

# A study on dog-eating and dog-raising in Han dynasty of China

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**ABSTRACT.** *Dogs played an essential role in the daily life of the Han dynasty, frequently appearing in the stone paintings, pottery sculpture and so on. The image of the dog can serve as one of the important enlightening windows for us to study the social life of the Han dynasty. Based on the archaeological findings of Han dynasty stone painting and pottery sculpture and literature records, it can be found that eating dogs and raising dogs in the whole society of Han dynasty has become a commonplace, leading to the commercialization of dog keeping.*

**KEYWORDS:** *dog; the Han dynasty. Stone painting; pottery sculpture sculpture*

## 1. Introduction

*Gou* (dog), also known as *quan* (dog), is one of the important livestock in ancient China. According to the document resources available, domestic dogs first appeared in the middle Neolithic Age of China, and became one of the main livestock and played a very important role as early as in Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties. At that time, they are mainly used for food, guard, funeral and sacrifice and there was a strong trend of dog sacrificial rites so the bones of dogs were generally found in tombs, sacrificial pits, chariot pits and architectural sites (Liu Denghui, 2011). In Han dynasty, although dogs still played an important role in social life, the image of dogs appeared in stone, pottery sculpture and other carriers instead due to the change of custom in burial and sacrifice in which people gradually began to use pottery sculpture, stone carving and other objects in replace of real livestock.

Han dynasty witnessed great development and change of feudal society in China. In terms of funeral customs, the Han dynasty the trend of luxurious burial was prevailing and the general tendency was to worship and treat the dead as if they were alive. The Recuperation policy in the early Han dynasty brought about a sharp increase in social wealth. It is said that “the people can provide enough to the family and the government store millions of money in national treasury”, which laid a solid economic and social foundation for the fashion of luxurious burial.

The large number of stone paintings and potteries serve as one of the embodiments of the culture in Han dynasty. The themes of stone paintings and potteries in Han dynasty are rich and mainly realistic, covering all aspects of social life in which the image of dog appeared a lot and played an important part in the study of stone paintings and potteries in Han dynasty, providing essential windows to know the social life of Han dynasty. It must be pointed that stone paintings in this study mainly refer to the underground tomb, cemetery ancestral hall, or sculpture carved on the architectural portrait of the architectural stone like tomb, temple or other buildings while pottery sculpture mainly refers to pottery sculpture funerary products which involve the image of people, animals as the subject.

## **2. The popular image of dogs in stone paintings of Han dynasty**

As a special art form of funeral rites in ancient China, stone painting in Han dynasty has a strong characteristics of Han people and the times. It vividly recorded the social life at that time, and became a valuable material for the study of politics, economy, ideology, art, customs and other aspects in Han dynasty. As said by Mr Jian Bozan “in addition to the relics of the ancients, there is no kind of data can reflect history better than painting or sculpture. At the same time, there is no other era in Chinese history which prefer to engrave the forms of real life and popular stories on the tablets more than the Han dynasty. If these stone portraits were collected systematically, they would almost present a history of the han dynasty.”(Jian Bozan1983)

The stone paintings of Han dynasty appeared Emperor Wu and declined or died out in the late Eastern Han dynasty, covering three hundred years or so. According to the founding sites of Han stone paintings over the years in China, there exist a large number of Han dynasty stone remains in the east to the coastal areas, west to provinces of Sichuan and Gansu, south to provinces of Zhejiang and Yunnan, north to the cities of Yulin and Baotou, covering a large area, among which areas like Shandong province, northern part of Jiangsu province and the city of Nanyang most concentrated.



*Fig 1 Stone painting (rubblings) “Doorkeeper armed with a dog” in changzhongdian of Deng county*

In terms of subject, the stone paintings of Han dynasty mainly involve door, hall, trees or characters, horses and so on, which are emulating the image of real life and can be divided into four categories: social life, historical stories, ghosts auspicious, decorative patterns. Dog is one of the important themes of the stone paintings in Han dynasty, which is found extensively, but especially more frequently in Nanyang of Henan province, Shandong province and northern Shanxi province. The images of dog are quite rich. Generally speaking, they appear on the stone paintings about social life and historical stories, mainly as a supporting role to foil the portrait theme. Such as the painting “the Mother of Wangcheng in the canteen” of the first year of Yonghe, unearthed in Chen village of Huishan city in Shandong province. This painting covers a hall in the middle, with a monkey climbing, one person sitting facing front, a servant standing in on the right of the hall, followed by a dog to the right upper of which there is a ride. There is a fish on the left of the hall and a knocker a bird on in the rear part(Yang

Jiandong,1998).However,separately the paintings with the image of the dog as the leading theme are rear, most distributed between the door and wall of stone's tomb. For example, in the stone painting “Doorkeeper armed with a dog” in changzhongdian of Deng county (Fig 1), the dog is in a lying position with eyes opening and barking(Wang Jianzhong,1990). Because the dog is keen in hearing and smelling, it is good at guarding and tracking the animals to be a hand in the field hunting, so it often showed the image of chasing the animals and guarding in stone paintings in Han dynasty.

The dogs images on these stones are quite vivid and concrete and can truly reflect the social life at that time, providing us with detailed and reliable information to understand the breeding and use of dogs in Han dynasty. Among domestic animals, the dog appeared most on stone paintings in Han dynasty and were often accompanied by characters, which indicates the close relationship between man and dog in the Han dynasty, serving as valuable data to study the relationship between man and dog in the Han dynasty.

### **3. The popular image of dogs in pottery sculpture of Han dynasty**

Based on the development of ancient Chinese pottery sculpture, the custom of the pottery sculpture figures and pottery sculpture animals buried with the dead can be date back to the warring states and is inheritance and evolutions of the custom of real lives buried with the dead , which surely represents the progress of human civilization and great change of social system, as well as the power of pottery sculpture in China's feudal era. By the whole time of the Han dynasty, as a major feature of this era, burying with pottery sculpture figures and animal appeared most in tombs of Han dynasty.

In addition to the figures with various shapes and themes, a large proportion of animals were buried in the tombs of the Han dynasty. pottery sculpture animals appeared in the tombs of feudal nobles, landlords and ordinary people. Especially in a large number of small and medium-sized tombs, animal terracotta warriors are often more or less found rather than terracotta warriors. There are also many kinds of animals, including livestock and poultry, such as pigs, sheep, dogs, chickens, ducks, geese, cattle, horses and so on. In the meantime, birds and beasts also appeared, such as bears, owls, tigers and so on.

According to archaeological findings, in the Han dynasty, dogs were the most popular in livestock, so the image of dogs is most frequently found in animal pottery sculpture of Han dynasty. In terms of region, pottery sculpture dogs have been found in Han dynasty tombs all over the country. Among them, the ones unearthed in Nanyang area of Henan province are the most distinctive, which are not only numerous, but also diversified in shapes, showing a unique artistic style and a strong life atmosphere. Apparently, Burial in the tomb with the dog became a fashion at that time. In the eastern Han dynasty, tombs excavated in Nanyang almost all buried pottery sculpture dogs, regardless of the size of the tombs and the number of burial objects. On the one hand, it is related to the early custom of burying dogs. According

to archaeological findings, from the Neolithic Age, the tradition of burying dogs in central China was widespread. On the other hand, it has something to do with the political and economic status of Nanyang, which were known as a famous commercial city and the hometown of the emperor in the Han dynasty. According to "On Salt and Iron", nanyang at that time was famous for its rich resources so that many princes, nobles and powerful landowners depend on it. During the western Han dynasty, there were about 30 princes who were granted feuds in Nanyang county. During the eastern Han dynasty, the feudal aristocracy lived a luxurious life, chasing dogs and horses, and also brought the prosperity of dog. When they are alive, dogs are the pets. It was natural that the dog were chosen to accompany forever after the death. At that time, under the influence of the strong divination and superstition, the phenomena of burying pottery sculpture dogs in the tombs were widespread, ranging from the rich and the to the common people because it was regarded as a symbol of guarding the peace and security of the underworld.



Fig.2 the red glazed pottery sculpture dogs unearthed in Nanyang of Han dynasty

According to the red glazed pottery sculpture dogs unearthed in Nanyang of Han dynasty (Fig. 2), some of these dogs were like male lions, wild and strong; Some looked like tigers, ferocious and terrible; Some were like the fox, alert and keen; Some looked like people, lively and lovely. Each kind of dog image are all vividly made, fully showing craftsmen's wonderful creation in the Han dynasty. In addition to Nanyang area, Xi'an in Shaanxi province, Xuzhou in Jiangsu province, Jiyuan and Luoyang in Henan province, there were other places also unearthing a lot of dog pottery sculpture of the Han dynasty. For example, among the 23 Han dynasty tombs in Shaogou, Luoyang, a total of 26 pottery sculpture dogs were unearthed, basically one for each tomb. The largest number of pottery sculpture dogs were ever unearthed in No. 13 burial pit at Hanyang mausoleum in Xi'an, with a total of 456 painted pottery sculpture dogs.

#### 4. The popular custom of dog-eating in Han dynasty

As one of the Top Six Animals in Chinese culture, dogs has been taken as an

important part of human dish since ancient times. From the Neolithic Period to the Qin and Han dynasties, the popularity of raising and eating dogs has been enduring. In the very beginning, the ancestors of Chinese first dog meat for sacrifice. As is said in "Shuo Wen" about the explanation of the word "xian"(fete) "the top sacrifice in ancestral temple is dog so the fat dogs are often used for sacrifice to show respect for god or ancestors". Moreover,As is said in "Li Ji""in the ceremony of sacrifice, Chicken are called *Hanyin* and dogs are called *Gengxian*" ,which shows that dog meat had been a rare delicacy used in important occasions and ceremonies as sacrifice to ancestors and gods in the Shang and Zhou dynasties. It was very difficult for ordinary people to eat dog meat so as said in "On Salt and Iron""without special reason, even officials are forbidden to kill cattle,sheep,dogs or pigs."(Yuan Jing,2009)However,there are many animal bones unearthed in the Shang dynasty ruins, among which the number of dogs covers the largest,which reflects that people raised dogs for eating besides offering sacrifices and burying. In Zhou dynasty, the dish"Liao liver"made of dogs liver and dogs grease is one of the famous "the most eight delicious dishes ". Between the Spring and Autumn period and the warring states period, dog meat was still regarded as the main meat, which is often mentioned in ancient literature. According to *The Commentary of Zuo* "uncle sun treat the official with his guard dog and killed it for cooking." Although the killing of barking dogs is used for treating guests, but it shows the prevailing custom of eating dog meat. As said in *Mencius*" in the yard, if one plants the the tree of mulberry, even old people in fifties can wear silk; if one raises the chicken, the pigs or the dogs in the right time, even old people in seventies can eat meat." This indicates that the dog was one of the main animals for people to eat at that time. During the warring states period, slaughtering and selling of dogs had become a specialized trade. For example, Nie zheng, a famous warrior in the early warring states period, avoided his enemies as a dog slaughter in the state of Qi. In the late years of the warring states period, the assassin Jing ke traveled to the state of Yan and often drank with a dog slaughter friend in the market. It can be seen that during the warring states period, there already existed the dog-slaughtering and dog-selling industry in the downtown areas of state of Qi, state of Yan and other countries, and dog meat was popular among the people at that time.

In the Han dynasty, the whole society, whether the upper aristocracy, or the lower people, are very fond of eating dog, which became a common food on the table. The trend of dog eating offer the ancient Chinese also reached its peak, presenting an unprecedented flourishing. According to *History of the Han Dynasty*, Fan kuai who was one famous official under emperor Gaozu, Liu bang,the founder of Han dynasty, worked as dog slaughter in Pei county of Jiangsu province during the Qin and Han dynasties.Yan shigu in Tang dynasty notes "at that people eat dogs just like sheep or pigs so Fan kuai was specialized in slaughtering dogs for sale." This shows that the dog and sheep, pig were the three main meat livestock at the time and the dog eating habits was very popular. The owner of the No. 1 Han tomb in Mawangdui in Changsha was of high status during his life. In his tomb, the menu with more than one dishes with dog meat was found.As said in *On Salt and Iron*, when the festival is coming, the rich"eat cattle and beat the drum", the middle class "slaughtering sheep and dogs for eating" while the poor "slaughtering pigs and chicken for eating"

which shows that in the western Han dynasty, even the ordinary poor people can eat meat within a year and the value of dog meat was still higher than that of pork, which was edible by the middle class.

The cooking of dog meat was various, but often cooked and chopped up with a knife. At the beginning of the Han dynasty, Liu bang suspected Han xin had a rebellious intention, so he captured and bound him in the prison to kill. Han xin cried " when the rabbit is killed, good hunting dog would be cooked" , inadvertently revealing the most common way to eat dogs. In addition, there is a kind of dried dog meat called "preserved meat", which is made by cooking the dog meat slices and removing them, dusting them with peppercorns and dried ginger powder, and mixing them with various seasonings. According to the cooking methods recorded in the book unearthed from the Han tombs in Mawangdui, there are nine types of *soup* among which *the Big Soup* includes *the dog soup*, that is, the pure dog soup without any addition; *the Bitter soup* includes *the bitter dog soup*, that is, dog soup with bitter naphthalene. In addition to the soup, there are dog side dish, dog liver dish and other dog dishes. It can be seen that at that time, the cooking method of dog meat had been very fine and various and could produce a variety of delicious food, with the belief "the more delicate the food is, the more delicious it is"

The prevailing trend of dog eating in Han dynasty was vividly reflected on many Han stone paintings. Since it is not easy to distinguish the dog meat from other meat in feasting pictures, the stone paintings about eating dogs mainly appear in the kitchen scene, which are mainly distributed in provinces like Shandong, Jiangsu, Henan and so on. In the kitchen scene painting, the image of peeling the dog is most popular in which the dog is generally hung on a pole and peeled with a knife. According to the distribution area, in the Han dynasty, the area of Shandong and northern Jiangsu was the most popular area for dog eating, and the images of dog peeling were far more than those of pig killing, sheep killing and cattle killing. On the stone painting about kitchen scene unearthed in Tongshan county in Jiangsu province, there are many delicacies prepared for feasting carved on the upper layer, such as ham, fish and chicken, dog and deer to be killed.(Wu Lihua, 2002)In Nanyang city of Henan province, there is also a carving of slaughtering pigs and dogs on the stone. The most magnificent scene appeared in one painting found in Zhucheng of Shandong province, in which various livestock are being slaughtered, and to the right of the figure, there are two people ready to kill the cattle, and another person using the rope to pull a pig, another person with great desire to hit, another person holding a long sword standing beside, another person leading a dog, with the right hand holding sticks to hit the dog(Ren Rixin,1981). This kitchen painting vividly reflects the real huge busy cooking scene in the Han dynasty, including pumping, slaughtering, cooking, roasting meats, making wine and other cooking activities, reflecting rich foods in the Han dynasty, which also shows the dogs like cows, pigs and other livestock, is indispensable to people as food at that time. Besides, In one of the stone paintings in the Han dynasty, there appeared a hanging large scale for dog meat which also serve as the symbol of large number of dog slaughtering at that time.

### 5. The popular custom of dog-raising in Han dynasty

The popularity of dog-eating in Han dynasty is inseparable from the popularity of dog-raising at that time. The livestock breeding developed to a relatively high level in the Han dynasty. As one of the top six livestock in ancient China, dogs were raised widely. After the birth of the Han dynasty, the central court set up a special position *dog supervisor* for the emperor to manage the stuff about dogs. In the time of Emperor Wu, *dog palace* was built. According to *the Map of Huang*, "the dog palace was built in the forest garden which is 28 miles to the west of Chang 'an". The common peasant households all raise dogs at home. In many historical books like *the History of the Han Dynasty* "the sound of the crow of the rooster and the bark of the dog" is often applied to describe the social stability. *The History of the Han Dynasty* said like this "Is it that the people engage in commerce to harm agriculture in many places, a lot of millet is wasted in wine or livestock eat a lot of food?", which doubt whether the people cause famine because of the breeding of livestock and too much wine-making. These phenomena all reflect the trend of dog raising in the whole society of the Han dynasty. There were many pottery sculpture dogs unearthed in tombs of Han dynasty and there are also scenes of slaughtering dogs and hunting with dogs on the stone paintings. In the tomb of Eastern Han unearthed in Tuqiao in Chengdu, Sichuan province, a stone painting of poultry and livestock was also unearthed, depicting the scene of flocks of domestic animals such as dogs, ducks, chickens and geese in farmers' homes (Gao Wen, 2000). All these above are evidence of the popularity of dog raising in the Han dynasty.

The main raising area for dogs was in the north. *The Xuncius* introduces the influence of various products on the people's life in the central plains and says "in the north sea, there were running horses and barking dogs, but the Chinese people domesticated them" Bei Hai here refers to the north during the Han dynasty, while China (zhongguo) refers to the central part. "Huai Nan Tzu said "the north is proper for planting beans and full of dogs and horses." Almost all the records about dogs in Han dynasty documents came from the north. For example, in the materials about dogs collected in *the Taiping imperial survey* of the Han dynasty, the places most involve the state of Qi, Chang 'an, Wei jun, Luoyang, Changyi, Liaodong, Donglai and Runan, which are all lie in the north. Some scholars have made rough statistics and found in terms of pottery sculpture livestock (poultry) regional distribution, Beijing, Shaanxi, Henan, Hebei, Jiangsu, Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong occupied the largest proportion unearthed dogs, followed by Sichuan, Chongqing, which is in line with the above discussion that in terms of the image of dog in stone paintings, Henan, Shandong, northern Shanxi and other places are the most concentrated in the Han dynasty.

The prevailing trend of dog raising in Han dynasty not only reflected the great universality of the whole social class, but also reflected the influence of dog as a special animal in various fields of social life at that time. Briefly, in addition to food, it can be also used in hunting, guarding and so on.





Fig 3 Stone painting (rubbing) "Wild Hunting" unearthed in Wang village in Qiyi township of Nanyang city

The dog used for wild hunting is called "hounds" and was also called "field dogs" in ancient times. Since then, dogs have taken as people's helpful hand in hunting, and there is no exception in the Han dynasty. The agency in charge of the emperor's hounds was known as the *dog warden*. According to *the biography of Sima Xiangru in History of Han* " Yang Dieyi, a man from the state of Shu, served as a dog



Fig 4 Stone painting (rubbing) "arsenal" unearthed in Baitan of Nanyang city

supervisor. "In addition, *Collection of Solution* said: "Guo pu explain '.....in charge of hunting dogs'" It can be known that the hound was bred for hunting by the emperor. Dog chasing was an important method of hunting in Han dynasty. The image of hunting dogs in the Han dynasty is also reflected on the stone paintings (Jiang Shibi, 2003). For example, *wild hunting* stone painting (Fig 3) unearthed from the stone tomb of unearthed in Wang village in Qiyi township of Nanyang city vividly depicts the image of the hound. In the picture, on the left side of the mountain, a hunter with a flat crown on his head, a long halberd on his right hand, and show the left hand for the dog to chase a fleeing fawn; The man on the right kneels on one leg, bows to shoot the deer, while the man on the right rides is watching the intense hunting.

*Wild hunting with nets* stone painting unearthed in a knitting factory of Nanyang city depicted a more magnificent scene of field hunting. The upper part of the picture is engraved with a hunter, with both hands holding the net, stepping to hunting with nets; In front of him, two mastiffs galloped after a deer; Two riders stand on the right, whipping their horses into the field, in which one holds a rabbit in one hand and a hammer in the other. These pictures vividly depict the hunting scenes in the Han dynasty when people used hunting dogs, hunting net and other tools, fully illustrating that dogs were one of the indispensable tools in hunting activities at that time.

There is an old proverb going like that, "no dog in the yard, no guarding at night." In ancient times, the watchdog was called "guard dog" or "door dog", whose duty was to "guard the house". China has used the dog as guards for a long time. "the legend of emperor Mu " said ".....donate 14 good horses , 300 cattle and 90 guard dogs." It is clear that the house guard is one of the important functions of dogs in the Han dynasty. In the unearthed houses and courtyards of the Han dynasty, it is common to see pottery sculpture dogs squatting in front of the pavilions to guard them. Due to the burial concept of "death is same with life" in Han dynasty, the pottery sculpture dog commonly found in Han tombs, which serve as a good embodiment of this function. So far, there are many images of guard dogs found on the Han dynasty stone. For example, the picture stone of "*Doorkeeper armed with a dog*" in Changzhongdian of Deng county(Figure 1), in which the gate official holds the dog with both hands; The dog sits on the ground with its ears erect, eyes agape and eyes open. It vividly shows the fierce and alert image of watchdog in Han dynasty. Another example is stone painting "arsenal" unearthed in Baitan of Nanyang city (FIG. 5), in which the armory weapons are placed in an orderly manner, with three dog guards under a pair of armor. It shows that including keeping house, dogs has been widely used in various social occasions in the Han dynasty.



Fig 5 Stone painting "a dog catching a mouse"

With the prosperity of the social economy and the fashion of raising dogs in the Han dynasty, the social functions of dogs were no longer limited to the mentioned above. Among the pottery sculpture dogs with different images unearthed from Han tombs, many of them are small and cute with collars, depicted as pets. A kind of small poodle dog is frequently unearthed in Han tombs, with image of short legs, big body, forelimb back decorated with colored ribbons, the neck with collar, body with yellow glaze or green glaze, standing on all four legs, head up to cater for the owner. These various kinds of dog also reflect that dog breeding has been quite popular in the Han dynasty, meeting the needs of people in different aspect. It is worth mentioning that a cave tomb unearthed in Qijiang town of Santai county in Sichuan province unearthed a piece of stone on which the scene of a dog that is catch mice was depicted (figure 5), in which a dog is proudly with a mouse in mouth, with the mouse's tail hanging outside (Luo Erhu, 1988). This discovery directly proves the authenticity of "a dog catching mice" in the literature, and also reflects another function of dogs in the Han dynasty - catching mice. In addition, according to a pit dog pottery sculpture found in Xiyaotou village of Jiyuan, dogs were also used for fighting in the Han dynasty, which was widely spread in the society at that time.

It can be seen from the above that dogs were widely used in various aspects of the society, such as eating, hunting, guarding and entertainment, etc., in the Han dynasty. Its demand should be quite large so it is very difficult to rely on the family raising alone satisfy. Especially we can find from the pottery sculpture dog images that unearthed in the Han dynasty tomb which represents different genres that private breeder by no means can breed be himself. According to *the History of the Han dynasty*, Emperor Wu levied taxes for cars, ships and livestock so it can be seen that dogs were also required to pay tax, indicating that the raising of livestock such as dogs in the Han dynasty may have been commercialized. That is to say, the prevalence of dog-eating and dog-raising in the Han dynasty may have led to the emergence of a specialized dog-raising industry that specialized in providing dogs for meat, hunting, and so on. This phenomenon also reflect that society economy development and the social concrete division of labor in Han dynasty.

## 6. Conclusion

Above all, combined with the archaeological findings about stone paintings or pottery sculpture and literature records of Han dynasty, it can be seen that the dog eating and dog raising was widespread in the whole society of Han dynasty and the ways of dog eating and dog raising were various. This shows that dog eating and dog raising had become a custom in the Han dynasty. The formation of this custom led to the commercialization of dog keeping, and professional institutions for dog keeping had emerged in the society. From discussion above, we can have more clear idea about the image of dogs commonly on the stone painting or pottery sculpture that are unearthed in Han tombs. In the meantime, it surly shed light to the discussion or study on agriculture, animal husbandry and folk customs in the Han dynasty.

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