On the Layout of the Palace-city of the Han–Wei Luoyang City in the Light of the Changhemen Gate

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The Old Luoyang 洛阳 in the Han–Wei period was one of the important cities of ancient China, functioning as the capital for a long period of time, from the Eastern Zhou to the Northern and Southern Dynasties. The architectural form and evolution of its palace-city have all along been a topic of general interest among scholars. However, it is extremely difficult to clarify the shape and layout of the palace-city in different periods as Luoyang had a long history and went through a lot of dynasties, its buildings were repeatedly destroyed and renovated, and the related literal records are rather confused.

From 2001 to 2002, an overall excavation was carried out on the site of Changhemen 阙阖门, the main gate of the Northern Wei palace-city, which revealed that the layout and structure of this city-gate and its paired piers were very novel and unique. Moreover, as the findings suggest, this Northern Wei city-gate, in basic size and shape, adopted its predecessor built in the Wei–Jin period. It is obviously an important clue for inquiring into the evolution of the palace-city in successive dynasties. With the excavation results as a turning point, here I would try my best to make a research on the layout of the South and North palaces in Han period Luoyang and that of the Luoyanggong 洛阳宫 Palace in the Cao Wei period.

I. Layout of the South and North Palaces of the Han Period

According to literal records, the palace-city of Han Luoyang consisted of a southern palace and a northern one opposite to each other, which constituted a unique palace-city layout even among Chinese capitals. As the ruins of the city have been disturbed or underlain by those of later Luoyang in Cao Wei, Western Jin and Northern Wei times, the layout of its palace-city is difficult to be reconstructed completely and exactly in the light of available archaeological data. Among the previous studies only Prof. Wang Zhongshu’s 王仲殊 reconstruction can be taken to be a deep-going investigation. Based on related archaeological and textual evidence, I would attempt to offer some amendments and supplements to its details so that it might be more reliable (Fig. 1).

1. Southern wall of the South Palace

According to documentary sources, the Pingchengmen 平城门 Gate, functioning as the main gate of the greater city and also called palace gate, must have been closely related to the South Palace 南宫. Even if it was not the main gate of this palace, it was at least close to the latter as is known from the record that it was on the bank of the Luoshui 洛水 River. So it would be more dependable to reconstruct its southern wall to be close to the southern wall of the greater city.

2. Side gates of the South and North Palaces

The Houhan Shu: “Baiguan Zhi” 后汉书·百官志 (History of the Latter Han: “Biographies of Officials”) says that “In the South Palace, the nan tun sima 南屯司马 is in charge of the guard of the palace-gate north of the Pingchengmen Gate; the canglong sima 苍龙司马, the eastern gate; the xuanwu sima 玄武司马, the Xuanwumen 玄武门 Gate; and the bei tun sima 北屯司马, the northern gate. In the North Palace 北宫, the zhujue sima 朱爵司马 is in charge of the guard of the southern side gate; the dong ming sima 东明司马, the eastern gate; and the shuo ping sima 朔平司马, the northern gate. Altogether there are seven gates. Judged by literal records and archaeological evidence on the layout of roads, the location of these side gates can be reconstructed as

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space between the two palaces was called area below the southern and northern palace-gate piers. These suggest that there must have been a pier-flanked palace gate in the western section of the South Palace’s northern wall, and the building talling with these conditions was just the Xuanwumen Gate that was called Xuanwuque Piers or North Piers and had a stilted road. (4) On the southern side of North Palace, there was only one palace-gate, i.e. the southern side gate guarded by the zhujue sima, also called Zhujue South Sima Gate, Zhuque (Scarlet Bird) Gate or Zhuque Gate-piers. It must have referred to the main pierced gate of North Palace. As the two palace-gates must have been furnished with gate piers, the Zhuquemen 朱雀门 Gate can be taken to have been just this gate. (5) On either the eastern or northern side of North Palace, as known from documentary evidence, was also only a palace-gate. They were guarded by the dong ming sima and shuo ping sima respectively, and so called Dongmingmen 东明门 and Shuopingmen 朔平门 gates in textual records. They must have been built, respectively, in the eastern wall of North Palace, leading eastward to the Upper Eastern 上东 Gate of the greater city, and in the northern wall of this palace, leading northward to the Xiamen 下门 Gate of the greater city too.

3. Sub-palaces, major pavilions and parks in South and North Palaces

Historical documents mention not only the South and North palaces, but also the East, West, Yong’angong 永安宫, Yonglegong 永乐宫, Changqiugong 长秋宫 and other palaces. Relevant records combined to suggest that the South and North palaces were independent palace-cities, while the other building complexes were auxiliary sub-palaces. Among them the East and West palaces referred to those groups in South Palace that differed in location and were used by the emperor and empress respectively; and the anterior pavilion, just the main pavilion of South Palace. In the Changqiugong Palace was the Hehuadian 和欢殿 Pavilion, which stood also in South Palace. The Yonglegong Palace occurs in the description of both the South and North palaces. The Changqiugong and Yonglegong palaces of South Palace were located on the western side of the major pavilions (anterior pavilion of East Palace, Lechengdian 乐成殿 Pavilion, Lingtaidian 灵台殿 Pavilion, etc.). Perhaps these were in the West Palace, the empress’s living area, mentioned in literal records by
contrast with the East Palace. Besides, in the north of the greater city, close to North Palace, there were the Zhuolongyuan 濯龙园, Fanglinyuan 芳林园 and other imperial parks.

The pavilions and towers in South and North palaces were large in number. For example, the Qufeidian 去非殿, Anterior, Lechengdian, Lingtaiyuan, Jiadedian 嘉德殿, Hehuandian, Yuntaiyuan 云台殿 and Xuanshidian 宣室殿 pavilions and the Yuntai Terrace are all clearly described to have been in the South Palace. The Anterior Pavilion was obviously the main pavilion of South Palace. The Lechengmen Gate in front of Lechengdian Pavilion was also called middle gate of South Palace in some texts. In the North Palace, the definitely recorded pavilions include Deyangdian 德阳殿, Chongdedian 崇德殿, Xuanmingdian 宣明殿, Handedian 含德殿 and Zhangdedian 章德殿. The former two were the North Palace’s main pavilions built in Han Emperor Mingdi’s Yongping 永平 reign. As the most magnificent among the building complexes of North Palace, the Deyangdian Pavilion measured 37 丈 from the east to the west, more than present-day 100 m, holding about ten thousand persons. The Chongdedian Pavilion, as textual records suggest, seems to have been the North Palace’s main pavilion built earlier than Deyangdian. It stood 50 丈 double paces east of the latter. Although histories contain no definite records on the location of the main pavilions of South and North palaces, I could roughly infer it on the basis of the above reconstruction of the location of side palace-gates. The South Palace’s Anterior Pavilion must have faced southward to the main gate of this palace (i.e. Pingchengmen) and stood to the southwest of the South Palace’s eastern gate Canglongmen. The North Palace’s main pavilions Deyangdian and Chongdedian were arranged in an east-west line. Of them the Chongdedian Pavilion built earlier in the east is most likely to have faced southward to the main gate Zhuquemen in the middle of the North Palace’s southern wall and stood to the southwest of the eastern gate of this palace. The later built main pavilion Deyangdian was west to Chongdedian, presumably close to Taijidian, the main pavilion in Northern Wei palace-city.

4. Stilted road between South and North Palaces

Historical records mention repeatedly that the South and North palaces were connected with a roof-covered stilted road and that the distance between the two palaces was seven 里. This is very important to the reconstruction of their location. It will be clearly unconformable to reality if we take the length as the distance between the two palace-cities. In my opinion, it means that the distance between their main pavilions was seven 里. First, the main pavilion where the emperor conducted the court administration and the pavilion where the empress lived could be called East and West palaces respectively in then literal records, and such was also the case for the main pavilion of the South and North palaces. Second, the definite record “South Palace’s stilted road” in historical texts suggests that such ways were constructed not only for joining the South and North palaces. The Taiping Yu Lan 太平御览 (Taiping Reign-period Imperial Encyclopaedia) cites the lines from the Danyang Ji 丹阳记 (Record of Danyang) that “The Han and Wei period pavilions and storied buildings were often joined with stilted roads, so the towers in the Luoyang palaces numbered more than 700.” This is a clear proof that the main pavilions and terraces in the then imperial palace were connected by stilted roads. Thirdly, according to the above reconstruction of their locations, the distance between the South and North palaces’ main pavilions measures five 里 from the north to the south. Added a length of 2 里 from the east to the west, it will be just seven 里.

II. Layout of the Luoyanggong Palace of the Cao Wei Period

The Cao Wei Dynasty built its capital in Luoyang, and called the new palace-city “Luoyanggong Palace.” But how to determine whether it had the same unitary palace-city form as the Northern Wei palace-city or continued to use the South and North palaces of the Han period? It is difficult to solve the question on the basis of literal data alone. With the gradual deepening of survey and excavation in the Luoyang palace-city, especially the excavation of Changhemen Gate, the evidence of the Northern Wei palace-city as the continuation of the Cao Wei Luoyanggong Palace is getting increasingly clear. So it is becoming more and more distinct that the Cao Wei Luoyanggong Palace was a unitary palace-city rebuilt on the site of Han period North Palace in the middle of the North of Luoyang City. But this still calls for further confirmation with literal records.

1. The “South Palace” and “North Palace” in Cao Wei Luoyanggong Palace

Despite the destruction of the Han period South and North palaces in the war flames of the late Eastern Han, the two names remain occurring in the textual records of the Wei—in and even still later Northern Wei palace-cities. Through careful discernment of written evidence we have detected that they do not refer to the two
independent Han period palace-cities standing opposite each other and sharing the same position and function. What they mean are the pavilion complexes for the emperor and empress respectively that stood in the same palace-city but differed in specific location and function. During the Wei–Jin period, the main pavilion Taijidian 太极殿 was said to be in the “South Palace.” In the Northern Wei, the palace-city’s southern half where the emperor conducted court affairs and the northern half where the empress lived were called “two palaces,” i.e. the former, “Rear Palace” or “North Palace,” while the latter, “South Palace.” With the problem solved in this thinking way, it does not remain difficult to understand why the names “South Palace” and “North Palace” occur in the textual description of the Cao Wei Luoyanggong Palace. As recorded in historical documents and confirmed by archaeological evidence, this palace was built on the site of Han period North Palace, in the middle of the north of the greater city.

2. The main gate Changhemen and the Dasi-mamen and other side palace-gates

Based on records in the *Shui Jing Zhu* 水经注 (Commentary of the Waterways Classic) I believe that the southern wall of Cao Wei Luoyanggong Palace must have two palace-gates: the main gate Changhemen in the western section and the Simamen Gate in the eastern section. On the northern side, the Changhemen Gate was right opposite to Taijidian, the largest pavilion in the palace, while in front of it, the imperial street called South Changhejie 阙阖街 or Tongtuojie 通驼街 Avenues extended southward. This street was rather peculiar as the north-south axis running along it and dividing the main buildings of the whole city into two halves which was clearly inclined to the western side. The Simamen Gate, according to records, was located to the east of Changhemen. As I infer, it seems to have been in the southern palace-city wall, at the end of the north-south road between the eastern and western compound groups in the southern half of the Northern Wei palace-city discovered by drilling (Fig. 2). This, of course, needs to be confirmed through further archaeological excavation. If this gate existed really, it must have been roughly in the middle of southern palace-city wall. Thus its position would have approximately coincided with the presumably located Zhuquemen, the main gate of Han period North Palace, and even would be highly likely to have been the site of the latter. Perhaps just owing to the collapse, as recorded in textual records, that happened when the Wei Emperor Mingdi built paired gate piers and caused the death of several hundred persons, the emperor avoided construction here as taboo and decided to replace the old with the new at Heaven’s will. So he did not build gate piers here but erect afresh the main palace-gate with paired piers. This accident may have been the cardinal cause of why the main gate Changhemen of palace-city was made inclined to the western side of the whole city’s central axis. But this planning exercised great influence upon the layout of the city in the subsequent construction.

Following the reconstruction of the location of Changhemen and Simamen gates in the Cao Wei Luoyanggong Palace, the Zhichemen 止车门 Gate and the eastern and western side gates of the Wei–Jin Luoyanggong Palace can also be inferred on the basis of archaeological surveys and related literal records. The
Zhichemen Gate must have been inside Changhemen and in front of Taijidian, on the rammed-earth foundations north of the east-west road discovered through drilling-survey to the north of Changhemen. The two side gates may have been, respectively, in the eastern and western palace-city wall, at the ends of the road that ran from east to west and passed by Zhichemen.

3. Main pavilion Taijidian in the Luoyanggong Palace

According to historical documents, the main pavilion of the palace in different periods began to be named Taijidian from the Cao Wei Dynasty. The *Shui Jing Zhu* further states that “The Wei emperor Mingdi erected the Taijidian Pavilion in the southern Luoyanggong Palace, on the site of the Han period Chongdedian Pavilion.” Some scholars take the Cao Wei Taijidian Pavilion as the predecessor of the Northern Wei main pavilion Taijidian, which was evidenced in the early 1980s, through test excavation on the foundations of Taijidian, the largest pavilion in the Northern Wei palace-city. The excavation of the Changhemen Gate in the palace-city offered further proofs to the understanding that the location of Cao Wei Luoyanggong Palace alongside its main gate and main pavilion was the same as that in the Northern Wei. Both were on the Han period North Palace site in the middle of the north of Luoyang City. As shown in the above reconstruction of the complexes in the South and North palaces of the Han period, the Chongdedian Pavilion was just the major building group of the Han period North Palace, corresponding roughly to the above-described location. As for the literal record that “The Taijidian Pavilion was erected on the site of Chongdedian in the Han South Palace,” it is obviously an error caused by mistaking the “South Palace” of the Cao Wei period for that of the Han period. Actually there was no Chongdedian Pavilion in the Han South Palace according to other records. Was the Taijidian Pavilion built on the Deyangdian site of the Han North Palace or on the ruins of Chongdedian? Either argument may be possible as the two pavilions were close to each other, only 50 bu apart, and both on a scale of great magnitude. It is very likely that the Cao Wei main pavilion Taijidian as a grand building complex was partly superimposed on the adjacent pavilion foundations when it was built on either site.

4. Lingyuntai Terrace and pavilions in the Rear Palace

The Lingyuntai 凌云台 Terrace was an important structure on a high platform in the palace-city of Luoyang from the Cao Wei to the Northern Wei periods. The relevant textual records are rather confused on its location, but they say unanimously that it was first built in Emperor Wendi’s reign of the Cao Wei Dynasty (AD 221). Combining related historical documents with archaeological data, I pointed out that the round building site excavated in the Northern Wei palace-city was just the ruins of Lingyuntai Terrace the Wei emperor Wendi built first. In the platform was an octagonal ice-well for storing ice; and at the top, the Northern Wei emperor Xiaowendi erected the Liangfengguan 凉风观 Tower for escaping the heat and enjoying the cool in the summer. This building was located in the northern half of the Cao Wei and Northern Wei palace-city called Rear Palace or North Palace.

In addition, as historical documents record, there were the Xuanguangdian 宣光殿, Jiafundian 嘉福殿 and Jiulongdian 九龙殿 (Chonghuadian) pavilions and the Lingzhichi 灵芝池 Pool among the other building complexes in the Rear Palace of the Cao Wei period.

References


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