

## Auspicious Motifs in Stone Carvings of Han Dynasty (206 Bc-Ad 220): A Semiotic Analysis

Qiao Zhongyan, Zainuddin Bin Abindinhazir

<sup>1</sup>Tanjong Faculty of Art, Sustainability and Creative Industry, Sultan Idris Education Univesity, Malim, Perak, Malaysia

Email: 2672184123@qq.com, zainuddin@fskik.upsi.edu.my

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### Abstract

The images carved on stones during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) were primarily burial art and reflected the Han people's views on the universe, life, and mortality. The universality of the concept of "death is like life" in the Han Dynasty is embodied in the burial art, whether it is the round carving on the ground or the stone relief under the earth. In these stone-carving images, animal images are just one of the themes. The characteristics of the stone, the carved images, or the creatures themselves motivated the artisans of the Han Dynasty. These images, which feature a variety of symbols, illustrate the Han people's collective consciousness of pursuing good luck and advocate for the profound symbiotic relationship between humans and the natural world. Despite the numerous research studies conducted on these stone carvings, there is a lack of semiotic analysis in these research methods, particularly in the academic discourse. This leaves a gap in the field: the provision of a theoretical analysis framework for the animal image in the Han Dynasty stone carvings. This study fills in that gap by combining historical and cultural methods with semiotic analysis to look into where animal symbols in stone carvings from the Han Dynasty came from and what they meant. There are two primary objectives of this investigation: (1) to examine the forms and varieties of animal images in stone carvings from the Han Dynasty; (2) to elucidate the relationship between humans and animals by looking at the material and spiritual world of the Han people.

**Keywords:** Auspicious Motifs, Animal Images, Aesthetic Thought, Han Dynasty

### Introduction

In general, scholars classify Chinese traditional sculpture into two peaks: the "Qin and Han" sculpture art formation and the "Tang and Song" sculpture period. Han dynasty stone carving arts were the initial apex of the development of ancient Chinese stone carving art during these two peak periods (Bao, 2023). One of the most significant monuments in the history of Chinese art was the Han stone carving art, which had a substantial influence on subsequent art. Stone carving during the Han Dynasty encompasses three distinct categories: three-dimensional round engraving, stone relief, and inscription (Zhao et al., 2023). Mr. Li Zehou (2008) pointed out: "Han Dynasty art shows people's conquest of the world and

dazzling objects in specific images, pictures, and artistic conception, which are power, movement, and speed, which constitute the momentum and basic aesthetic style of Han Dynasty art." The Han dynasty's stone carving arts not only inherited and developed the exquisite tradition of plastic art that had been in place since the Tong Zhou dynasty, but they also paved the way for the development of sculpture and painting in the Wei and Jin dynasties, the sole material used in Chinese sculpture and painting (Xie, 2023). The stone carving art of the Han Dynasty was described by Mr. Wu Weishan (2017) in the Style of Ancient Chinese Sculpture as having a certain natural form that was enhanced by a minimal amount of carving, resulting in a proud and majestic appearance. After reaching its zenith during the Han Dynasty, this design went into decline. Consequently, it is incumbent upon contemporary sculptors to remain attentive to the artistic style characteristics and images of traditional sculpture.

During the Han Dynasty, tombs, classified as either above-ground or subterranean, primarily employed stone carvings. Scholars were particularly interested in the artistic value of the stone relief, which was the most representative of the underground stone carvings. The underground stone carvings were primarily inscriptions and portraits on architectural components, while the above-ground stone carvings were stone carvings of figures, animals, or queues. In the past few years, there has been a significant increase in the investigation of their historical and archaeological significance, as well as the emergence of a study of their artistic value (Zhu, 2017). The Han Dynasty divided the development of art into three distinct periods: the initial, development, and perfection periods. During the early Western Han Dynasty, the artistic style was influenced by the standard and rigorous characteristics of Qin culture, as well as the romantic and enigmatic atmosphere of Chu culture. During this period, the primary focus was on the development of the previous generation of art and the demonstration of a natural state of succession in silk painting, lacquer painting, wood carving, and stone carving. The second period of art development in the Han Dynasty spans from Emperor Wudi to Emperor Zhang. Utilizing the stone carving situated in front of the Huo Qubing tomb of Emperor Wudi during the Han Dynasty as an illustration, the style of this era is expansive, vibrant, and audacious. This artistic style has distinguished itself from the early Han Dynasty-era style and has been qualitatively distinct from the art of the Qin and Chu dynasties. This has established a strong foundation for the complete maturation of art in the subsequent period. Until the conclusion of the Han Dynasty, the third development period was known as the Han and Emperor period. According to Hu (2013), the artistic expression techniques of this era were generally flawless, and the profound and bold artistic style was relatively mature and stable, as evidenced by a significant number of unearthed stone and brick statues. Both the stone beast in front of the tomb and the currently known Yuan Chi carving originated as distinct round statues. Explicit production intentions can render these sculptures concrete, despite their inherent abstract and mysterious nature, as demonstrated from a modelling perspective. The Western Han Dynasty primarily concentrated its stone engravings near Chang'an, the capital (Yan et al., 2012). It was common practice to construct ancestral halls and shrines on cemeteries during the Eastern Han Dynasty, when the mausoleum system was established. Additionally, scholars positioned a variety of stone carvings on both sides of the shrine and in front of monuments. The subterranean stone carving art, in addition to the above-ground stone carving, is the subject of extensive attention by scholars. Politics, economy, culture, and the custom of opulent burial all played a role in the emergence of stone statues during the Han Dynasty (Zhu, 2017). The above-ground stone

carvings of the Han Dynasty are mostly studied from an artistic point of view, while the subterranean stone carvings of the Han Dynasty are studied from the points of view of petrology, archaeology, culturology, and art. The Han Dynasty's stone carving art, which is used as burial art, shows the Han people's "cosmological view" and belief that "death is like life" (Huang, 2011). It also presents the Han people's views on Yin and Yang and life and death.

The stone carving art of the Han Dynasty was characterized by the presence of animal and human statues in the above-ground section, while the underground section was exceedingly abundant in subject matter and content, encompassing nearly every aspect of social life during that era. It was exceedingly challenging to accurately categorize the underground section (Zhu, 2017). Li Falin divided Han portraits into four groups based on what they show: (1) portraits that show how society really is (there are 11 types in total); (2) portraits that show the stories of historical figures; (3) portraits that show happy or mythical stories; and (4) portraits of natural scenery (this group can't exist separately from the first three; it can only be a subset of those three groups) (Li, 2000). Also, Jiang Yingju and Yang Aiguo classified the contents of Han portraits into four categories: (1) social life; (2) historical accounts; (3) auspicious spirits; and (4) pattern patterns (Jiang & Yang, 2001). Yu Weichao and Xin Lixiang (1981) categorized the subject matter, content, and atmosphere of Han portraits into eight or nine categories, resulting in a total of 55 types. The majority of these types were classified through the interpretation of a single image (Zhu, 2017). Subsequent researchers suggest that we should consider stone statues as architectural constructions and analyze them based on their overall content. After examining the image configuration of "Wuliang Temple," Wu Hong is of the opinion that "the three components of the image—the roof, gable wall, and wall gable wall—precisely represent the three organic components of the universe in the minds of the Eastern Han people—heaven, heaven, and earth" (Wu, 2015). Huang Yafeng distinguished Han Dynasty stone sculptures into three categories from the perspective of image tradition: images of the unity of heaven and man, images of gods and fairies (animals, auspicious, West Queen Mother), and narrative characters (Huang, 2011). These classifications serve as a foundation for discussion of the cultural symbols and artistic attributes of stone reliefs from the Han Dynasty. In order to analyze the art of stone statues in the Han Dynasty, the majority of the existing research has employed iconology, formalism, and culturology. The majority of these analyses relate the content of images to text or investigate the generation of images from the perspectives of society, politics, economy, and culture. However, little is known about image subject content, generation, dissemination, and significance. We can conduct an examination of these issues within the theoretical framework of construction semiotics.

## Literature Review

### *Aesthetic Thoughts on Stone Carving Art in the Han Dynasty*

Scholars from Taoism, Chu culture, Confucianism, and aesthetics mostly debate the artistic spirit that is embodied in the stone-carving art of the Han Dynasty. The philosophical concept of "Taoism" was introduced into the Chu culture milieu, and it was the religious organization form of popular Taoist thought during the Han Dynasty (Liu, 2006). Mr. Li Zehou asserted in 2008 that Chu culture and Han culture are inseparably intertwined. Mr. Li Zehou asserted that "Han inherited the Qin system" in various institutions such as political, economic, and legal. Nonetheless, Han continued to preserve the indigenous characteristics of Southern Chu in certain facets of ideology, particularly in the realm of literature and art. In

ancient China, the romanticism of the Chu and Han dynasties is another significant artistic tradition that follows the rational spirit of the pre-Qin Dynasty and complements it. It is the predominant aesthetic concept in the art of the Han Dynasty. The characteristics of Han Dynasty art are difficult to fully articulate without comprehending this key. It is readily apparent that the administrators of the early Han Dynasty inherited Chu customs. In the reign of Emperor Wudi of the Han Dynasty, from the beginning of the Western Han Dynasty to the Wenjing Period, Dong Zhongshu's concept of "eliminating all schools of thought and respecting Confucianism" was adapted to the circumstances of the era, and since then, Confucianism has become the preeminent philosophical doctrine (Hu, 2013). In 1985, Ren Jiyu observed that the philosophy of the Qin and Han dynasties is fundamentally concerned with the epistemology of the universe's constitution. The image motif of Han Dynasty stone carving art as burial art, particularly the existence of stone sculpture as architectural components, reflects the Han people's ideas on Yin and Yang and life and death cosmology (Huang, 2011).

This universe view is consistent with humanity's conquest of the objective world, as evidenced by the theme of Han Dynasty art, which depicts the coexistence of myth and history, reality and God, and man and beast (Li, 2008). These contents are also evident in the "Huainan Zi" from the early Western Han Dynasty, which demonstrates the Han Dynasty's fascination with the process of cosmic operation: "The tiger howled, the valley wind came, and the dragon lifted, and the Jingyun genus." The whale dies, the unicorn fights, and the eclipse occurs. Additionally, the comet emerges. The comet is accompanied by the silkworm R silk and Shang string, the cardia star fall, and the Bohai Sea. The heavens impart man's affection. Consequently, the sanction of violence will result in an increase in wind, while the violation of the law will result in an increase in insects (Liu, 2016). The symbolic world of Han portraits engraves all types of "auspicious pictures" (Qin, 2020).

#### *Concept and Emergence of "auspicious" Thought*

What qualifies as auspicious? The phrase "Xiang" (祥) signifies auspiciousness, which may indicate either favorable or unfavorable outcomes. Xiang (祥) and Fu (福) are referenced in "Shuo Wen Jie Zi" (说文解字). "A cloud is advantageous." "Rui (瑞) regards jade as a symbol of faith, and the means of venerating God is likewise Rui." Rui (瑞) is the generic designation for Guibi Zhang Cong (圭璧璋琮). Rui denotes 15 terms, ranging from wall to bill (碧).

Indeed. It is the auspicious one, which is also known as the festival of inspiration, by extension (Xu, 2017). The Book of Mountains and Seas recorded and developed auspicious thought in the pre-Qin Dynasty. However, there are only a few types, including the emblem Phoenix (凤凰), husband and wife (鸾凤), Wenray (文鳐鱼), Dengkang beast (当康兽), Yanwei (延维), and Craftier beast (狡兽). Individuals profoundly ingrained the notion of auspiciousness in their minds, reaching its pinnacle during the Han Dynasty. The Book of Han, the Book of the Later Han, and the Book of the Later Han all recorded the significant significance that people attached to auspiciousness, from the folk to the imperial court (Zhu, 2017). As a result of the influence of Confucianism and the concept of a fortune-bearer, auspicious images were widely popular throughout the country during the Han Dynasty. During this period, the great unified dynasty primarily used auspicious images to support its rule. The subject matter and content of these images primarily demonstrated that the monarch was well-governed, the society was stable, and the people lived and worked happily,

praying for happiness and success. The Xiangrui image is a popular choice due to its divine color, which is influenced by the concept of ascending the immortal in the scene and subject matter (Wei, 2022).

Some researchers link auspicious images with one another and believe that they constitute a subset of auspicious imagery. Beginning with auspicious imagery, they examine its background, symbolic significance, and impact on subsequent generations. Zhang Daoyi categorizes auspicious images into three types: tombstones featuring auspicious content, heavenly realm depictions, and unique auspicious images (Zhang, 2011). The study of academic research history shows that there is a fair amount of information about auspicious objects in literature. On the other hand, the definition of auspicious diagrams is too broad and doesn't really explain what they are. The investigation includes certain inauspicious elements, leading to complex findings (Wei, 2022). So, using the pictures in Han Dynasty stone carvings, one can deeply think about how these lucky pictures were made, how they changed over time, how they spread, and how they grew by putting them into groups based on themes and figuring out what they mean. Establish the semiotic analysis framework for the Xiangrui thematic imagery in Han Dynasty stone carving art.

#### *Auspicious Motifs in the Han Dynasty Stone Carvings*

Ancient texts categorize auspicious signals into nine classifications and over 120 varieties, encompassing divine beasts, divine birds, flora, artifacts, natural occurrences, aquatic exotic creatures, divine humans, insects, and reptiles (Li, 2000). Xiangrui is methodically presented in "Spring and Autumn Dew" (春秋繁露) (Dong, 1989). During the Western Han Dynasty, auspicious artifacts were primarily present during the reigns of Emperor Wudi and Emperor Xuan. Each time Emperor Xuan encountered Jiarui, he altered the year name to God 神爵, five phoenix 五凤, Manlu 甘露, Yellow Dragon 黄龙, etc., with the intention of expressing gratitude to the deities and acknowledging virtuous conduct (Fan, 1997). Currently, common fortunate symbols include the kylin (麒麟), phoenix (凤凰), Zhicao (芝草), manna (甘露), and Baoding (宝鼎) (Ban, 2003). During this period, the elite classes restricted Confucianism and associated favorable ideologies with imperial governance. During Emperor Guangwu's reign, Li Spring was frequently observed in the capital, and auspicious items such as manna and scarlet grass were commonly reported across numerous counties (Fan, 1997); during Emperor Huan's reign, golden crops flourished in Wei County, and nectar descended from the heavens. Ba County observed yellow dragons, phoenixes, unicorns, five-colored birds, and other lucky symbols (Fan, 1997). "White Tiger Tongyi": "With the advent of global peace and prosperity, it is believed that the principles of kingship harmonize Yin and Yang, establishing order among all things, fostering tranquility; thus, Furui and Zhen should be attained." The day is illuminated by intense light, moonlight, and dew; the ground is adorned with Jiahe sheng, Moting pod, and Jubi Chang, signifying tranquility. The two deep springs are Huanglong Lake, Li Quan Tong, the river emerging from the Dragon Map, the Luo Turtle Book, the river flowing into the Great Bay, and the sea leading to the Pearl; the eight auspicious winds bring favorable energy when Xi, Zhong Law Tone, Sound Degree, Four Yi, and more Shang Gong are present.

《白虎通义》：“天下太平符瑞所以来至者，以为王者承统理，调和阴阳，阴阳和，万物序，休气充塞，故符瑞并臻，皆应德而至。德至天则斗极明，日月光，甘露降；德至地则生，起，出，太平感；德至渊泉则黄龙见，通，河出龙图，洛出龟书，江出大



贝，海出明珠;德至八方则祥风至佳气时喜，钟律调，音度施，四夷化，越裳贡。” (Ban, 1992).

In contrast to earlier literature, "White Tiger Tongyi" enumerates a substantially greater number of auspicious things, exceeding 30 varieties, including the yellow dragon (黄龙), Kirin (麒麟), nine-tailed fox (九尾狐), and Jingxing (景星). Xiangrui's ideas are becoming increasingly organized, exhibiting greater systematic precision than the "Spring and Autumn Fandlu" (春秋繁露). During the Eastern Han Dynasty, Wang Chong critiqued the criteria for assessing auspiciousness proposed by earlier scholars in his work, Lun Heng. "Lun Heng · Zhuanrui" stated: "The hue of an organism's body does not inherently signify its quality; the quantity of birds or beasts accompanying it does not inherently reflect its superiority." Given its rarity, a quyu (a species of bird) may manifest. Sages possess atypical skeletal structures and physiques, akin to those of virtuous individuals. Both sages and virtuous individuals are exceptional, rendering differentiation between them challenging. In discussions of sages and virtuous individuals, remarkable birds and animals have peculiar and distinctive characteristics in addition to commonplace species. Wise and moral individuals possess substantial knowledge that distinguishes them, although their skeletal structure remains unchanged. How can we ascertain that the phoenixes and qilins observed in antiquity were not mere birds and beasts? How can we ensure that the magpies and deer we see today are not phoenixes and qilins? 以体色言之，未必等;以鸟兽随从多者，未必善;以希见言之，有瞿鹤来;以相奇言之，圣人有奇骨体，贤者亦有奇骨.圣贤俱奇，人无以别.由贤圣言之，圣鸟、圣兽，亦与恒鸟庸兽俱有奇怪.圣人贤者，亦有知而绝殊，骨无异者.....夫如是，上世所见凤凰、麒麟，何知其非恒鸟兽? 今之所见鹊、麀之属，安知非凤皇、骐驎也? "(Huang, 2018)

During the Han Dynasty, sculptors often imbued animals in stone with specific symbolic traits and implications, portraying them as lucky creatures. We can categorize these animals into two types: realistic animals and spirit animals. The former represents the primary form, while the latter serves as an auxiliary, characterized by a freehand style, rich texture, evident dynamism, and intense desire. This reflects the dialogue and interaction between sculpture and humanity, as well as the resonance and interplay among sculptures themselves. Animal sculpture during the Han Dynasty evolved into a freehand model of artistry, serving as a valuable resource for subsequent generations to study (Wang, Y., 2023). Fortuitous animals include the phoenix (Suzaku), turtle (Xuanwu, a combination of turtle and snake), white tiger, dragon (green dragon, Ying dragon), unicorn, white horse, jade horse, white deer, white pheasant, and red bear, among others (Zhu, 2017).

The classification of spirit beasts encompasses three primary categories: first, common auspicious animals, including the green dragon, white tiger, red bird, and white elephant; second, deified animals, such as the winged rabbit, winged sheep, and four-eared creature; and third, auspicious birds and beasts documented in literature. Current research indicates that the definition of auspicious images lacks uniformity, which affects the precise understanding of their function. Previous research categorizes the auspicious images of the Han Dynasty into two types: standard auspicious pictures and auspicious decorative pictures. The quantity of standard auspicious charts is limited, adhering to a specific format and sample, organized in a "catalogue" arrangement. The location, official status, and cultural

background of the tomb owner intricately influence the selection of contents. The stone carving images were located exclusively in the Wuliang Ancestral Hall, the Han Tomb in Wangdu, Hebei, Tomb No. 2 in Maozhuang, Lishi, Shanxi, the tomb of Xiangmiuyu in Pengcheng, Xuzhou, and the inscription of Xixianxia Song. An auspicious decorative map lacking a title, integrated with various subject matter, segmented into two forms: a horizontal unbounded grid and a boundary grid. These images are prevalent and exhibit extensive distribution. Based on their characteristics, we can categorize the regions into Henan, Northern Jiangsu, Northern Shaanxi, Western Shanxi, Sichuan, and other areas. Evidence indicates its presence from the late Western Han Dynasty to the middle and late Eastern Han Dynasty in regions such as Sichuan, Henan, and Jiangsu. The auspicious decorative map is categorized into five regions based on the regional characteristics of the stone statues: Sichuan, Shaanxi and Northern Shanxi, Henan, Shandong, and Northern Jiangsu, along with other regions. These regions are influenced by social atmosphere, economic conditions, folk customs, and beliefs, resulting in notable differences in image content, expression forms, combinations, and collocations (Wei, 2022).

#### *Animal Images Carved in Stone in the Han Dynasty*

Animal-themed imagery was significant in the stone sculptures of the Han Dynasty. Numerous animal images were prevalent, and vibrant depictions of supernatural creatures, deities, and immortals were inspired by them (Huang, 2011). The animal pictures preserve the essence of humanity's basic past, and the Han people have maintained their early amicable connection with the animal kingdom from antiquity through three generations, extending into the civilized age (Li, 1981, 70). The art of the Han Dynasty, predominantly including animal imagery, demonstrated a profound reverence for all living beings and effectively conveyed the subject of humanity's dominance over both the material and natural realms. Animal motifs were typically associated with auspiciousness during the Han Dynasty. The Han people utilized numerous animal images to convey auspicious sentiments. The representations of animal imagery in tombs exhibit both commonalities and regional variations. Animal imagery is relatively scarce in the regions of northern Shaanxi, northern Sulu, Henan, and Anhui. The Nanyang, Sichuan, Sulu, Henan, and Anhui regions include a significant amount of animal imagery, particularly in Nanyang, which is renowned for its animal performances (Huang, 2011).

#### *Analysis of Semiotic Theories*

In the realm of human experiences, signs play a crucial role in influencing cultural formations and creations (Brandt, 2010). Sebeok (2001) says that a sign is any physical thing that was thought of or made by someone else using a physical medium to represent an idea, emotion, feeling, or other mental constructs. The sign is defined as a perception that carries meaning (Luo, 2007). Signs serve as essential instruments for human communication and cognition, allowing individuals to perceive and identify patterns in their environment (Sebeok, 2001). Nearly all signs assign meanings fundamentally linked to their relationships with humans (Ahmed & ZOHRA, 2021).

In the late 19th century, the Western academic sphere gave rise to semiotics, an ancient discipline that focuses on signs and semiosis (Ahmed & Zohra, 2020). Semiotics currently involves the examination of signs and their meanings across many settings, including all items that can be classified as signs (Chandler, 1998; Hjelm, 2002). Semiotics shows how

cultural agents keep and spread the framework of cultural values that shapes our view, which in turn affects our collective consciousness (Schroeder, 2003).

The contemporary semiotic theory established by Saussure and Peirce at the onset of the previous century plays a crucial role in advancing semiotics. Saussure's semiotics of language and Peirce's semiotics of speech have emerged as the theoretical foundation and essential research methodologies in subsequent semiotic studies (Xiao Wei, 2015, 8).

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), a pivotal Swiss linguist, established fundamental ideas in semiotics (Chandler, 1998). Saussure posits that a sign comprises the 'signifier' and the 'signified,' which are as inseparable as the front and back of a sheet of paper (Munro, 1987). Saussure used the arbitrary principle of speech to delineate the link between signifier and signified in the context of phonetic symbol analysis (Saussure, 2011). Nonetheless, the semiotics of art history, derived from the examination of visual symbols, is rooted in the visual rather than the auditory. The connection between signifier and signified is not arbitrary but characterized by "non-arbitrariness," as the symbolic relationship in art primarily hinges on visual resemblance. This delineates the distinction between art history semiotics and Saussurean semiotics (Duan, 2018).

Peirce formulated a ternary semiotic framework for the representation of artistic image symbols, grounded in empirical observation. This framework comprises three symbols and three terms: similarity (icon), indicator (index), specification (symbol), representamen (representamen), interpretant (interpretant), and object (Duan, 2018). Peirce stated, "A symbol, or representamen, is an entity that signifies something to an individual in a particular manner or capacity." It generates an equivalent or potentially a more sophisticated symbol in an individual's mind. I refer to this produced symbol as the interpretant of the first symbol. It signifies its object, but not in every aspect; it is connected to a specific concept, which I occasionally refer to as the foundation of the representamen. (Jappy, 1984). Duan Lian conducts a comprehensive analysis of Peirce's concept of order and the development of Chinese landscape painting. He asserts that "Peirce emphasizes the connection between cognition and symbol encoding, and his encoding mechanism illustrates the interplay between form and the concept of visual symbols." In other words, he employs one aspect of his thoughts and emotions.

Susan Langge, a student of Cassirer, inherited and expanded upon Cassirer's aesthetic theories regarding artistic symbols. She used the idea of symbols to explain different aspects of her art. This is related to symbolic coding theory, which says that the visual representation is the "signifier" and the idea behind the symbol is the "signified" (Duan, 2016). In Cassirer's aesthetic philosophy, all kinds of artistic symbols are looked at in detail, and the complicated nature of artistic activities is shown in different ways by using symbols. Suzanne Lange, in her book *Emotion and Form*, presents her notable theory that characterizes art symbols as "the creation of symbolic forms of human emotions" (Susan Lange, 1986). Suzanne Lange discusses an emotion that transcends individual experience, serving as a representation rather than a mere expression of the self. She refutes the notion of self-expression, emphasizing that art conveys the collective emotions experienced by individuals throughout life rather than reflecting their unique emotional states. A comprehensive piece with symbolic significance



should integrate the artist's personal emotions with those that are more objective in nature. (Hu, 2019).

Using semiotics to look at art from the Han Dynasty includes looking at the animal images in stone carvings, using Saussure's sign theory to figure out what the artists were thinking and feeling, and looking at how these carvings changed over time in relation to Chinese philosophical ideas, social structures, and long-lasting cultural traditions.

### Research Method

This research uses the method of semiotic analysis. Initially, it categorizes the animal motifs on Han Dynasty stone inscriptions utilizing Peirce's triadic technique. Then, it does a preliminary analysis of the common animal themes in Han Dynasty stone inscriptions by combining Saussure's ideas of "signifier" and "signified." This confirms the images' thematic significance in relation to their surrounding context. The study aims to explore the common emotions that the images' significance conveys. Utilize library resources (literature and empirical scientific publications) and museum resources (artifact observation) to collect and categorize information. This study will look at the good examples of stone carvings from the Eastern Han Dynasty and Han Dynasty stone sculptures. It will mostly use examples from the Jiaxiang Wu Clan Temple, the Nanyang Han Dynasty Stone Sculpture Museum, the Xuzhou Stone Sculpture Museum, the Shandong Museum, and the Huo Qubing stone sculptures (shown).

#### *"Signifier" of the Auspicious Images of the Han Dynasty*

In the context of extensive burial practices, stone statues are observable across Shaanxi and its adjacent provinces, including Shanxi, Henan, Hebei, Shandong, and Sichuan, as well as other expansive regions. The motifs of the ground stone carvings encompass stone tablets and stone timepieces, featuring animals such as lions, elephants, horses, cows, sheep, tigers, and other creatures, in addition to spiritual entities like kirin, Tianlu, and malevolent spirits. The variety and quantity of stone carvings are contingent upon the identity of the tomb owner (Shisong & Yang, 2010). The subterranean stone carvings are predominantly found in Han portrait stones, which feature numerous auspicious themes and a variety of auspicious beasts with a broad distribution range. Additional themes include dragon, phoenix, tiger, horse, deer, the Dynasty Stone Sculpture Museum, the Xuzhou Stone Sculpture Museum, the Sandong Museum, and Huo Qubing stone sculptures (pictured). The sculptures include bears and elephants, among others (Zhu, 2017), with particular emphasis on the four spirits (dragon, phoenix, turtle) and four deities (Canglong, white tiger, Zhuque, Basanwu) (Zhang, 2019).

#### *"Signified" of the Auspicious Images of the Han Dynasty*

Saussure's semiotic theory posits that the "signified" encompasses rich cultural connotations, incorporating both synchronic and diachronic dimensions. The signified shapes contemporary social dynamics and establishes lasting connections with historical and future contexts (Yakin & Totu, 2014). In the Han dynasty, animal species and behaviors served as sources for imagery and analogies. The Han dynasty strategically employed them to evoke emotional responses, convey impressions of the natural world, or articulate ethical principles (Sterckx, 2005). Xiangrui is associated with the governance of the dynasty and societal stability and serves as a spiritual support for individuals seeking good fortune, world peace, and

personal happiness. The populace viewed auspiciousness as a valuable asset, inscribing it on tombs to invoke good fortune, honor morality, and acknowledge merit (Wei, 2022).

### *Meaning of auspicious images in the Han Dynasty*

The stone carvings featuring dragons, tigers, four gods, and unicorns as gatekeepers accurately depict myths and tales (Wang, 2011). These auspicious creatures in ancient mythology, "although powerful and majestic," are no longer revered as the most sacred beings by humanity, but rather as instruments employed to terrify spirits" (Shan, 1985). They are the Han Dynasty's "conquered god," symbolizing not only the exorcism of monsters but also representing the immortal and blissful region beyond, intended to honor the tomb owner. The favorable motif in stone carvings from the Han Dynasty embodies the philosophical concept of the relationship between heaven and humanity in that era. The Han people, in creating auspicious images, possessed a harmonious awareness of their surroundings and sought to convey the intrinsic connections and vital spirit of objects, which constituted the primary concept and methodology for producing these auspicious images (Huang, 2011).

### **Analysis and Finding**

The depiction of auspicious animal themes in Han Dynasty stone carving art serves primarily three purposes. Initially, many auspicious animals originate from myths and legends, serving as totem symbols that represent blessings and signify the tribe. Secondly, the majority of these creatures are fictional and typically represent a combination of various animal species. The peacock and pheasant represent the fundamental form of the phoenix (Zhang, 2019). The selection process prioritized elements exhibiting pronounced animal characteristics. These animals possessed extraordinary abilities and could serve as means of transportation for individuals to reach the immortal realm. Third, these animals may function as symbols of the Han Dynasty, conveying blessings for individuals who arrived or departed.

The theme of lucky animals in Han Dynasty stone carvings includes real animals, animals that were changed based on examples, and creatures that were made up by the artist (Huang, 2011). This study categorizes the favorable animal motifs in Han Dynasty stone sculptures utilizing Peirce's rule of thirds. Peirce's rule of thirds categorizes these animal representations into three symbols: icon, index, and symbol. Second, the author uses Saussure's ideas of "signifier" and "signified" to do a first look at the common auspicious motif in Han Dynasty stone carvings and figures out what the image's main meaning is by looking at its surroundings. Ultimately, the author uses Suzanne Lange's perspective to investigate how the image signifies the shared emotion.

### *Animals in Nature (Original Image)*

This type of animal preserves its natural appearance. It falls into two distinct categories: Initially, animals such as horses, dogs, pigs, chickens, ducks, lambs, geese, and swans are intricately connected to human everyday existence, emphasizing the survival dynamics and personality traits of both animals and humans. Examples include the tiger, lion, leopard, elephant, mule, snake, turtle, and toad; these creatures embody spiritual traits and engage in conflict with humans, symbolizing totemic consciousness. Others suggest witchcraft, exemplified by toads concealed during the full moon. Cattle and deer are both classifications. The favorable animal motif is a tiger, turtle, toad, elephant, deer, sheep, and

bear. The stone carvings depict these animals in various stances. Individuals in the Han Dynasty believed that existence was comprised of the interplay between Yin and Yang, specifically the soul (hun) and the corporeal spirit (po). The soul (hun) represented Yang qi ascending to the heavens, whereas the soul (po) signified Yin qi descending to the earth. Individuals anticipated that the soul may elevate to heaven, necessitating particular ceremonies and specialized instruments throughout the ascension process. Alongside their own cultivation, emergence, and ascension to heaven, this often occurs with the aid of various forms of transportation. This includes the ability to ride different animals or vehicles. The deer and turtle emerged as celestial beasts that facilitated the immortal's elevation, with representations showcased in the Nanyang Han Portrait Museum. Since antiquity, numerous traditions regarding turtles exist, often symbolizing longevity and good fortune, exemplified by the phrase "beetle 360, while the god turtle is long," as well as the adage "a thousand years of king, 80,000 years of turtles."




Furthermore, the ancients held the belief that the turtle possessed the ability to discern fortune and misfortune; hence, throughout the Han Dynasty, numerous methods for nurturing the immortal turtle were considered a means of fostering immortality. Among the creatures that the Han Ascends the Immortal to mount, the deer has also been designated as one of the deities that draw the immortal chariot. In antiquity, people intertwined "sheep" with "xiang," symbolizing auspiciousness and embodying humanity's quest for favorable outcomes. There are a lot of sheep-shaped designs on Han stone statues in Shandong. These designs are usually found on the lintels of tombs and are thought to keep evil spirits away and bring good luck. Ying Zhao, during the Eastern Han Dynasty, authored "Customs," which stated that the tiger represents a phallus, surpassing all animals in length, and possesses the ability to consume spirits. This suggests that people perceive the tiger as a symbol of masculinity, strength, courage, and righteousness. Due to the tiger's comprehension, individuals aspire to harness its formidable attributes to safeguard their personal security and combat the enigmatic specters. Han art frequently depicts tigers chasing away and hunting monsters, symbolizing victory. Hu is a cygnet. During the Han Dynasty, the Hu"鹄" is considered a Rui bird within the context of superstitions related to heaven, humanity, and divination. Its appearance signifies the equilibrium of governance, prosperity, and favorable fate. Besides auspicious birds, it also represents individuals with significant objectives. The "Five" should reflect the notion of "Shang Five" in alignment with the societal context of that era.




Table 1  
The sign system of native animals in nature

Semiotic significances of the animal images in


Han stone carvings




Source: authors collation

Title	Signifier	Signified	Significations Functions	Mentation	Animal images	description	Source
Tiger	Lay down on the tiger, and the limbs were outlined in lines	strength	Symbol	politics		The statue belongs to the above-ground stone art, highlighting the spiritual attributes of animals.	The Stone tomb of Huo Qubing in the Western Han Dynasty, from the Complete Works of Chinese art
Turtle	A fairy held up the grass by turtle, turtle head forward	Ascension, longevity	Symbol	Psychological needs		This picture may be on the lintel of the tomb, symbolizing that the tomb owner is going to the celestial realm, where the divine turtle and immortal can bless him and foretell good and bad luck	Tong Han dynasty, Qilin Gang Han Tomb, Nanyang City, (The original stone is taken by Nanyang Chinese Painting Museum)
Deer	Carved in stone, two deer are lying in pairs, serene and natural. Another deer is curled up.	"Fu Lu" 伏鹿 means "Fu Lu" 福禄, that is, wealth and honor."	Homophony, symbol	psychological need		This is a stone carving on the door, symbolizing that the owner of the tomb can enjoy a good life or pray for their descendants to live a prosperous life.	Tong Han dynasty Dooble Deer stone carving, Yantai Fu Shandong Liugong unearthed (high relief) raw stone is taken by Shandong Museum

Sheep	A sheep looks up into the distance with its head bent downward, its body carved with two rings and its limbs uncarved	Good fortune	Symbol	psychological need		It has certain decorative qualities.	Tong Han dynasty , The Complete Works of Chinese Art
Elephant	Carved in stone, people ride elephants, tigers, deer, birds and other auspicious, two elephants are located above the image, four teeth can be clearly seen, the elephant back with six pointed hats, different posture.	The six-toothed white elephant implies peace and auspiciousness	Narrate	Philosophy		It shows that the owner of the tomb pursues peace and auspiciousness.	Tong Han dynasty Unearthed in Longyang Shop, Tengzhou, photographed by the author in Shandong Museum
Elephant	As if lying on the ground, the features only the long	Strength, Longevity	Symbol	Political Need		One of the stone sculptures of Huo Qubing in the Han Dynasty, symbolizing	Western Han Dynasty, Huo Qubing Stone Tomb, Complete



Hu 鹤	nose is more obvious, and the other parts are simply carved	Government and People, Good Luck,Lofty Aspirations	Symbol	Politics		auspice and longevity in general	works of Chinese art
	There are five birds on the stone carving, four before and after spreading wings to fly, in its image is called the ancient bird. In the lower left corner of the picture, the tail of a series of right stars are connected, there are two stars in the lower right corner, and the upper part of the upper right corner is another engraved with				It symbolizes that the owner of the tomb pursues an auspicious life in the celestial realm and still has lofty aspirations. The "Five" of the five should be a reflection of the concept of "Shang Five" in accordance with the society at that time.	Tong Han dynasty , Nanyang Wangzhua ng Han Tomb, the original stone was taken in Nanyang Chinese Painting Museum	

	two stars, and the blank is engraved with clouds.						
Lion	A stone lion, head facing forward, chest straight, right front foot and right back foot forward, walking	Ward off evil, guard, power and status	Symbol	Psychological Need, Politics		It is placed at the entrance of the tomb road or on both sides of the shrine, reflecting the Han people's respect for the sanctity of the tomb. It may also be related to the divine Yin and Yang, hoping that the soul will be blessed and continue to enjoy peace in the afterlife	Tong Han dynasty , Yang Jun Tomb Stone lion (one), the Complete collection of Chinese art
Toad 蟾蜍	A toad held his head high and stared warily ahead	Victory, Merit	Symbol	Politics		One of them commemorates Huo Qubing's conquests of the Xiongnu	Western Han Dynasty, Huo Qubing Stone Tomb, Complete works of Chinese art
Horse	A horse lying on the ground, with its forelimbs extended forward, can quickly stand up	Victory, Merit	Symbol	Politics		Although the two statues of horses are different in posture, they are both to express "the Huns conquered by Huo Qubing",	Western Han Dynasty, Huo Qubing Stone Tomb, Complete works of Chinese art

at any  
time, a  
horse  
standing  
with a  
Huns  
under its  
feet

especially  
the picture  
below  
shows a  
profound  
relationship  
with the  
merits of  
the tomb  
owner.

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### *Shape-Shifting Animal*




Using the form of natural animals, its shape changes. For instance, the shape of birds varies, such as two-headed birds, three-legged birds, five-headed birds, and cow-headed birds. Among these, three-legged birds are often found in the divine void, symbolizing the sun. The nine-tailed fox, which changes from fox, and the Jade rabbit, which changes from rabbit, usually cluster together in front of the West Queen Mother to celebrate their birthday and make merry. The grotesque image of a man with a tiger body is represented by a horse's belly. The Han people believe that as long as one cultivates with dedication, one can live without food or clothing, and the body is made of hair from the immortals between heaven and earth. But ordinary people have to go through many hardships. One of the ways to overcome difficulties is to remove the ghosts that exist between heaven and earth, and one of them is to use the divine beast that specializes in eating precious things to expel or eat them. The divine beast is the artistic image generated by the ancient working people's transformation and deification of birds and beasts in real life, and it is generated by the ancient people's pursuit of beneficial wishes. The images of gods and beasts in Han stone statues played the role of connecting the human world and the celestial world, guiding the souls of the dead into fairyland. They were either depicted as the tomb owner's mount or played in the celestial world, expressing the tomb owner's desire to ascend to the celestial world after death.


Table 2  
The sign system of Shape-shifting animal

Semiotic Significances of The Animal Images in



Han Stone Carvings






Source: authors collation

Title	Signifier	Signified	Significations Function	Mentation	Animal images	Description	Source
Three-foot Aconitum “三足鸟”	The figure is engraved with the Xiwangmu, nine-tailed fox, three-foot aconitum and jade rabbit stamping medicine, that is, the Xiwangmu pharmaceutical diagram	Represents the sun, Yang essence	Symbol	Philosophical principle		It symbolizes the unification of Yin and Yang in the Han Dynasty.	Western Han Dynasty, Nanyang folk painting collection
Inseparable King Bird” 比翼鸟”	Carved on the left side of the picture is a two-headed bird, two-legged, winged, and phoenix-tailed. The beast with the right dragon body and beard.	Auspicious, Inseparable	Metaphor	Psychological need		On behalf of luck, a metaphor for loving husband and wife, but also a metaphor for deep friendship, inseparable friends.	Tong Han dynasty, Nanyang folk painting collection
Seven-Headed” 七头兽”	A black dragon is engraved in the picture, and 14 stars are engraved around the	Star chart, Exorcise Evil Spirits and avoid Evil Spirits	Symbol	Philosophical principle		It represents the ancient thought of heaven and man, and implants	Tong Han dynasty, Nanyang Longxi Village also temple unearthed, Nanyang folk Han

	<p>dragon body, surrounded by clouds. On the lower left is carved a tiger with seven heads, four heads in the head and three heads in the tail.</p>					<p>images in the astrology to illustrate the worship and belief of the Han people in the mysterious power.</p>	<p>painting collection</p>
<p>The Nine-headed Man-faced Beast” 九头人面兽”</p>	<p>In the upper layer of the stone carving, there are nine human-faced beasts (massive monsters with human faces and tiger bodies, with strange images), and two winged dragons pulling carts, and the lower layer is tigers, bears, rabbits, deer, feathered people riding deer and deer carts. The nine-headed man-faced beast is an</p>	<p>Guard, majesty, holiness and strength</p>	<p>Symbol</p>	<p>Psychological need</p>		<p>It expresses the tomb owner's entrance into heaven. It is also associated with certain politics, symbolizing wisdom and prophetic wisdom. The worship of mystical powers</p>	<p>Tong Han dynasty, Unearthed in Huangangling, Tengzhou (present Huangangling Village, Fengmao Zhen, Shanting District), the original stone was photographed in Shandong Museum</p>



<p>Nine-tailed Fox 九尾狐</p>	<p>ancient mythological water-god beast also known as the "enlightened beast". In the picture, the Queen Mother of the West, Dai Sheng, is in the center, and Fuxi Nuwa is closely surrounded by a snake with a human head and a toad, a jade rabbit and a nine-tailed fox</p>	<p>A symbol of Immortality.</p>	<p>Symbolic Narrative, Metaphor</p>	<p>Philosophical principle</p>		<p>This schema is a symbol of the unification of the celestial world, the coordination of heaven and earth and Yin and Yang, and a deeper meaning is the embodiment of immortal immortal thought.</p>	<p>Tong Han dynasty, Rubbings of Han Dynasty stone statues in Tengzhou, Shandong Province, Research on Han Dynasty stone Statue Brick Art (Huang, 2011)</p>
<p>Mythical Creatures</p>	<p>Carved in stone, two beasts have wings on one horn and open their mouths opposite each other in a playful manner. Clouds wreathed between the paintings.</p>	<p>Celestial Aura</p>	<p>Symbol</p>	<p>Philosophical principle</p>		<p>It symbolizes the peaceful life of the tomb owner in the celestial realm.</p>	<p>Tong Han dynasty, Nanyang Shilipu Han tomb, the original stone shot in Nanyang Chinese Painting Museum</p>

Yang Wu” 阳鸟”, Two-headed Beast” 双头兽”	The upper part of the stone engraved a Yang Wu, spread wings and neck to fly, the lower part is a pair of head beasts, head joined, shoulder wings.	The sun shines, the Yin and Yang unite	Symbol	Philosophical principle		It reflects the thought of the unity of heaven and man and Taoism	Tong Han dynasty , Nanyang Chinese Painting Museum
Two-faced Tiger	Stone left engraved two deer, a standing back, a foot jump. Stone right a beast, tiger body human face.	Ward off evil spirits	Symbol	Psychological need		It reflects the Han people's psychology of seeking good luck and warding off evil spirits	Tong Han dynasty , Nanyang Chinese Painting Museum
Sacred Deer	Winged, deformed, multi-horned deer	Fulu 福祿	Symbol	Psychological need		It reflects the Han people's thoughts of seeking good fortune and warding off evil.	Tong Han dynasty , Jiangsu , xuzhouThe Great Dictionary of Han Dynasty Art
Unicorn ( “xie zhi)	With a sharp horn on its forehead, the ancient mythical animal "leans forward when it touches the ground and has wings.	Wisdom, courage, justice, power, dignity	Symbol	Politics		Generally placed in the tomb door fat, the town tomb ward off evil spirits	Tong Han dynasty , Nanyang, Henan Province, the Chinese Han painting Canon
Unicorn ( “xie zhi)	The forehead has a sharp Angle, making a	Wisdom, courage	Symbol	Psychological need		Reflecting the Han people's pursuit of justice,	Tong Han dynasty , Suide, Shaanxi Province,

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shape, and  
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### *The Images of Mythological (mystical) Animals*

The Han Dynasty audaciously conceived this creature, a mythical and fictitious animal that embodies their aspirations. The Han people assert that with diligent cultivation, one can subsist without food or clothing and that the body is composed of hair from the immortals residing between heaven and earth. However, common individuals must endure numerous adversities. One method to surmount challenges is to eliminate the specters that inhabit the space between heaven and earth, and one approach is to employ the divine creature to expel or consume them. Examples include Qianchi (穷奇), Fei Lian (飞廉), Tianlu (天禄), Bixie (辟邪), Qilin (麒麟), Taobai (桃拔), Guan Shu (瞿疏), Shi (兕), and other mythical creatures, originating from folklore and historical accounts. Qian Qi is one of the twelve heavenly monsters, described as "Qian Qi is akin to a tiger, possessing wings" (Yuan, 1993). Meng Kang observes: "The peach dial resembles a deer, featuring a long tail, one horn representing the sun deer, and two horns symbolizing malevolent spirits." Regarding Guan Shu, "The Book of Mountains and Seas and the Book of Beishan": "There exists a creature resembling a horse, possessing a single horn, known as Guan Shu." The author, inspired by the creation of deities and creatures, envisioned an expansive realm as a dwelling, resembling clouds and fluid, serpentine gods - "dragons". It is stated that "there exists a dragon with scales, a dragon with wings, a dragon with horns, and a dragon devoid of horns" (Ruan & Chen, n.d., 1987). In Shuowen (说文), the depiction of the dragon is more vivid: Jiao represents the genus of dragons. The pond has three thousand six hundred fish, and the river dragon can produce fish in the water. Ancient texts depict it as a creature possessing scales and armor, a head adorned with whiskers and horns, and five claws. Upon encountering a thunderstorm, a flood dragon ascends to the ninth heaven. The ninth heaven is designated to characterize the latitude and prospects afforded to an individual of aptitude. In the dragon picture, there are both four-clawed and five-clawed representations, indicating that the Han people's depiction of dragons does not consistently align with textual descriptions. The Ying Dragon embodies the essence of winged dragons, and its motif predominates in stone sculpture. Ancient texts describe the Chi dragon, characterized by its scales, horns, wings, and diminutive tail. Additionally, the Chi kiss is a symbol of good fortune, and people sometimes place the beast's head on their houses. The Chinese perceive the dragon as a symbol of positive fortune, as well as an embodiment of pure emotions in both men and women. Exotic animals are distinct creatures referenced in ancient Han mythology and historical texts. The renowned examples include the unicorn, the valiant creature, and the Taoties, among others. The Han tombstone monuments employ a multitude of these exotic animals to repel malevolent spirits, avert calamities, and invoke blessings.

Phoenix is a mythical creature, referred to as "Shuwen" in the cloud: "phoenix, divine bird," as noted in "The Classic of Mountains and Seas." "The Wilderness of the West"

references a vibrant avian species, stating, "There are three colorful birds: one emperor bird, one Luan bird, and one phoenix bird." During the Han Dynasty, the emergence of phoenix birds was believed to herald favorable omens for individuals. The phoenix, akin to the dragon, represents the emperor's auspiciousness and symbolizes the good fortune of both the sage and the monarch. Nevertheless, the phoenix is also found in the tombs of common families, typically serving a decorative purpose or reflecting the psychological desires of the Han people to seek auspicious significance.


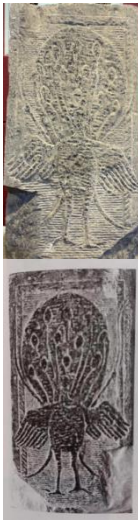
Table 3



*The sign system of mythological (mystical) animals*

Semiotic significances of the animal images in Han



stone carvings


Source: authors collation


Title	Signifier	Signified	Significations Functions	Mentation	Animal images	Description	Source
The Dragon 'lung 龍'	A dragon on the left side, a foot forward, mouth open tongue, towards a feather	The patron saint, the psychic beast	Symbol	Psychological needs, Politics		The worship and belief in dragons..	Tong Han dynasty, The original stone was taken by the author of Nanyang Chinese Painting Museum
Phoenix"凤凰"	A big bird, like a peacock	The symbol of peace in the world, the harvest, the country and the people	Symbol	Psychological needs		It represents good omen, auspiciousness, auspiciousness and harmony, and symbolizes the quality of the tomb owner's pursuit of	Tong Han dynasty, Nanyang City Qilin Gang tomb, the original stone was taken in

						noble gentleman. Nanya ng Chinese Painting Museum
Tianlu”天禄”, Bixie”辟邪”	Tianlu and talismans are a pair of gods in ancient legends. They are winged like lions. Tianlu has one corner and talismans has two horns	This is a divine beast that drives away evil and evil things, and heaven blesses and blesses	Symbol	Psychological needs		Located at the gate of the palace or the entrance to the shrine, the tomb animal is used to protect the tomb owner from evil. Tong Han dynasty, It was originally located in front of the tomb of Zongzi in Runan, and the original stone was taken in Nanya ng Chinese Painting Museum
Qiongqi”穷奇”	A tiger on the left side,galloping back, there is a tiger like monster , head long corner, back with two	The embodiment of ghosts	Symbol	Political		The front image of the lintel stone indicates the political ideal of the owner of the tomb: the tiger eating the poor and Tong Han dynasty, The specific age is unknown, Nanya ng folk Han



	wings straight gotting the front tiger					strange symbolize s the struggle with the people who are far from the gentlema n and near the villain	painti ng collect ion
Feilian"飞廉"	Left engrave d a bear, looking back to retreat, opposite two unicorns running after the bear. The middle animal is an imaginar y eon, a bird's head and a deer's body, and finally an imaginar y animal named xiezhi.	A mythical beast with a speed beyond human limits.	Symbol	Politic , Psycholo gical needs		Lintel stone, a divine bird, symbolize s the tomb owner's wish to attain the virtue of ascension , enjoy fairyland life, and also says that it can guide the atmosph ere.	Tong Han dynast y , Nanya ng Stone bridge folk collect ion loose stone, Nanya ng folk Han painti ng collect ion
Qilin"麒麟"	The head has a corner upright, the body shape is strong, like a horse, standing	God beast, auspiciou sness, peace, longevity, auspiciou sness, good luck, national prosperit y, authority, honor	Symbol	Politic , Psycholo gical needs		Gentle and courteous , gracious gentlema n's humble demeano r, in the folk etiquette have blessing and blessing	Tong Han dynast y , Muyu Tomb, Xuzho u, Jiangs u Provin ce, the Chines e Han painti

Guanshu“贖疏”	In the middle of the stone carving, there is an elephant with upright limbs, open mouth and nose, and the appearance of a tiger. Heel the zebra, want to go and stop. The last one is shaped like a horse and is Guanshu “贖疏”.	Mystical power, warding off evil spirits, good luck	Symbol	Psychological needs		effect, Cathay peace. The lintel stone expresses the tomb owner's pursuit of good fortune and happiness.	ng Canon Tong Han dynasty, Nanyang folk Han painting collection
Si“兕”	Carve a bear on the left, run to review, straighten the limbs, carve a 兕 on the right, long sharp horns, steady feet, straight getting the bear in	Bear Fight Si” 兕 “Bring down evil spirits,	Symbol	Political		It's a celebration of heroism and a celebration of fighting and competition.	Tong Han dynasty, Nanyang folk Han painting collection

	front.Bo dy like buffalo, blue, only long corner, fierce.						
Xuanwu"玄武"	A combina tion of a turtle and a snake, the turtle moves forward with its mouth open, the snake surroun ds the turtle, the snake head and the turtle head face to face, as if talking	One of the four gods, Lord North, winter, water, life, longevity	Symbol	Psycholo gical needs		In the tomb as an auspiciou s patron saint represent s the owner of the tomb to prolong life, the pursuit of fortune	Tong Han dynast y , Nanya ng city, easter n subur bs, Nanya ng folk Han painti ng collect ion

### Conclusion

The stone carvings of the Han Dynasty attribute auspicious significance to the theme of animals. The depictions of animals in the stone carvings illustrate two aspects: the intrinsic wild essence of the animals and the representations imbued with intricate forms and significance. The animal motifs shown in the stone carvings convey the feelings and culture of the Han people. These animals are essential to the Han Chinese conception of harmony, which influences their daily existence. The depiction of these stone pictures signifies good fortune, encompassing the anticipation of the tomb owner's afterlife, the benediction for future generations, and the representation of an aspirational existence throughout his lifetime. The animal depictions in these stone carvings are numerous, content-rich, and vividly expressive. They embody the cultural practices and spiritual beliefs of the Han people, articulating their political ideologies, aesthetic values, social existence, and harmonious worldview.

The Han people appropriated animal motifs, emulated genuine animals, exaggerated their forms, or sculpted mythological and fantastical creatures in stone carvings. The animal pictures are mostly shown in composite forms, where the combination of pictures follows a set pattern that comes from earlier generations (based on stories or historical accounts) and

goes beyond them. There are many symbols and different combinations of animal images that can be grouped together based on "similarity, indicator, and specification." This shows what the images are supposed to do and helps with the interpretation of these lucky animal images.

The animal-themed images in the stone carvings of the Han Dynasty exhibit specific procedural characteristics; however, within these characteristics, notable differences exist in the burial art of each tomb. This difference reflects the craftsmen's innovation in the Han Dynasty's art form and the impact of regional cultural variations. Overall, stone animal images from the Han Dynasty exhibit a systematic approach to image composition and animal characterization, characterized by regional variations and mutual influences. The alterations in imagery within certain tombs indicate the development of aesthetic awareness at the individual level of the artist or the tomb proprietor. It is crucial to recognize that in various burials, the same image (signifier) can represent different "signified" concepts. The identical image (signifier) will denote various "signified" meanings due to its contextual placement within the tomb. Professor Wu Hong stated that "the position of the image" determines its meaning. Different "signifiers" may refer to the same "signified," particularly in the context of Han Dynasty stone images featuring animal themes. All images ("signifiers") represent a common "signified" in various forms, indicating that animal images from the Han Dynasty collectively reflect the consciousness of the Han people in their pursuit of positive fortune and prosperity. The Han people perceive auspicious images as divine interpretations of authority. These auspicious thoughts are linked not only to the governance of the dynasty and social stability but also to the populace's prayers for fortune, global peace, and personal spiritual sustenance. Individuals consider auspicious signs as valuable and inscribe them on tombs to invoke good fortune, honor virtue, and acknowledge merit. Xiangrui's animal images illustrate the Han people's regard for all living beings, embody the theme of humanity's dominance over both the material and natural realms, and reflect the widespread belief in the interconnectedness of heaven and humanity. This highlights a central concern of Han Dynasty aesthetic consciousness: the relationship between heaven and man.

This research significantly contributes to the convergence of Chinese art history and semiotics. The research utilizes Peirce's semiotic model and Saussure's linguistic framework to interpret the complex symbolic implications of animal themes from the Han Dynasty. This theoretical framework enhances the comprehension of these objects, from mere visual representations to vessels of cultural and philosophical importance. The study integrates Susan Langer's notion of "art as symbolic form," demonstrating how stone carvings encapsulate collective emotions and cosmological viewpoints. It fills in a big gap by using semiotic theory to look at art from the Han Dynasty. This gives us new ways to think about how ancient Chinese symbolic systems worked. This study prioritizes the dynamic interplay between material forms and cultural meanings, enhancing comprehension of Han funeral art in contrast to existing research that mostly concentrates on iconographic analysis. The study emphasizes the significance of auspicious themes in expressing the Han people's worldview, especially the concepts of "heaven and humanity" and "death as life." These carvings intricately merge mythology, philosophy, and quotidian existence, demonstrating how visual symbols reinforced communal unity. The regional differences in these motifs further illustrate the different local customs and beliefs of the Han Dynasty. This research offers essential insights for current sculptors and cultural historians. It highlights the significance of ancient aesthetics in shaping contemporary artistic activities and promotes the preservation of

cultural heritage in a progressively globalized society. This study confirms the lasting significance of Han Dynasty stone carvings as a fundamental element of Chinese art history and a deep monument to China's cultural legacy.

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