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## **The historical development and transformations of the ritual architectures (Sheji Tan) in Western Han dynasty**

*Li Yi, postgraduate student, Belarusian State University,  
Kozlenko A. V., assistant professor*

In his “Historical records” Zuo Qiuming (556-451 BC) emphasized the importance of ritual etiquette: “it is the great law that governs the state, stabilizes the nation, maintains order among the people, and benefits future generations” [1, p. 88–89]. Therefore, when the Western Han Dynasty was striving for the unification of China, special attention was paid to the religious etiquette, rituals and ceremonies as a source of legitimacy.

The idea of ritual architecture, known as Sheji Tan, has emerged in China with the rise of Western Han ruling dynasty (202 BC-8 AD). In the term Sheji, the hieroglyph “She” refers to the Earth God, and “Ji” refers to the God of Grain. Together, they refer to the altar where Western Han emperors would offer sacrifices to the Earth God and the God of Grain. Clearly, the Sheji is a crucial symbol for seizing power and governing a country [2, p. 208].

From the previous Qin Dynasty (221-207 BC) Western Han rulers inherited the veneration of Earth, Heaven, mountains, rivers, and ancestral spirits. After rising to power, Western Han Dynasty fix the rituals and built its own structures that represented the significant aspects of governance. So, for example Liu Bang, the first Emperor of the Western Han (256-195 BC) shortly after he entered the Jing region in 205 BC ordered the demolition of the Sheji in Xianyang, the former capital of the Qin Dynasty, and set about constructing a new Sheji to reflect the ideals and aspirations of the Han Dynasty [1, p. 842–843].

The Western Han Dynasty established material carriers symbolizing the major affairs of the state in architectural plan of its capital city Chang'an. Ritual complex was located outside the Chang'an, with the most concentrated distribution of the buildings in the southern suburbs. It include two main complexes: Zongmiao (“the ancestral temple”) and Sheji Tan (“The Earth God and the Grain God”). Ancestral temple (Zongmiao) was on the left and official sacrificial altar (Guan She) and official grain storehouse (Guan Ji) on the right established spatial configuration known as Zuozu Youshe. This layout not only reflects the importance of ancestor worship in society at the time, but also highlights the role of ritual architecture in preserving the purity of bloodlines and the legitimacy of power [3, p. 990–991].

By the Western Han Dynasty, the Guan She and Guan Ji were two separate architectural entities. Guan She had already been established, but Guan Ji had not yet been built. During the reign of Wang Mang (9-23 AD) Xia Yu was honored as a deity in the Guan She and Hou Ji as the God of agriculture. Besides Wang Mang assigned the official sites for worshipping the Earth God and the Grain God to the left side of the ancestral temple. He constructed also the “Nine Temples of Wang Mang” along with the Hall of Brightness, the Circular Building, the Imperial College, and the Lingtai, among others, in the southern suburbs of Chang’an. While these developments primarily reflected the ambitions and power dynamics of the rulers, they also carried an enduring message about the importance of “Tiandao” civilization, emphasizing the continuity and evolution of these valued cultural beliefs.

This pattern reflected Wang Mang reform of the sacrificial rites of the Western Han Dynasty’s early period, aiming to restore them to the regulations of the Zhouli (“Justice”). “When the capital city was established, altars were set up to worship the gods, and the Sheji Tan was on the right side of the royal palace, while the Zongmiao was on the left side” [4, p. 1421]. By this point, “She” and “Ji” were physically linked and merged into “Sheji”, which was placed on the right side of the capital city, and the Zongmiao (Nine Temples of Wang Mang) on the left side, thus forming the spatial pattern model of Zuo Zu Youshe. This pattern was inherited and developed by subsequent dynasties until the Zuo Zu (Tai Temple) Youshe (Shiji Tan) in Beijing of the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

### **Literature**

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