Equestrian gear is commonly found in Liao-dynasty tombs, indicating that Khitan rulers continued to value their nomadic heritage after the establishment of the Liao dynasty. The horse was the most valued animal in Liao society as it provided not only mobility but also food. Elaborate sets of harnesses made of precious metals were found in the tombs of the Prince of Wei and his wife (dated 959), and the Princess of Chen and her husband, Xiao Shaoju (dated 1018). Similarly, hunting and archery on horseback, skills common to Khitan nomads, were reflected in the discovery of hunting tools such as awls, sheathed knives, bow cases, and arrows excavated from Liao-dynasty sites. Falcons, an integral part of Khitan culture, were also trained for hunting purposes as noted by the presence of the arm protector included in this exhibition.

The link between the Liao-dynasty elite and their Asian steppe roots is also evident in their distinctive mortuary practices. These included careful preparation of the corpse by wrapping the limbs in silk and clothing the body in metal burial attire, consisting of a face mask, body netting, and shoes. Burial attire in this exhibition, including a silver mesh burial suit, gold face mask, and gilded-silver boots belonging to the Princess of Chen, are the best examples found to date. A small, yurt-shaped earthenware funerary urn takes its form from the traditional circular tents used by Khitan nomads.

Other ceramics from Liao-dynasty tombs also indicate the survival of forms related to the Khitan’s nomadic heritage. For example, a bottle on display in the shape of an ox leg was derived from a traditional form used for fermenting milk or storing wine. The nomads’ use of animal skins to make functional vessels is evident in the shape of distinctive bag-shaped flasks based on leather prototypes—materials such as leather or wood were particularly suitable for a mobile lifestyle. That vessels originally created from such practical materials were transformed into freestanding ceramic flasks reflects the amalgamation of the nomadic and sedentary ways of living that characterized the founders of the Liao empire.