



Beijing's Dingling Tomb: An Awe-Inspiring Tour of Chinese History

Among a series of Ming Dynasty tombs that are held in great reverence by archaeologists and the Chinese people alike, Beijing's Dingling Tomb is the only fully excavated tomb that allows visitors. A popular site to visit for residents and tourists alike, this remarkable site is not only a fantastic and fascinating place to visit but the ability to visit it at your own pace by self-guiding your own tour allows you to really tick around at the sections that catch your wonder while moving through at a relaxed and measured rate.

History / Background of the Dingling Tomb

The Dingling Tomb is the final resting place of Emperor Zhu Yigun (est. 1563-1620) of the Ming Dynasty, as well as two of his empresses: Empress Xiaojing and Empress Xiaoduan. The Ming Dynasty is one of the most famous dynasties in Chinese history, and one of the last great lines of emperors in China. Zhu Yigun was the 13th emperor of the Ming Dynasty and would rule for 48 years, the longest reign of any of the Ming emperors.

The tomb itself was built during Emperor Yigun's lifetime, as the 44 acre monument was built over 6 years from 1584 to 1590. Today the Dingling Tomb remains an extremely important site not only because of its undeniable historical and cultural value, but also because it attracts millions of curious tourists from inside and outside of China every single year.

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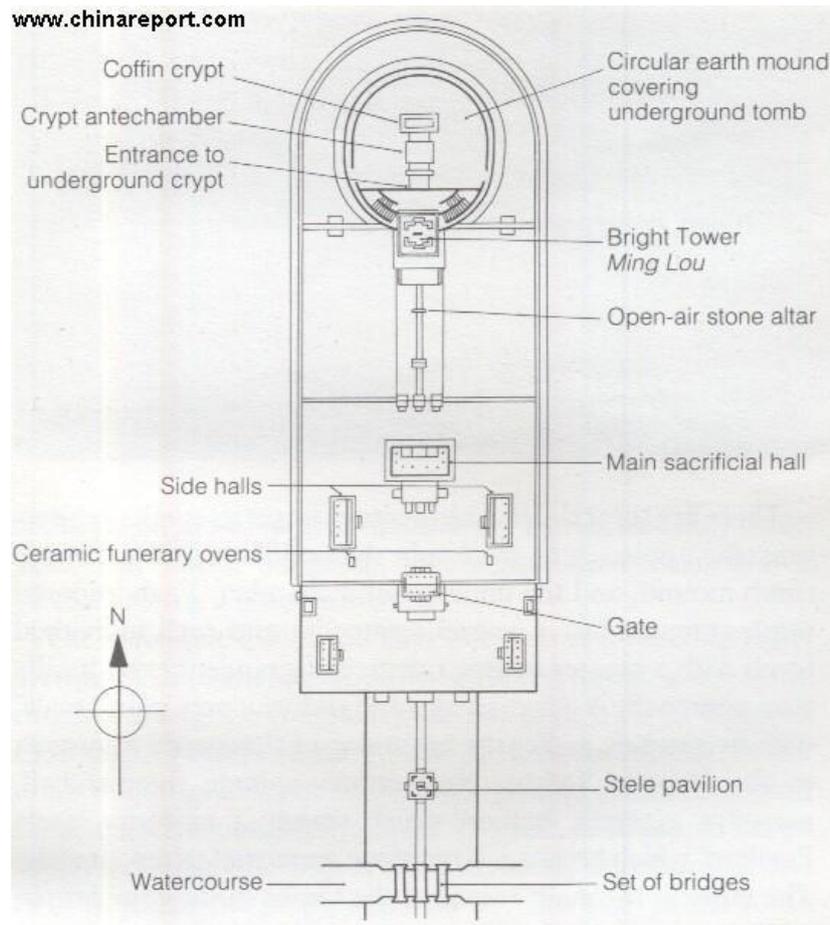
The Emperor

Known as the Wanli Emperor, Zhu Yigun would be crowned at age 10, but a trusted minister and adviser, the Senior Grand Secretary, Zhang Juzheng, would both rule administratively while also mentoring the young child emperor as he grew. The 10 years of this time were prosperous as corruption was rooted out of government, the treasury grew, and the economy thrived in a way that allowed the social structure and military to thrive, as well.

This was considered the last golden age during the Ming Dynasty, and while by all accounts the Wanli Emperor respected his mentor Zhang, upon Zhang's death and the emperor's taking control he undid many of the changes that were originally enacted. At first the emperor proved competent and attentive to matters of state, but a conflict with the heirs of Zhu Yigun led to the complete confiscation of their lands and wealth and might have been a warning sign of things to come.

Upon hearing disagreements or counter arguments from a council of advisers, the emperor decided not to hold council again for 20 years, a time many historians point to as indicating the decline of the Ming Dynasty. While many problems would certainly crop up during this time, it's worth pointing out that the Emperor still successfully dealt with three different military threats: one from the Mongols aided by a rebelling Ming General, one by the Japanese invading Korea, and the famed Yang Yinglong revolt.

The later decades of his rule, however, would see constant clashing with the ministers and council, as well as disagreements over succession, which led to his further isolation from meetings and necessary governing actions and helped precipitate the full decline of the dynasty at a time when new military threats would prove fatal to the ruling dynasty.



The Outer Tomb

The above ground section of Dingling Tomb greets visitors with a large square front and a circular rear, which is intentional as it agrees with the ancient Chinese philosophy of the earth being square while heaven is round. To get to the entrance you will walk over three bridges carved from white marble, and this leads to an impressive high tablet pavilion that indicates you're closing in on the entrance to the underground section of the tomb.

At various points the outside gives clear clues as to the importance of the tomb and the level of artistic work that went into it. A large stone stele on a turtle clearly indicates the importance of the tomb while many visitors are endlessly fascinated by the exquisitely carved Imperial Path with ornate stone dragons. This is a fine example of the high end work that went into the emperor's tomb.

Further back from the entrance Wailuo Wall is visible around the mausoleum itself. The first door displays yellow glazed tiles, archways, rafters, and columns all sculptured directly from stone before they received their colorful outside painting.

Inside the wall there are several courtyards of note, while the famed Treasure City is found in the rear where the tomb shifts to a circular design. You'll notice the first courtyard is

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clear of clutter, featuring no buildings or facilities, though on the far left side there are 3 Divine Kitchens outside the courtyard and 3 Divine storerooms on the right side of the courtyard to ensure balance.

You'll pass through the Ling'en Gate (Blessing & Grace Gate) to get into the second courtyard. Railings are there at the base, with the tops of each railing forming into decorative stone heads of dragons and phoenix. Although relatively bare of attractions, it is an impressive courtyard that certainly works to build up admiration when tied into the one before and after it.

The Ling'en Palace is actually located in the third courtyard. This was a place where it was setup to make appropriate sacrifices to Emperor Zhu Yijun and the two empresses who are buried with him. The stone road cutting through the middle of the courtyard displays impressive artwork once again as a dragon and phoenix are sculpted out playing with a pearl, a sight that is definitely worth taking time to study and appreciate, and this is the last courtyard before seeing the circular rear of the Treasure City where the Emperor and his two empresses are buried.

The Inner Tomb

The pathway to the Underground Palace is clear as the sloping path feeds directly into this important site. Unearthed between the years 1956 and 1958, this is the most valuable part of the very impressive Dingling Tomb and as of this writing remains the only unearthed palace of the 13 Imperial Tombs that make up the Ming Dynasty. You will need to follow the tunnel more than 130 feet until it opens up into the tomb itself. Notice the stonework and stone structure of the underground palace as this is classic of the popular style that was in vogue during the Ming Dynasty.

The Underground Palace is divided into five splendid vaulted halls:

- The Front
- The Middle
- The Rear
- The Left
- The Right

Each of these halls feature entrances sculpted out of valuable jade and the floors are constructed with gilded bricks. Each of these halls features a white marble coffin in the middle. The main hall (aka the rear vaulted hall) is the most important of all these.

There you will see three white marble thrones, one for the emperor and one for each empress. This is a place where incense, flowers, and candles would be set. In front of each marble throne is a glazed Five Offerings as well as a blue China jar that would be filled with sesame oil to keep the lamps lit. Notice the impressive precious items that are displayed

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with these coffins and realize this is only a small portion of what was originally buried in the tomb.

The removed relics include multiple national treasures, all of which are stored in the Dingling Tomb Museum to allow the public access while also keeping them appropriately protected and under proper security. It's estimated that over 3,000 cultural relics came from the tomb.

Additional information:

Dingling office: 01060761424

Emergency Numbers

Police (Calling)	110
Police (Text message)	12110
First-aid Ambulance	120
Fire	119
Traffic Accidents	122

Thanks for Visiting!

We hope you enjoyed exploring Dingling Tomb, and imparted some useful information and history, and got a lot of fun. If you have any questions about anything you saw or read on this self-guided tour, or if you would like to request more information, please feel free to contact us via Email: wildgreatwall@gmail.com

Enjoy the rest of your stay in Beijing, and we look forward to seeing you again soon.