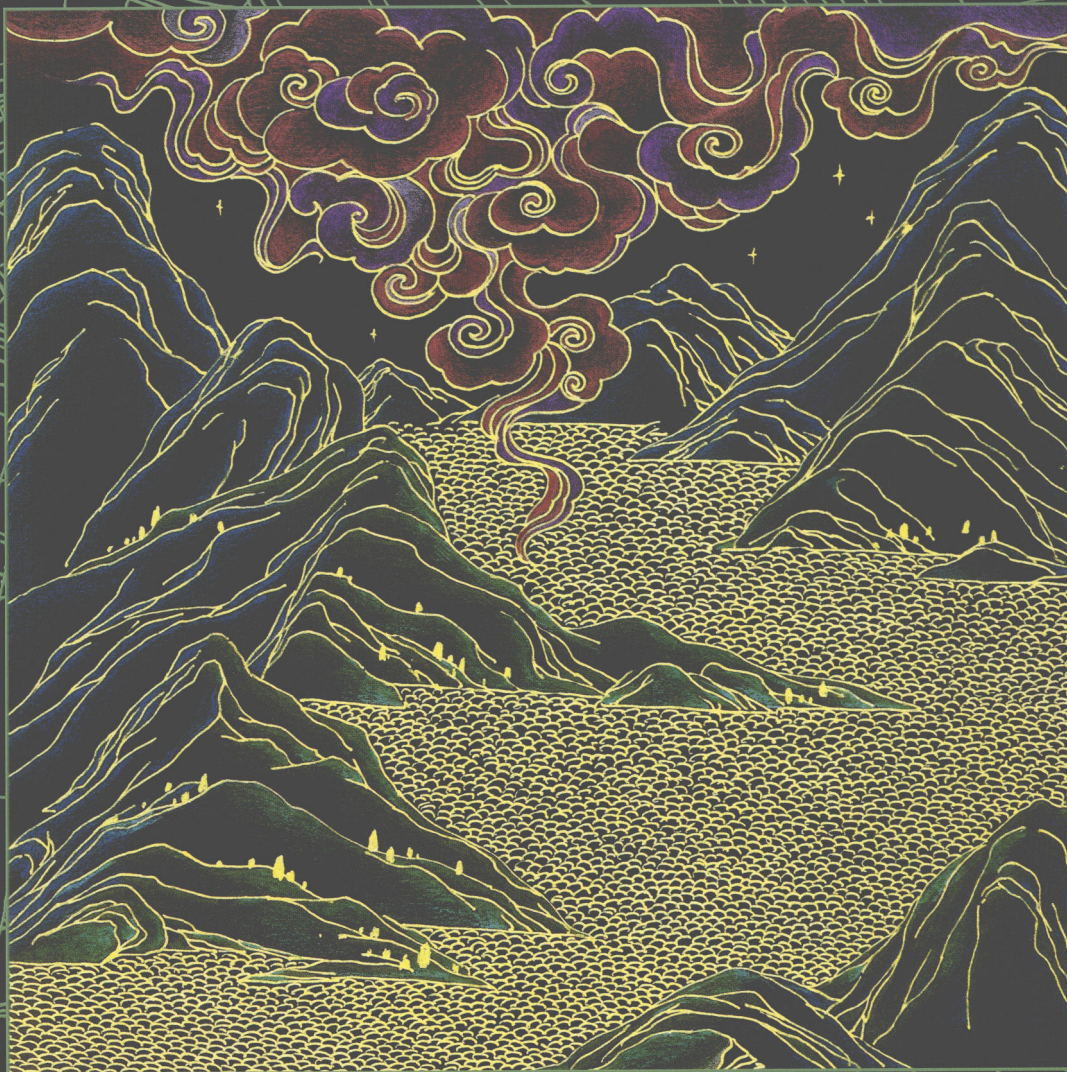
emperor's favorite concubine Zheng. The doctor wore a mask. He gave the emperor three red pills, and forced him to take one before turning to leave. In fact the pills contained poison prepared by Zheng. The emperor took hold of the masked doctor and asked him who he was, how he had got into the palace and what he was there for. At that moment it began to rain. The doctor struggled free, and escaped in the rain. On the same night, the emperor, who had been on the throne for only one month, died with his eyes open. Later, people started to say that when it rains the ghost of Guangzong brightens his tablet, trying to see who had murdered him.

Many laborers died of overwork transporting the colorful stones for building Changling and Yongling tombs.

It is said that there is a spring under Tailing, the tomb of Emperor Xiaozong (r. 1488-1505). The official in charge of the construction secretly had the spring plugged to make the work go smoothly. Today, no one knows whether there is really a spring under the tomb, and whether the emperor's coffin has been soaked. It is also said that the supervisor was very cruel, and killed many workers and artisans, so the tiles for the top of the tomb could not be baked into the color of imperial yellow....

During the span of almost 240 years, large numbers of secrets were buried in the 13 tombs.





One day, over 500 years ago, Ming Emperor Chengzu (r. 1403-1424), escorted by his entourage, came to a place embraced by mountains and a river in the western suburbs of Beijing. He threw his jade thumb ring into the distance. The moment it landed on the ground, auspicious purple clouds rose up to the sky. His attendants exclaimed that it was the treasured location of the dragon's vein. From then on, it became the site of the imperial mausoleum of 13 Ming emperors – popularly known as the Ming Tombs.





With the mountains constituting a protective screen, the Ming Tombs area is easy to hold and hard to attack. It is said that its gourd-shaped topography looks like a dragon's head at one end and a phoenix' tail at the other, and that dragons, tigers, snakes and turtles as well as all kinds of spirits reside here.



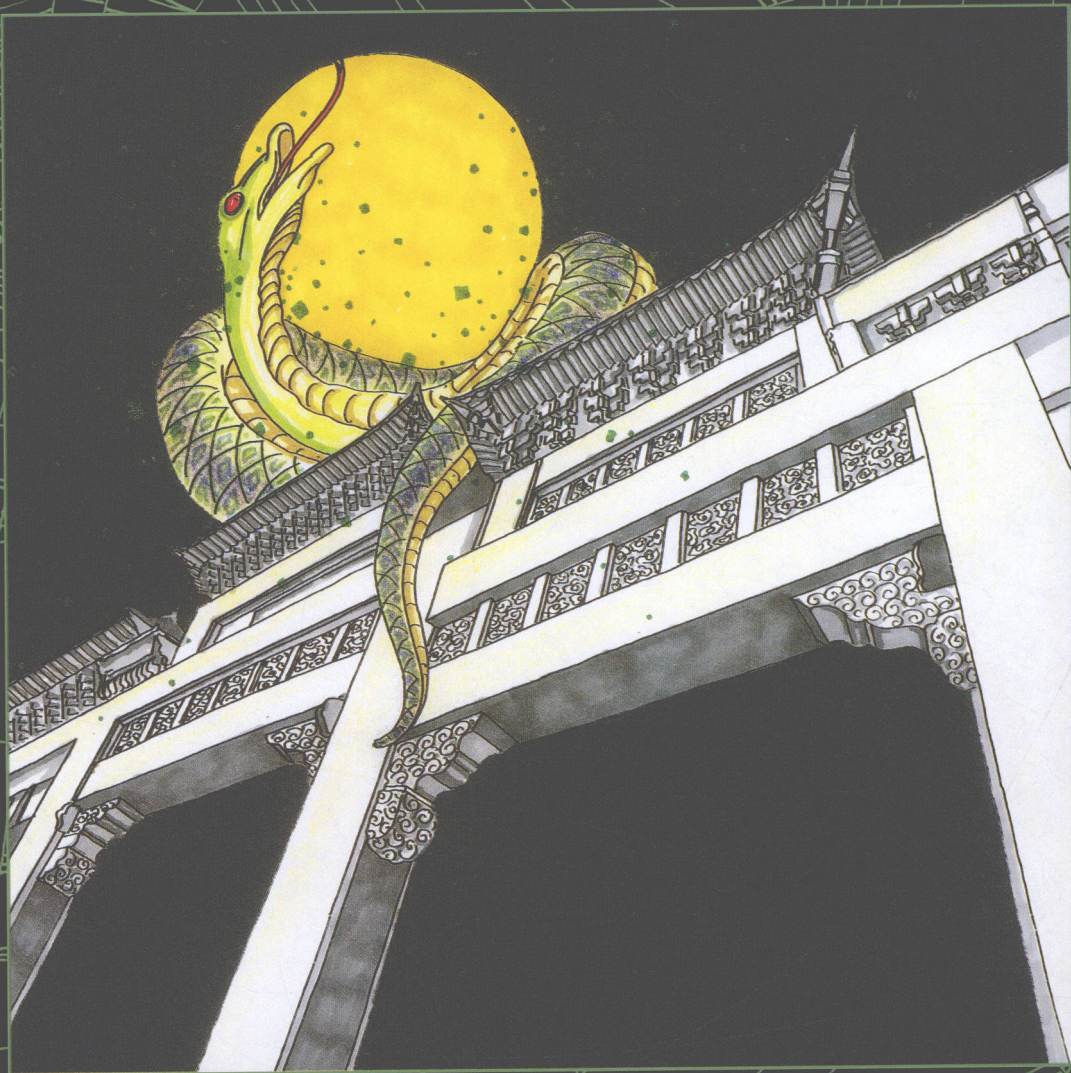






Tombs are homes of the dead. Many ancient Chinese believed that only a grand, elaborate funeral could ensure that the ghost would rest. Is this true?





The stone memorial arch before the tomb was built to commend the merits and virtues of the ancestor. Civil and military officers of later generations had to alight from their carriages and go on horseback before passing the memorial arch. At the main gate to the tomb, which is one km from the memorial arch, they had to dismount and walk. Almost every emperor's tomb has such a memorial arch in front of it. Did they all achieve perfect virtues and merits?





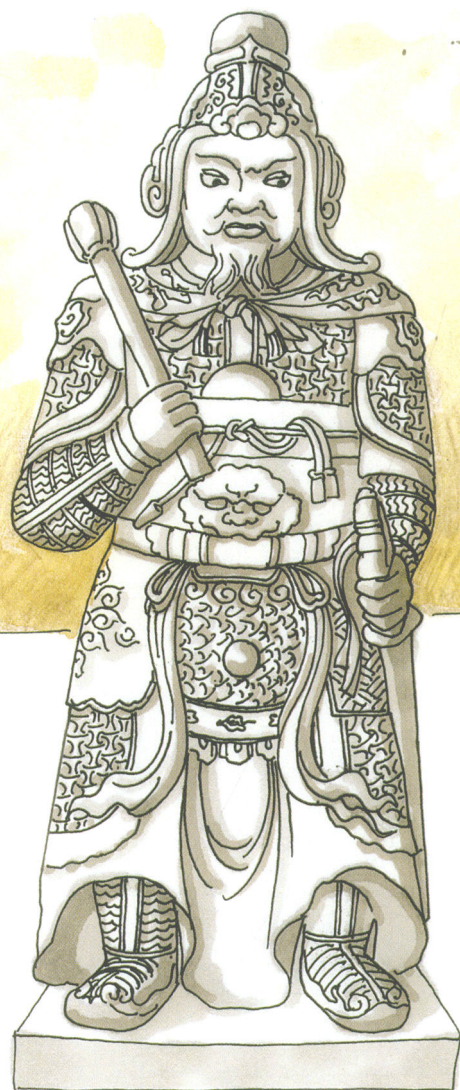
In the area of 40 square km set aside for the Ming Tombs, each tomb is in a separate area, containing the Hall of Eminent Favor, fasting room, workshop of the Ministry of Public Works, office of the Directorate of Imperial Temples, Divine Stable, orchard, kitchen for preparing sacrificial food offerings, Abattoir Pavilion and Sacrificial Office.





It is said that the imperial tombs are full of hidden protective devices, and anyone breaking into them or entering them by mistake will be shot by arrows or die of poisonous gas, or ....





I don't have time to chat with you, civil officials, military officers and meritorious ministers.  
I have a hunch my mother will come to see me today.



