



## Article

# Serving the Dead as Serving the Living: Examining the Concept of Burial and Life Consciousness in Medieval China <sup>†</sup>

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**Abstract:** In the minds of ancient people, tombs and burials were where the lives of this world ended and another type of life began. By incorporating the concepts of life found in Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and the widespread belief in ghosts and immortals, burial ceremonies evolved during the Wei and Jin 魏晋 dynasties (220–420) into an integrated and unified notion of burial. The funeral ritual's imaginative and fanciful depictions of the hereafter express sentimental devotion to life and contemplation of death. The burial ceremony and tomb architecture change in accordance with how the concepts of sacrifice and ghosts develop. The features of people's belief in ghosts and immortality are reflected in particular burial practices. The popularity of necromancy burials and ghost marriages during the Middle Ages (third to sixth centuries) bring to light the binary antagonism between the soul and the body in burial, as well as the emphasis on spiritual freedom and physical immortality in the life philosophy.

**Keywords:** burial concept; life consciousness; soul and figure concept; cultural belief



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## 1. Introduction

From the Wei and Jin dynasties until the Sui 隋 unification in 581, China fell into another period of division, and there was constant warfare. Scholars were anxious and unsettled all the time, and lamenting the fragility and impermanence of life, which gradually became an important social and cultural trend. With the awakening of an individual's life consciousness came the idea of avoiding misfortune to ensure one's own security, and an interest in discussions of life and death. With the collapse of the Confucian order of law and disciplined rites and the system of "correspondence between Heaven and mankind" (tianren ganying 天人感应), individuals re-examined and thought about the relationship between themselves and nature, as well as between themselves and history, which promoted a drastic change in people's concepts of life and death. Zhuangzi's 庄子 (369–286 BCE) philosophy of equating living and death, Wang Chong's 王充 (27–97) view of dying being as natural as living and his denial of ghosts, as well as the Buddhist view of karma and causative reincarnation, have all had impacts on individual views of life and death since the Wei and Jin dynasties; together, they promoted the development and evolution of funeral rites and customs.

Funeral rites and traditions have long been obscured as historical settings by the capricious vicissitudes of the times. Fortunately, funerary utensils and tomb murals have appeared again through archaeological excavations. These cultural relics provide an opportunity for scholars to explore the emergence and transformation of life consciousness in ancient China from the perspectives of space and materiality. Wu Hong 巫鸿 has written a series of works analyzing the content, theme, forms, and thoughts of ancient Chinese tomb art.<sup>1</sup> Pu Muzhou's 蒲慕州 *Searching for One's Own Fortune—The World of Belief in Ancient China* 追寻一己之福—中国古代的信仰世界 (Pu 2007) and *Burial and Life and*

*Death—Reflections on Ancient Chinese Religions* 墓葬与生死—中国古代宗教之省思 (Pu 2008), as well as Li Hong's 李虹 *Death and Rebirth: Tombs and Beliefs in the Han Dynasty* 死与重生: 汉代的墓葬及其信仰 (Li 2019), focus on the view of life and death during the Han dynasty. All of these above-mentioned authors systematically explained the elements of belief behind burial. Combining archaeology with fine art history, Zheng Yan 郑岩, in his work *Mask of the Deceased: A Study on the Burial Art of Han and Tang Dynasties* 逝者的面具: 汉唐墓葬艺术研究, explored the world after death in the ancient time from a panoramic perspective including society, culture, and mentality (Zheng 2013). Books such as Rong Xinjiang's 荣新江 *The Medieval China and Sogdian Civilization* 中国中古与粟特文明, Shen Ruiwen's 沈睿文 *Zoroastrian Beliefs and Funerals in the Medieval China* 中古中国祆教信仰与丧葬, and Wu Guibing's 吴桂兵 *Archaeological Research on the Evolution of Buddhist Factors in the Ancient Funerary Rites and Customs* 中古丧葬礼俗中佛教因素演进的考古学研究 discuss the evolution of tomb structures and life concepts in the Middle Ages in combination with foreign religions and cultures (Rong 2014; Shen 2019; Wu 2020). Based on the aforementioned research, this paper makes use of archaeological excavation reports and other recently discovered cultural artefacts in order to investigate the evolution of burial rites, with a focus on the regional factors influencing the Middle Ages' conception of life and death and the specific process by which ancient people formed their conception of life and death through the imagination of space in the underworld.

## 2. Tangible and Intangible: Changes in Life Concept and Burial Ceremony in Medieval Times

An important aspect of ancestor worship that demonstrates people's devotion to life and their reflection on death is burial ceremonies. The evolution of societal ideas and beliefs during the medieval period had a significant impact on how people thought about life, which in turn influenced how tomb structures and their functions were developed. Sculptures, murals, pictures, and other funeral artefacts underwent changes as a result of this.

The development of the life concept<sup>2</sup> in medieval times promoted the transformation of the structural design of tomb chambers. Zong Baihua 宗白华 (1897–1986) points out that the Wei–Jin dynasties were “a period with strong devotion towards life” (Zong 1987). Qian Zhixi 钱志熙 puts forward the idea that the change in the social life concept in the Han 汉 (202 BCE–220 CE) and Wei dynasties was mainly that “the mainstream of life concept shifted from irrational one in Han dynasty to a rational one in the Wei and Jin dynasties” (Qian 1997). A tragic consciousness of death finally contributed to the awakening of life consciousness in the Wei and Jin dynasties. Along with the rise of a rational life concept, the belief that had been prevalent since the Han dynasty vacillated. Meanwhile, the beliefs regarding immortality in Taoism were in a state of crisis with the changes in the social environment. This state of anxiety influenced the construction of tombs, manifested by the fact that people no longer built large tomb chambers or created special spaces inside the tomb for the living to hold ceremonies. Instead, they held sacrificial ceremonies such as recalling and made sacrificial offerings to ancestors outside the tomb. The above-mentioned change in concept can be confirmed by the contents of unearthed tombs. In the Eastern Han 东汉 dynasty (25–220), it was popular to have paintings of the owner of the tomb in the tomb chamber. Some of these paintings depict the tomb owner, and some depict the owner and his wife (Luoyang Shi Di'er Wenwu Gongzuo Dui 1992; Luoyang Shi Wenwu Gongzuo Dui 1982). Funeral-related articles such as tables, dishes and drinking utensils were also unearthed in front of the paintings of the tomb owner. At this time, the space and site of sacrifice had basically been transferred from the temple to the tomb, which required enough space in the tomb for ritual performances (Wu 2005b). Talking about tomb sacrifice at his time, Wang Chong 王充 (27–97?) said that “People venerated temple sacrifices in ancient times, but the custom at present is tomb sacrifices... Tomb is the residence of ghosts and immortals and the place for sacrifice”.<sup>3</sup> This illustrates that people at that time

generally believed that tombs were the places of residence of ghosts and cemeteries were locations for sacrifices.

The tombs of the wealthy, on the other hand, were mostly double-chamber tombs and multi-chamber tombs, and the sacrifice ceremony was held inside the tomb. For example, located in Luoyang 洛阳, Henan province 河南, the Qili he 七里河 tomb from the late Eastern Han dynasty is a double-chamber brick tomb equipped with a transverse front hall and a storage room. The tomb consists of five parts, including a tomb path, a long corridor, the front room, the rear room, and a north storage room. Pottery lamps were placed on the brick platform in the southeast corner of the front room and the entertainment figures (baixi yong 百戏俑) were placed in the northwest with the pottery lamps. According to the archeological excavation reports, the brick platform in the front room may have been a sacrificial space (Yu 1975). However, in the Wei and Jin dynasties, the number of tomb chambers gradually decreased, with single-chamber tombs gradually becoming mainstream, and this had a lasting impact on the tombs in the Northern and Southern 南北朝 dynasties (420–589). According to the excavation reports for three tombs from the Western Jin 西晋 dynasty (265–317), published in *Wenwu* 文物 in 2019, tomb #1 was a single-chamber brick tomb. The second and third tombs were double-chamber brick tombs with the same structure (Liu et al. 2019). The chambers of these three tombs are representative of the common structure of Jin tombs found in Central China. Without a clear space for sacrifices in the tomb chambers, the sacrificial ceremonies would have been performed outside the tombs. In the two-chamber tombs of the Wei dynasty during the Three-Kingdoms 三国 Period (220–280) and the Western Jin dynasty, the front chamber changed from a transverse front hall to a nearly square space, where formerly, in the late Eastern Han dynasty, it could hold a large number of people to perform sacrificial rituals. However, there was little difference in the combinations and positions of artifacts in the front chamber compared with in the single-chamber tomb. Thus, it can be regarded as a transitional form. Funeral sacrificial activities occurring inside or outside the tomb were the reason determining whether double chambers or a single chamber was employed. To a certain extent, the practice of gradually transferring sacrifice-related activities from inside the tomb to the exterior of the tomb contributed to the disappearance of the double-chamber tomb and the predominance of the single-chamber tomb.

From the establishment of the Sui 隋 dynasty (581–618) to the Rebellion of An Lushan and Shi Siming 安史之乱 (755–763) in the Tang 唐 dynasty (618–907), the strong power of the state gave people general confidence and optimism. The imperial examination system provided a way for people to make contributions, the martial spirit pushed people to be aggressive, and the value of individuals often rested on the achievements of the present age. The tomb structure of this period also catered to this value orientation. Most of the tombs were still single-chamber tombs with the body and soul resting in one chamber, and sacrificial activities were mostly held outside the tombs. In addition, there are still a small number of double-chamber tombs, and some of them have been excavated. This includes, for example, the tombs of Yuchi Jingde 尉迟敬德 (585–658), Zheng Rentai 郑仁泰 (600–663), Su Dingfang 苏定方 (592–667), Li Jinxing 李谨行 (619–683), Li Chongrun 李重润 (682–701), Li Xianhui 李仙蕙 (685–701), Li Xian 李贤 (655–684) and Wei Jiong 韦洵 (?–708). However, the above-mentioned people are mainly members of the Tang imperial clan, high-ranking military officers and imperial consort kin. Therefore, it can be inferred that double-chamber tombs during this period were mainly popular among the upper aristocracy, showing the noble status of the tomb owners. Su Bai 宿白 (1922–2018) also holds the view that “ordinary officials in the Tang dynasty, even those enjoying the highest level of official rank, could not use the double-chamber brick tomb unless they are awarded with the special honor by the emperor”.<sup>4</sup> Qi Dongfang 齐东方, as described in his book *Research on the Double-Chamber Brick Tomb Found in Xi'an Area* 略论西安地区发现的唐代双室砖墓, also believes that the double-chamber brick tomb is a type of burial system used by Tang imperial relatives. Qi Dongfang argues that spacious and elegant burial spaces and tomb structure could not be afforded by common people during the Tang dynasty. Because of

their intimate ties to politics, tombs from this era indirectly reflect the changes in the political world (Qi 1975).

Tang imperial tombs were large in scale and were surrounded by numerous stone tablets and abundant funerary objects, especially the Zhaoling 昭陵 Mausoleum, the Qianling 乾陵 Mausoleum and the Tailing 泰陵 Mausoleum. On the basis of inheritances from their predecessors, the funeral rites of the Tang dynasty were constantly being improved. From the *Kaiyuan Rites of the Tang dynasty* (*DaTang Kaiyuan li* 大唐开元礼) to the *Notes on the Rites of the Yuan Tombs of the Tang dynasty* (*Tangdai yuanling yizhu* 唐代元陵仪注), we can see the completeness and richness of the funeral rites, extending from the emperor through to all social strata. Generally speaking, the funeral rites of the Tang dynasty consist of three parts: funeral, burial and sacrifice. The *Institutional History of Tang* (*Tang Hui Yao* 唐会要), *Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang* (*Youyang Zazu* 酉阳杂俎) and other extant Tang documents reflect the importance of funeral and sacrifice activities in the middle to late Tang dynasty, further demonstrating the diversification of tomb structure and the popularity of these rituals among the public.

In Medieval China, with the changes in the concept of life, the internal structure of tombs, including burial objects, sculptures, murals, and epitaphs, became more abundant and closer to secular life. Bearing the concept of “serving the dead as serving the living” in the mind, people created a living space similar to that in real life for the deceased in the tomb and prayed for eternal life through shamanistic rituals. Under the influence of this concept, the objects displayed in the tomb were closely related to real life. The burial objects in tombs gradually changed from delicate bronze and jade to real life objects such as plastic bottles, bronze mirrors and hairpins. In the Han tombs located in the Central Plains, such as the Yangjiawan 杨家湾 Tomb, earthen vessels imitating the appearance of bronzeware and lacquerware in real life were unearthed, and these wares were usually decorated with painted patterns after being fired to form basic shapes (Xianyang Shi Bowuguan Yangjiawan Hanmu Fajue Xiaozu 1977). In the Mancheng 满城 and Jiulongshan 九龙山 tombs of the Han dynasty, both bronze and pottery vessels used for sacrifice were unearthed (Shandong Sheng Bowuguan 1972; Zhongguo Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo Mancheng Fajuedui 1972). In the Mawangdui 马王堆 Han Tombs located in Changsha 长沙, Hunan Province 湖南省, sacrificial bronze vessels and lacquerware were unearthed that possessed obvious characteristics of the Chu culture (Zheng 2016; Hebei Sheng Wenwu Yanjiusuo 1989). Among the tombs from the end of the Eastern Han dynasty to the end of the Western Jin dynasty excavated in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River 长江, Duisu 堆塑 pots were found to be common burial objects in the tombs, often referred to as “Duisu bottles” (duisu ping 堆塑瓶) or “soul bottles” (hunping 魂瓶) by scholars.<sup>5</sup> The Duisu pots are decorated with patterns of birds and beasts, immortals, multi-storied buildings and upturned eaves and Buddhist statues and engraved with auspicious words such as prayers for the blessing of descendants, as well as scenes of Taoist immortals gathering in the happy land of fairy mountains in the spiritual land (Ding 2001). Wang Ming 王铭 holds the view that the large number of funeral objects such as articles for the dead, pot-shaped utensils, and “grain pots” unearthed in tombs of the Tang and Song dynasties are closely related to Duisu pots, and they can be regarded as an early form of grain pot or storage utensil for food crops. Additionally, the scenes sculpted on the Duisu pots symbolize the resting place for the soul of the deceased. Thus, it is safe to say that “Duisu pots combine the function of both the storehouse for food crops and grotesque-shaped articles to guard the tomb for the dead (Wang 2014)”. The small “soul pots” integrate ideas from religion, life and death, architecture and aesthetics. Hence, the human soul can rest in the beautiful world constructed by the stacked sculptures on the pot. The funerary objects, with their increasing practical function, facilitated the weakening of sacrificial function and become closer to real life.

Murals and other works of art that included depictions of the hereafter were also ways in which the ancients explored death. People’s painful experiences with death during the Wei and Jin dynasties led to an awareness of the frailty and transience of life, and the living started to pay attention to the living state of those who began another journey of life. Thus,



a great quantity of scenes focusing on secular life appeared in the tomb murals. In the murals of the Jiayuguan 嘉峪关 tomb, unearthed in 1972, a great number of Wei–Jin local life scenes were portrayed. “A large number of scenes in murals are related to social life such as farming and sowing, daily life such as cooking meat and feasts, and the scenes of sheep and wagons”, which vividly reproduces the living conditions of people in the Hexi area 河西地区 (Lin 1999). The clan culture also features in tomb murals of Hexi area. The tomb murals mostly appear in the clan tomb groups, reflecting the tomb owners’ yearning for the other world, the enjoyment of the secular life, and the worship of the clan culture.

The tomb murals in Medieval China also showed distinctive regional characteristics, as well as the interaction and integration between the Central Plains and the Western Regions. For example, in the Hexi area, “The brick paintings unearthed from the tombs of Wei and Jin dynasties at Jiayuguan 嘉峪关 depict ethnic minority figures, such as Di 氐, Qiuci 龟兹, Qiang 羌, Xianbei 鲜卑, and Jie 羯 (Zhang and Gao 1989)”. However, such complete visual depictions of the northern tribesmen in ancient China are rarely seen in the Central Plains. In addition, the murals in the Hexi area reflect the results of the cultural exchange between the Central Plains and the Western Regions, presenting diversified themes and styles. Tomb murals in the Central Plains also include an abundance of daily life scenes. For example, the Northern-dynasty 北朝 (386–581) tomb murals in Jiuyuangang 九原岗, Xinzhou City 忻州市 are divided into four layers. According to the archaeological reports, the first layer of murals mainly shows strange birds and beasts of various kinds, dragons and cranes, and the thunder god and the wind god, and all of these are depicted in flowing clouds. The second layer of murals are mainly scenes of horse trading, hunting and so on. The third and fourth layers of murals concern scenes of traveling and returning home (Zhang et al. 2015). The secularization of the murals in the Central Plains and the diversification of the mural themes in the Hexi area were further inherited by the Tang mural paintings, where new characteristics were presented: a distinct sense of order and the atmosphere of prosperous times. The Tang-dynasty tomb in Huangjiashan 黄家山, Wanzhou district in Chongqing Municipality 重庆万州, Xiajiang 峡江 area (Sichuan Sheng Bowuguan 1980), the three tombs for Li Hui 李徽 (644–683), Yan Wan 阎婉 (622–690) (Quan 1987) and Li Xin 李欣 (633–687) (Gao 1980) in Yun County of Hubei province 湖北郧县 in Jingjiang area 荆江地区, and the tomb of Lady Yang, who was married to prince Wu 吴王 in the Tang dynasty, located in Anlu of Hubei 湖北安陆 (Song et al. 1985), all included painted murals in the tomb chambers. The fact that the murals were painted only in the tombs of the imperial family, aristocrats and high-level officials demonstrates an obvious sense of hierarchical order. The tombs of Li Hui and Yan Wan, excavated in the Yellow River basin, are typical of northern tomb structures. In the tomb murals of the Tang dynasty, scenes with a strong sense of etiquette and ritual order become the mainstream; these include, for instance, scenes of banquets (Yanyintu 宴饮图), traveling (Chema yizhang chuxing tu 车马仪仗出行图), hunting (Shoulie chuxing tu 狩猎出行图) and receiving guests (Libin tu 礼宾图). These paintings highlight the dignity of the tomb owner by displaying their authority and power. At the same time, paintings such as those of beauties (Shinü tu 仕女图), maids (Qunshi tu 群侍图), large banquets (Qunti yanyin tu 群体宴饮图), singing and dancing (Gewu tu 歌舞图), landscapes, flowers and birds (Shanshui huaniao tu 山水花鸟图) and so on often appear in the tomb murals. These paintings reproduce scenes in the lives of scholars in Tang dynasty and the rich and colorful culture of the time, showing the social landscape and the zeitgeist of the prosperous Tang dynasty.

In Medieval China, epitaphs developed over time into a significant funerary artefact. An important part of funeral culture, epitaphs developed in the Wei and Jin dynasties, matured in the Northern dynasties, and flourished in the Tang dynasty. The development process of epitaphs moved from brick construction to stone carvings, and from stele-shaped ones to square ones. Epitaphs in the Northern Wei dynasty were mainly stele-shaped and rectangular, and were placed flat in front of coffins and capped. This became the dominant form in the Sui and Tang dynasties. The epitaph is the record of a life or even a family, from which one can gain a glimpse of the particular age in which it was made, and it also directly

reflects the concept of life and death of the family members of the tomb owner and the author of the epitaph. For example, Quan Deyu's 权德舆 (759–818) "Epitaph of a Deceased Grandson" (Shangsun Jinma muzhi 殇孙进马墓志) reads:

大病之际，上辞尊长，下诀幼弟妹，恬然不乱。且谓其傅婢曰：“空中佛事，俨然在目。”促焚香，移吾枕西向，合掌而绝。始吾常疑神灭不灭之论，逮今信矣。噫嘻！以尔已仕，且有成人之志，吾欲勿殇，知礼者曰不可，而不敢逾也。

On the occasion of serious illness, bidding farewell to the elders and young brother and sister, he was calm and at ease. The dying told maidservant that "our Buddha worshipping in the past is still fresh in my mind." He urged family members to burn incense, to move his pillow to the west. Then, he put his palms together and passed away. At first, I always suspected that whether the death of the body was accompanied by the destruction of the soul and spirit, but now I firmly believed that dying out of the body didn't mean the perishing of the soul. Since you, my grandson, had gone into official career and had lofty ambitions, I didn't expect to have words reading "dying prematurely" in your epitaph. However, this was not allowed by Confucian ethics and rituals, and I did not dare to break the rule (Jiang 2013).

When the tomb owner was in critical condition, he was able to bid farewell to his family calmly, saying that the Buddha was fresh in his mind, urging incense burning, facing the west, and praying with palms together, which all reflect the young man's Buddhist nature. Facing his grandson's death and belief, Quan Deyu believed that the human soul was not destroyed with the demise of the body. Instead, the soul will live forever in a blissful and pure land, reflecting the influence of the dead on the living in terms of the concept of death.

The epitaph is the final word of the deceased. One part of the epitaph, namely, the zhi 志, traces the family history of the deceased; the other part, called the ming 铭, expresses the grief of the living. The stone with epitaph on it is decorated with various engraved patterns and cosmic symbols. Both the content of the inscription and the decoration on the inscription stone reflect the concept of life and death and the religious beliefs of people in a given period. "The Epitaph of Erzhu Xi" 尔朱袭 (512–529) 墓志 in the Northern Wei 北魏 dynasty (386–534) was engraved with four gods on its lid, reflecting the cycle of the universe. In the Northern Wei dynasty, beasts appeared on the four sides of the epitaph of Hou Gang 侯刚 (466–526), as well as on the epitaph of Feng Yong's Wife Yuan (*Feng Yi qi Yuanshi muzhi* 冯邕妻元氏墓志). Meanwhile, in the Sui and Tang dynasties, beasts mostly appeared in the center of the epitaph, such as the jade rabbit embossed on the epitaph of Yang Ju 杨居 (?–583), the dragon embossed on the epitaph of Zhang Yin 张荫 (515–576), the turtle embossed on the epitaph of Li Lian 李廉 (?–735), and the eight diagrams decorating the epitaph of Zhang Ning 张宁 (?–867). The latter reflects the influence of Taoist belief on the tomb owner or his family members. The inclusion of such images and content in an epitaph reflects people's views on life, and their longing for immortality.

People in the Wei and Jin dynasties learned that the Han dynasty's tales of immortality were false myths in terms of where one goes after death. Gods, spirits and immortals only appeared in illusory dreams. Therefore, they took into account the rites and human factors in the construction of tombs, causing rites and emotions to intermingle with each other. The function of offering sacrifices to gods in tombs gradually faded away. Instead, the fascination with the spirit of the departed tomb owner grew, and progressively more emphasis was placed on human life experience. The renewal of ideas and thoughts does not mean the simple replacement of old ideas, but rather a complex process of fusion and regeneration. Following the end of the Han dynasty, burials became functionally more focused on the deceased individual in the wave of the awakening of the life consciousness of the whole society. On the other hand, the integration of Taoist and Buddhist factors enriched the traditional systems of shamanism and immortals, strengthening the concept of worshipping gods again in an increasing spiral. Therefore, the sacrificial function of

tombs integrated the concepts of worshipping gods, offering sacrifices, and paying more attention to the souls of the dead.

In summary, burial and the worshipping of ancestors' spirits prevailed in the Eastern Han dynasty. During the Wei and Jin dynasties, the idea that the tomb was the house of the immortals was abandoned; instead, people believed that "tomb is not the house of immortals" (Chen 2000, vol. 1, p. 81). As a result, lavish burials evolved into simple ones. In the Sui and Tang dynasties, it was generally believed that the soul lived in the tomb, and thus people focused on offering services to the dead. The structure and form of tombs in different periods reflected the changes in the concept of burial, embodying the views on life and death of people at that time. Although the tomb is the destination of the dead, it also reflects the will of the living. Tomb construction and funerary objects not only reflect the meticulous and fantastic creation of the living, they also enrich the meaning of death. The structure and scale of the burial space varied in different periods and regions, not only on the basis of the social status of the tomb owners, but also related to changes in the concept of burial and the belief in soul occurring at that time. The main factor affecting the development of and changes in the function of tombs was the changing concept of life. The factors affecting the changes in the concept of life included the impetus of social and political events, the maturation of economic conditions, the development of the concept of ghosts and immortals, the spread of the Buddhist concept of reincarnation, and the revival of Confucianism. Changes in the social environment and the influence of cultural beliefs and concepts eventually reshaped people's concept of life and death, thus affecting the structure of tombs, as well as their content, and the form and placement of funerary objects.

### 3. Heaven and the Underworld: The Imagination of Space concerning the Underworld in Ancient Tombs

Confucius (551–479 BCE) once said, "How can you serve ghosts if you do not have the ability to serve humans?",<sup>6</sup> and that we must "respect ghosts and immortals but stay away from them" (Cheng 1990). These statements demonstrate the rational practice spirit of Confucianism. However, regarding the matter of life and death, Heidegger believed that man is a "daily existence toward death", and "when the daily existence toward death tries to 'think' about death, the answer will be revealed; even when this kind of thinking is carried out in a critical and prudent manner, it makes no difference (Heidegger 2019)". Thinking and anxiety about death push people to explore the meaning of life and imagine the world after death. When the exuberance of the real world meets the cold monotony of the underworld, the living try to build a warm habitat for the dead through tomb construction. In medieval China, the funeral ceremony was informed by the concept of and belief in the soul. The destination of the dead was divided into two categories: "living in human world" and "transfer to another place (Lin 1986)". The latter meant going to the land of the dead, which included three categories: above the ground, below the ground, and heaven (Lv 1998). The notion of the "immortal soul" (linghun busi 灵魂不死) was popular in the Han dynasty, and it emphasized that the soul could stay in the human world after death. The universe was divided into four levels in the minds of the Han people, namely, the celestial, immortal, human and ghost worlds (Xin 2000). Therefore, the subjects of tomb murals should correspondingly also have consisted of four parts. However, the previously excavated pictorial stone carvings of the Han dynasty mainly focus on the depiction of immortals and the celestial realm, and we rarely see the portrayal of the underworld. Since the Wei and Jin dynasties, the flourishing of religions had a significant influence on the concept of death. On the one hand, Buddhism imported the thought of "hell" from abroad. On the other hand, Taoism adopted the local imagination of the "underworld" from popular belief. The two ideas collided with each other, deepening the meaning of "the realm of darkness" (youming shijia 幽冥世界). The system of punishing evil and praising good in the underworld was gradually perfected, and the dominant images of the underworld

became increasingly diverse. There was no longer an insurmountable gap between the real world and the underworld, thus providing a way for the dead to return to their homes.

Most of the tombs from the Wei and Jin dynasties with celestial images appeared in the Hexi region, centered on Dunhuang 敦煌 and Jiuquan 酒泉. The celestial images in this period exhibited new changes compared to those from the Han dynasty. The carriers of the murals in the Han dynasty mainly included silk paintings, tomb murals, pictorial stones, sarcophagus murals, and so on. During the Wei and Jin dynasties, sculpture walls were added. For example, the sculpture walls of the Foye Miaowan Cemetery 佛爷庙湾墓地 in Dunhuang were the most regionally distinctive burial image carriers at this time (Zheng and Fan 2012). The characters in the image include the Queen Mother of the west, the East King (Dongwang gong 东王公), FuXi 伏羲, NüWa 女娲 and other mythical figures. For instance, the murals on the four walls of the entrance room of the Dingjia zha 丁家闸 Tomb in Jiuquan during the Sixteen Kingdoms 十六国 (304–439) depict the East King on the eastern slope of the inverted dipping ceiling (fudou 覆斗), the Queen Mother of the West on the western slope, the god Bai Lu 白露 and a Daoist fathered deity on the southern slope, and sacred animals and mountains on the northern slope (Gansu Sheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1989). The murals in the tomb reflect the imagination of the living regarding the underworld and express their prayers for the immortality of the dead.

The clash of cultures between the North and the South during the Southern and Northern dynasties, as well as the frequent exchanges of religion and culture, added to the complexity and nuance of social concepts (Wang 2021). Under the regime of the Southern 南朝 dynasty (420–589), the celestial images of the tomb murals underwent new changes. These images included learned persons with lofty interests such as the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (Zhulin qixian 竹林七贤), Rong Qiqi 荣启期 (571–474 BCE) and four hermits, ever living in seclusion in the Southern Mountain (Nanshan sihao 南山四皓). The images of these people in the tomb murals reflect the projection of the cultural power of the nobles in the Eastern Jin dynasty in the tomb construction, as well as their imagination of the world of the dead. For example, the brick murals of “The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove and Rong Qiqi” 竹林七贤与荣启期图 were unearthed in the Huqiao 胡桥 and Jianshan 建山 tombs of the Southern dynasties in Danyang City 丹阳市, Jiangsu Province 江苏省. According to the archaeological reports, this mural is located behind the main chamber, with two symmetrical walls, on each of which half of the mural is painted, showing four figures (You 1980). The theme of the “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove and Rong Qiqi” in the murals of the tombs of scholars in the Southern dynasty is actually the embodiment of the aesthetic orientation of the scholars in the Wei and Jin dynasties in the face of death. In 1957, a brick tomb with a colored mural was unearthed in Xuzhuangcun 许庄村, Deng County 邓县, Nanyang City 南阳市, and the archaeologists deduced that the tomb was from the Liu Song Period of the Southern dynasty 南朝宋 (420–479) (Zheng 2002). The four men depicted in the mural are sitting opposite each other in pairs, with long hair down to their shoulders, wide robes, and wide sleeves, playing the zither or *sheng* 笙. On the left side of the portrait, the words “four hermits in the Southern Mountain” are inscribed. The pictorial bricks unearthed at the same time as the “Picture of the Four Hermits Living in the Southern Mountain” not only depict scenes from life, such as guards and followers, ox carts traveling, and music and dancing, but also subjects related to Confucian ethics and filial piety, such as “Guo Ju Buried His Own Son” (Guo Ju mai’er) 郭巨埋儿, “Lao Lai Entertained his Parents” (Laolai yuqin 老莱娱亲) and the themes of ascending to immortality, such as Wang Ziqiao 王子乔, Fuqiu Gong 浮丘公 and so on. These pictures construct and reproduce the material and spiritual world of the tomb owner. They also show the secular life of the tomb owner’s time and the celestial landscape that existed in people’s imagination.

At the same time, paintings of filial sons (xiaozi tu 孝子图) were also added to the celestial scenes of tomb murals in the Northern dynasty. Zou Qingquan 邹清泉 argues:



北魏孝子画像中大孝题材的选择、刻画位置向棺与棺床的转移、山泽的出现、孝子的仙人装束、叙事性的消解皆是与‘孝悌之至，通于神明’的图像内涵与墓葬功能相适合的历史选择。

Items such as the selection of filial subject in the portrait of dutiful son in the Northern Wei dynasty, the transfer of the depiction position to the coffin and the coffin platform, the appearance of mountains and marsh, the fairy costume of dutiful son and the resolution of the narrative are all historical choices suitable for the image connotation of ‘the most dutiful will move the immortals to heaven’ and the function of the tomb (Zou 2007).

Although the Northern Wei was a regime founded by Xianbei, royal members devoted themselves to Sinicization and commended the Confucian filial piety culture. “The Filial Son” in the tomb mural is the embodiment of Confucian culture, which was widespread among the court and the common people.

In the Northern and Southern dynasties, complex and illusory scenes in the murals were gradually reduced. Couples feasting and guards became the new themes. “Fuqi Yanyin Tu” 夫妻宴饮图 (A Couple’s Banquet) and “Chema Chuxing Tu” 车马出行图 (Traveling with Horses and Chariots), found in a Northern Wei dynasty tomb located in Shaling 沙岭, Datong City 大同, Shanxi 山西, are representative examples. According to the archaeological reports, there are scenes of a male master holding a whisker, zhuwei 麈尾, and the couple sitting on the couch in the lacquer painting and in the mural. The murals in the tomb also depict scenes such as heavily armed horseback-riding troops, light-packed cavalry, military music on horseback, traveling with chariots and horses, and feasting, as well as Fuxi and Nüwa, mythical creatures, cooking, threshing grain, killing sheep, brewing wine, and so on (Datong Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2006). The “Che Ma Chu Xing Tu” in the mural differs a lot from the “Traveling of River God” (hebo chuxing 河伯出行) of the Han dynasty. Furthermore, oxcarts and pommel horses can be seen frequently in the Wanzhang 湾漳 Tomb in Hebei Province 河北省 (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo and Hebei Sheng Wenwu Yanjiusuo 2003) and Xu Xianxiu’s 徐显秀 (502–571) Tomb in Shanxi Province 山西省 (Taiyuan Shi Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2005). In addition to the northern region, the tomb of Huo Chengsi 霍承嗣 (d. 396), excavated in Zhaotong County 昭通县, Yunnan Province 云南省, is located in the southwest (Yu 1997). The murals around the tomb are divided into upper and lower layers, with a band pattern in the middle as the boundary. The lower part mainly reflects life scenes. The upper layer, consisting of gods, beasts and clouds, is mostly mythological. Below the eastern wall is an honor guard procession of thirteen people holding banners. In general, the thoughts of idle talk and metaphysics, the theory of five spirits, and the theory of immortals after the Wei and Jin dynasties reflect people’s confusion and rediscovery of the value of life. The charm of the personalities of the Seven Sages of Bamboo Grove and other reclusive persons began to be respected by scholars. The religious view of life and death and the traditional view of burial collided and merged with each other, promoting the diversification of the figures in the tomb murals.

Taoism became increasingly popular, and the concept of immortality spread widely in the Sui and Tang dynasties. Thus, Taoist images in tomb art also emphasized the concept of “ascending to immortality”, and white cranes soaring in the clouds became the main symbol of the decoration concept in tombs. For instance, the following pictures were found in archaeological excavations: “Yunzhong Chema Tu” 云中车马图 (Chariots and Horses Traveling in the Clouds) in the tomb of Princess Changle 长乐公主 (621–643) (Yu 2014); “Shuxia Laoren Tu” 树下老人图 (Old Man under the Tree) in the tombs of Liang Yuanzhen 梁元珍 (d. 699), Wei Hao 韦浩 (d. 692), Xue Jing 薛敞 (678–720) and Han Xiu 韩休 (673–740) (Ma 2011); “Xianhe Tu” 仙鹤图 (Crane) in the tombs of Li Chengxia 李澄霞 (621–690), Princess Yongtai 永泰公主 (685–701), Wei Jiong 韦洞 (677–692), Prince Jie Min 节愍太子 (d. 707), Li Daojian 李道坚 (685–738), imperial concubine Doulu 豆卢 (662–740), the abdicated emperor Li Xian 让皇帝李宪 (679–742) and the eunuch named Gao Lishi 高力士 (690–762);<sup>7</sup> “Sishen Tu” 四神图 (Four Gods) in the tombs of Princess Changle 长乐公主

(621–643), Princess Xincheng 新城公主 (634–663), Prince Yide 懿德太子 (682–701), Princess Yongtai 永泰公主, and Prince Jiemin 节愍太子 (d. 707).<sup>8</sup> It can be inferred that the owners of these tombs were mostly members of the imperial family, high-ranking dignitaries, and other upper-class social figures. The tombs were mainly distributed in the core area during the Tang dynasty, reflecting the great influence of Taoist immortal thought.

The idea of the underworld has changed and evolved as the idea of a multi-layered underworld gradually emerged. In the Qin and Han dynasties, the concept of the underworld was the result of the gradual development and evolution of indigenous concepts, mostly referred to as “huangquan 黄泉” (netherworld), “youdu 幽都” (secluded capital), “dixia 地下” (underground), “haoli 蒿里” (graveyard), “xiali 下里” (underground) and “tufu 土府” (underground residence) in the literature. As a result, the concept of the “soul returning to Mount Tai” was often described in poems. For instance, “Song of Plaintive” 怨诗行 states that “when people are living, they can go anywhere, but they will eventually return to Mount Tai. The joy of life has not been enjoyed, people suddenly died.”<sup>9</sup> The poet Lu Ji 陆机 (261–303) also wrote such a poem:

泰山一何高，迢迢造天庭。峻极周已远，层云郁冥冥。  
梁甫亦有馆，蒿里亦有亭。幽途延万鬼，神房集百灵  
Mount Tai is very high and extends to the sky.  
Too high to see around, clouds building up appear to be particularly dim.  
There are posthouses on Liangfu Mountain and pavilions in Haoli.  
Many ghosts are greeted on the way to the dark world  
and innumerable apparitions gather in the sacred room (Guo 1979).

The Buddhist concept of karma and reincarnation has connected heaven, hell and human world since the Wei and Jin dynasties. The imagination of the underworld had an impact on the local concept of the post-death world, mainly manifesting in the form of the lotus pattern, Moni 摩尼 beads, and other decorative patterns in the internal structure of tombs. In the south, along with the wide spread of Buddhism among the upper classes and ordinary people in the Eastern Wu 东吴 (229–280) and Eastern Jin 东晋 (317–420) dynasties, Buddhist statues served as decorative themes in the tombs in the Yangtze River basin. Thirty-two tombs with Buddhist statues or funerary articles with Buddhist statues have been excavated from between The Three Kingdoms period 三国 (220–280) and the Western Jin 西晋 (265–317) dynasty (Wu 2005a). Meanwhile, unearthed in Turpan, northwest of China, the “Litigation Documents of the Ghostdom between Zhao Huo and his mother in Gaoning County, Gaochang City, in the second Years of YuanHe of the Northern-Liang” 北凉缘禾二年高昌郡高宁县赵货母子冥讼文书 recorded “King Yanluo” 盐罗大王, which is the earliest record of Yama in Chinese popular literature. The documents present the Buddhist concept of judgment in hell in written form, along with the gradual improvement of the construction of the bureaucratic system in the underworld (You 2007). Under the joint influence of the Buddhist concept of the “hell trial”, the Taoist concept of “The Great God of Fengdu” 酆都大帝 and the secular idea of “the judgment of hell”, the imagination of the underworld become increasingly rich.

In the Southern and Northern dynasties, the idea of Buddhist hell judgment continued to be popular among the folk, and descriptions of hell gradually increased in the folk literature. The ruler of hell, Yama, appeared in tales of strange creatures (zhiguai xiaoshuo 志怪小说). In the Sui and Tang dynasties, Yama’s status in the underworld was continuously promoted. As Shao Yingtao 邵颖涛 argues, “the belief of Mount Tai was on the rise... A system of the underworld centered on Mount Tai was widely circulated among the people in Tang dynasty... The belief that Mount Tai rules ghosts is deeply rooted in people’s hearts” (Shao 2014). Mount Tai and hell were two popular underworld systems in the Tang dynasty. As the masters of these two underworld systems, The Lord of Mount Tai (Taisihan fujun 泰山府君) and Yama occupied equal positions in the Tang people’s concept of the underworld. The number of deities in the underground world during the Tang dynasty increased from three Kings to ten Kings. The emergence of the Dunhuang manuscript, *Su-*

*tra of the Ten Kings* (*Fo shuo shi wang jing* 佛说十王经) marked the formation of a systematic and theoretical system in the latter period of development of the underworld.

The belief of the “Mount Hua governing ghosts” also appeared in the Tang dynasty, indicating the popularity of concepts such as heaven and hell, the Mount Tai governing ghosts, the soul returning to the East Sea, and the Mount Hua governing ghosts in the Medieval China, which were believed by people in different regions; together, they reflect the diversification of belief in the underworld among the people (Jia 2002). The evolution of the imagination of the underworld demonstrates people’s constant concern with death; the notion that life continues in the form of ghosts after death is more reflective of people’s attempts to transcend death.

Overall, people in the Han dynasty already had a rich imagination of the underworld. The images of ascending immortals, and the burial objects and rot-proof technology in the Mawangdui Han Tomb in Changsha all reflect the life consciousness of Han people. However, when Confucianism was dominant, these tales of the underworld mostly became the imagination of marginalized<sup>10</sup> peoples. During the political turmoil of the Wei and Jin dynasties, life became fragile, and the Confucian ethical order was shaken. Thus, the awakening of life consciousness gradually became an important part of spiritual consciousness. Under the influence of Taoism and Buddhism, people broke the boundaries of original Confucian thought in spirit and reconstructed the underworld, which was presented through many aspects of burial.

#### 4. Ghost Marriage and Soul Evocations: The Exploration and Construction of the Concept of Life and Death in Ancient Tombs

The ancient Chinese formed their own judgment of the relationship between *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄. Yu Yingshi, in an article titled “‘Soul, Comes Back!’—On the Transformation of Chinese Ideas of Soul and Afterlife before the Introduction of Buddhism” 魂兮归来——论佛教传入以前中国灵魂与来世观念的转变, argues that:

最迟在公元前 2 世纪, 大概由于文化的融合, 中国灵魂二元论最后已定形。《礼记·郊特牲》里简洁地阐述了灵魂二元论的观点: “魂气归于天, 形魄归于地, 故祭求诸阴阳之义也。”……从上面引述的《礼记》中的段落里可以看出, 最迟在汉代, 以下的观点已被普遍接受: 魂属于阳类, 因而是一种主动的、属于天的物质; 而魄属于阴, 因而是一种被动的、属于地的物质。

By the second century BCE at the latest, probably due to the integration of cultures, the Chinese dualism of *ling* and *hun* had finally taken shape. The view of soul dualism was briefly expounded in ‘Jiao Te Sheng’ of *Liji*: ‘*hunqi* returns to the heaven, *xinghun* belongs to the ground, so offering sacrifices to seek the meaning of Yin and Yang’... From the above quoted passage in *The Book of Rites* 礼记, it can be seen that by the Han Dynasty at the latest, the following views had been generally accepted: the *hun* belongs to the Yang class and is therefore an active and heavenly substance; While the *po* belonging to the Yin and it is a passive substance belonging to the ground (Yu 2005).

Yu Yingshi believes that the folk concept of *hun* and *po* was clearly distinguished and also combined with the concept of Yin 阴 and Yang 阳 no later than the Western Han dynasty. This demonstrates that the ancient Chinese had insightful ideas about life and the contrast between Yin and Yang, the two states of existence. At the end of the Eastern Han dynasty, Buddhism spread to the east and brought new thoughts to the ancient Chinese concept of life and death. The Buddhist concept of Sunyata and Rupa and the indigenous concept of the “separation of *hun* and *po* while the soul is immortal” collided and fused, as evidenced by the large number of stories about spirits entering the underworld in tales of mystery and the supernatural during the Wei, Jin and Six dynasties 魏晋六朝 period (220–589). In the Northern and Southern 南北朝 dynasties (420–589), the soul was no longer separated from the body of the dead, nor was there an independent place for worship in the tomb. In the Sui and Tang dynasties, ghost marriage and soul evocation (*zhaohun* 招魂)

burial became popular funeral customs, reflecting new explorations of the concept of life and death.

During the Wei and Jin dynasties, the turbulent political situation, with corpses littered all over the country and numerous abandoned bodies of common people or scholars in ravines and ditches, laid a strong foundation for soul evocation funerals. Li Meitian 李梅田 and Li Tong 李童 thus argue that:

除了社会动荡、合葬、异地任官制度等原因外，祭祀方式的改变可能是一个重要原因，汉代以后发生了由庙祭向墓祭的改变，墓葬和宗庙、祠堂一样成为安魂之所，墓葬既可藏形，亦可安魂。

In addition to the reasons of social unrest, joint burial and the system of serving as officials in other places, the change of sacrificial methods may be an important reason. After the Han Dynasty, temple sacrifice changed into tomb sacrifice. Tombs became places for the rest of the soul like ancestral temples and ancestral halls. The tomb can not only store the body, but also rest the soul (Li and Li 2019).

During the Eastern Jin dynasty, soul evocation funerals for the dead were prohibited, but the popularity of funerals for the dead was also demonstrated from a different angle, with them becoming so popular that official intervention was necessary. Fang Yaguang 方亚光 holds the opinion that:

民俗现象与历史现象在不同的历史时期呈现出互相交织的状态，并成为历史现象的重要补充。历史的发展，促进民俗的演变，民俗的变化反映着历史的进程。因此，通过民俗的背后，能够体察此时此地或彼时彼地的社会现象或社会问题。

The phenomenon of folk custom and the phenomenon of history interwoven in different historical periods and became an important supplement to the historical phenomenon. The development of history promotes the evolution of folklore while the change of folklore in turn reflects the course of history. Therefore, we can understand the social phenomenon or social problems here and now or then through the folk custom (Fang 1992).

The ancient custom of soul evocation funeral was formed by following this track.

Newly unearthed epitaphs provide numerous documents that can assist us in understanding the details of soul evocation funerals. Soul evocation funerals are represented in various ways in the epitaphs of the Tang dynasty. Some of them are described in clear terms, such as “worship the hand evocation” (*baishou* 拜手), “summon the soul of the magistrate”, “respectfully call the soul of the departed mother”, while others are vague expressions, such as “bound souls”, “spirits burial”, “clothes and hats buried”, “serve one’s clothes and curtain”, and “souls be reborn”. Parts of them imitated soul evocation (*zhao-hun* 招魂) in the *Chu Ci* 楚辞 and used a sentence pattern with the Chinese character “xi” 兮 in two kinds of epitaph, *zhi* 志 and *ming* 铭. For example, in the “Epitaph and Preface of the Former JingZhao Prefecture and XuanHua Prefecture, General in Charge of the Guard and Hengye Army Surnamed Fan” 故京兆府宣化府折冲摄右卫郎将横野军副使樊公墓志铭并序, it states: “come back, soul! You can’t travel in the north. The north has different customs and there are many jackals and wolves. Ice and snow are piled up and poison gas is everywhere in the wilderness. Come back, soul, and rest here (Zhou 1992)!” This reflects the fact that the function of soul evocation burial was to comfort the dead and give comfort to souls who died unexpectedly, where no body is available. Some epitaphs also recorded the reason and process of holding a soul burial for the tomb owner. For example, “The Epitaph and Preface of Former District Defender Yuan Zhen in Qiantang County of Hangzhou of the Tang” 唐故杭州钱唐县尉元公真墓志铭并序 said that the tomb owner Yuan Zhen in Qiantang County of Hangzhou was temporarily buried in Heyin County because of the war at that time, and that the tomb owner had no son. After the end of the war in the fourth year of the Dali dynasty (769), a soul evocation burial was held to re-bury the soul in Jingu Township of Luoyang; the epitaph says:



春秋四十，以至德二年五月二日，遇疾终于河阴县。秀而不实，昔贤所叹；歿而无子，冥冥何依？时属艰虞，兵戈未息。乃权厝于县佛果寺墓园内。贼臣思明，再侵京邑，纵暴豺虎，毒虐人神。丘垄遂平，失其处所。……大历四年七月八日，招魂归葬于口南金谷乡焦古村，从先茔，礼也。

He lived to be 40 years old and died of illness in Heyin County on the 2nd day of the fifth month, the second year of Zhide reign (757). Being fine in appearance but empty in substance was what the sages lamented. Dead without a son made him lonely in the darkness without dependence. The situation of the times was extremely chaotic and the war was not over, so his body was temporarily lodged in the garden in the Buddha Fruit Temple of the county. The traitor Shi Siming once again attacked the capital city and connived at his men's killing the people, so the hills became flat and people had no place to live... On the 8th day of the eighth month, the fourth year of the Dali calendar 大历四年 (769), summoned soul was buried again in Jiaogu Village, Jingu Township and attached to the ancestors' graves. This was a ritual practice (Wu 1995; Zhou 1992, pp. 1767–68).

In addition to the war, long journeys could also pose much difficulty in terms of moving a body back, so soul evocation burials are necessary. For example, Zhang Wenxu's 张文绪 (d. 769) term of office in Longxi 陇西 County had expired, so he lived in Didao 狄道 County, Linzhou 临州. He died of disease in the eighth year of Tianbao (749), and was buried in the north of the county. Because the soul was far away, he was buried by way of evocation:

君讳文绪，字文绪，南阳人也。……大历四年八月廿二日，终于唐林县。次子庭，异乡独宦，举翼难成。念衰祸之偏口，恨负天之何罪。呜呼！属西戎尚口，尊灵远寄。迁举靡遂，攀号溃心。空招万里之魂，望就九原之宅。以大历四年十月九日，葬于北口口北平原，礼也。

The gentleman's name was Wenxu, and his style was also Wenxu. He was from Nanyang... He died in Tanglin County on the 22nd day of the eighth month, the fourth year of the Dali reign. His second son named Zhang Ting was an official in afar and could not arrive on time. Thinking of his father's death, he was very sad and hated heaven's ruthlessness. Alas! Living alone in a distant land, with father's soul, the son wanted to move his father's body to hometown but he could not, so he cried bitterly and was heartbroken. He could only call his father's soul thousands of miles away, hoping it would return to his hometown's house. On the 9th day of the ninth month, the fourth year of the Dali reign, Zhang Wenxu was buried in the plains, which followed the etiquette system (Zhou and Zhao 2001).

The poet Zhang Ji 张籍 (766–830) wrote a quatrain titled “Grievance of The Wife of the Soldier” (Zhengfu yuan 征妇怨):

九月匈奴杀边将，汉军全没辽水上。  
万里无人收白骨，家家城下招魂葬。  
In the ninth month, the Xiongnu killed many generals  
and all the Han troops died.  
There is no one to collect corpses on the vast wilderness,  
thus people can only hold soul evocation burial (Xu 2011).

It describes the situation where, because of the long journeys required, relatives are not able to collect the corpses of family members who died in the war; therefore, they have to summon souls and then bury them. There were two main types of soul evocation burial in the Tang dynasty: shaping a body with straw and other materials and evoking the dead; and evoking the soul of the dead using their clothes. The “Epitaph and Preface of the Former Magistrate of Nanhe County, Xingzhou, Gentleman Cui from Qinghe” (唐故邢州南和县令清河崔府君墓志铭并序) recorded that:

范阳夫人之歿也，即殯于偃师县漕口之北。世故流离，五十余□□无旧老，孰辨丘封。有同五父之引，莫遂西阶之葬。然以乡县接联，精□□远。且云非古，因以从宜。今所以衣服刍灵之设，如合祔之礼焉。

After Lady Fan Yang died, she was buried in the north of Caokou, Yanshi County. The country was in a chaotic state and people were displaced. ...Who can distinguish the graves of their relatives? Therefore, there is no way to bury them according to the proper rituals. But because the hometown is far away, we can only choose the appropriate way according to the situation. Now we use clothes and a straw figure to carry out the funeral, following the ritual of the couple being buried together (Zhou 1992, p. 2180).

Soul evocation burial was a universally recognized funeral custom during the Tang dynasty. Zhang Huanjun 张奂君 points out that, compared with Wei and Jin dynasties, soul evocation burial was not only institutionalized, but also became a fixed folk custom to be followed by scholars and common people in the Tang dynasty (Zhang 2012). The prohibition and popularity of soul evocation burial reflected the change in people's perception that the spirit and bodily forms were separate entities. Prohibitionists believed that, after death, the bodily form and spirit were separated. The bodily form was placed in the coffin, and the soul and the spirit were placed in the ancestral temple. They should not be mixed. Supporters believed that soul evocation burial helped filial children express their sorrow, and was humane and conformed to human feelings.

The popularity of ghost weddings (*minghun* 冥婚) also reflected the medieval concept of treating the dead as if they were alive during that time. Although ghost marriage was held in the underworld, it used the rites and rules adopted in human society. The concept of the immortal soul and ancestor worship was the fundamental reason for its establishment. Ghost marriage was a way of providing spiritual sustenance for the living, which penetrated the special forms of "life" and "death", while also at the same time blurring people's understanding of the boundary between life and death. In the Wei and Jin dynasties, officials acquiesced to ghost marriages. For example, Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220) asked for a ghost marriage for his beloved son Cao Chong 曹冲 (196–208), He "arranged Zhen's dead daughter to be buried together with Cao Chong" (Chen 2000, vol. 10, p. 580). Cao Rui 曹叡 (206–239), the Ming Emperor 明帝 of Wei, also arranged a ghost marriage for his beloved daughter, who died: "In the 6th year of Taihe (232), his beloved daughter Cao Shu 曹淑女 (232–232) passed away young and was awarded the posthumous title of Princess Yi of Pingyuan 平原懿公主 and a temple was built for her. Then Zhen Huang 甄黄 (fl. 3rd CE) was buried together with the princess" (Chen 2000, vol. 5, p. 163).

Until the Sui and Tang dynasties, ghost marriage was still popular. Ghost marriage is recorded repeatedly in the relevant literature and works. Among the Dunhuang documents, there are the "Lucky and Doom Etiquette System Book" 吉凶书仪, written in the fourth month of the thirteenth year of the Dazhong 大中 reign (859), Zheng Yuqing's 郑余庆 (745–820) *Newly Issued Etiquette of Fortune and Misfortune Events of Tang Dynasty, together with a Preface* (*Da Tang xinding jixiong shuyi yibu bingxu* 大唐新定吉凶书仪一部并序), Du Youjin's 杜友晋 (fl. 10th CE) *New Manual for Writing Etiquette* (*Xinding shuyi jing* 新定书仪镜) and *Newly Collected Etiquette for Fortune and Misfortune* (*Xinji jixiong shuyi* 新集吉凶书仪), written in 930, all of which contain ghost marriage records, answers to ghost marriage application letters, and ghost marriage sacrificial inscriptions written by parents on behalf of their lost sons and daughters. In practice, ghost marriage was regarded as a marriage in the human world. The parents of both sides referred to each other as relatives by marriage, and helped and supported each other economically and socially. Unearthed epitaphs from the Tang dynasty record much about the phenomenon of ghost marriages. For example, the "Epitaph and Preface of Lu Qinli of the Great Tang" (*Da Tang gu Lu Qinli muzhi bingxu* 大唐故卢勤礼墓志并序) states that Lu "was eighteen years old and died in a private house. Alas... So he married the daughter of Cui Xuanzhen, the magistrate of Yangzhai County, Xuzhou, and they were buried together on the 25th of the eleventh month, the first year of Yonglong (680). This was in accordance with the etiquette" (Mao 2018). Another exam-

ple is the “Epitaph and Preface of Recluse Elder Jia of the Tang” (*Tang gu chushi Jiagong muzhiwen bingxu* 唐故处士贾公墓志文并序), which records that:

既修文于地府，亦埋鬼于泰山。青苔深，白杨密，嗟嗟贾生居此室。遵古制以冥婚，结嘉偶于开氏。曾祖德，楚州山阳令。祖永简，皇朝宣州溧阳县令。父休元，国子博士。

He had issued document in the office of the underground world and buried ghosts in Mount Tai. The moss was deep and the poplar was flourishing. Scholar Jia lived here. Following the ancient rules and holding ghost weddings, a fine marriage is bond with the Kai family. His great grandfather named Jia De was the magistrate of Shanyang County, Chuzhou. His grandfather named Jia Youngjian was the magistrate of Liyang County, Xuanzhou. His father named Jia Xiuyuan was an erudite in the Imperial College (Zhao 2007).

The ghost marriage also required a “family match”. It can be seen that the family’s rank and political factors also exerted an important influence on the choice of the partner for the ghost marriage. In Tang tales, ghost marriages were mostly held in the middle and lower classes of society. These tales vividly reproduce the custom of ghost marriage in the Tang dynasty by fictional means, such as “Ji You” 季攸 in the *Extensive Records of the Taiping Era* (*Taiping Guang Ji* 太平广记), “The Woman Prenames Lu of Changzhou” (Changzhou Lushi nü 长洲陆氏女), “Wei Jing” 魏靖 and “Wang Yi” 王乙 in *The Book Recording Numerous Anecdotes* (*Guang yi ji* 广异记), as well as “Asking for a Ghost Marriage” (Qiu minghun 求冥婚) in *Reference and Admonishing Records* (*Jianjie lu* 鉴诫录). Although most of these stories are fictional, they still demonstrate the attitude of the middle and lower classes towards ghost marriage, as well as their acceptance and practice of ghost marriage. They regarded ghost marriage as an extension of and compensation for real marriage. The poetry of the Tang dynasty also includes mention of the ghost marriages occurring at that time. For example, Wei Huang’s 韦璜 (fl. 8th CE) poem “Ghost Meeting with Dugu Mu” (Yu Dugu Mu minghui shi 与独孤穆冥会诗) was created based on the legend of the ghost marriage between Dugu Mu and the Head of Linzi 临淄 County.

The rise of ghost marriage was the result of the changes in the concept of life during the Tang dynasty. Parents hoped their children could have a happy life after death. Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) once wrote an article titled “Dejing Holding Ghost Marriage and Neighbors Reporting Violations while the Accused Did Not Commit Crimes” (De Jing jia shang lin ren gao wei jin Jing bu fu 得景嫁殇邻人告违禁景不伏), in which he criticized ghost marriages and used the *Rites of Zhou* (Zhouli 周礼) to explain Confucian principles (Xie 2011). However, ghost marriages were still widely popular in the middle to late Tang dynasty.

Xunzi 荀子 (313–238 BCE) held the view that “funerals were to decorate the dead as if he was alive, and people try to send off the dead by highly imitating the state of being alive. So the dead seemed alive, the deceased seemed to still exist”.<sup>11</sup> That is to say, “serving the dead is just like serving the living and serving the deceased is just like serving the existing” (Guo 2012). The popular practices of soul evocation burial and ghost marriage in Medieval China showed that people at that time treated death as another life, similar to the concept of life and death conversion that people believed. In addition, this is also related to the folk belief that people expected the reincarnation of the dead through vegetarian fasting for seven days and soul transcendence.

## 5. Conclusions

Tombs implicitly act as material relics. Although they do not directly express views on life and death or spiritual belief, they provide a unique perspective, with the concept of the underworld being manifested via social beliefs through details such as the tomb’s structure, and the burial objects and tomb murals contained therein. The beliefs about life and death that are reflected in the burial ceremony are directly related to people’s outlook on life, and are influenced by social thoughts and views of the world. After the end of the Han dynasty, people were immersed in the strong emotions of life. Changes in the

concepts of life and death directly affected the layout of the internal structure of tombs. Facing the ups and downs of life, reality was more likely to arouse people's interest and thinking. Ghost marriage and soul evocation burial met the requirement for the dead to be able to return to their ancestral tomb with the help of the rituals of soul summoning, marriage, and other secular ceremonies. The dead were gathered in the underworld where the deceased ancestors lived, so that they might enjoy the rights of ancestor protection and ancestral worship. Thus, the spirits of the living can be comforted. The burial ceremony is a sad ending, but also the beginning of a beautiful story. The funeral rites of Medieval China reflected the efforts of the living to make up for their regrets in life and to realize the perfection of life for the dead, which not only reflects the philosophical outlook and view of life of those alive, but also represents the social customs and funeral rites at the time.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See, for example, Wu Hong's Monuminality in Ancient Chinese Art and Architecture 中国古代艺术与建筑中的纪念性, Fine Art in Etiquette 礼仪中的美术, Where are the Residual Monuments 残碑何在, Fine Art Under the Netherworld: Macro Ancient Chinese Tombs 黄泉下的美术: 宏观中国古代墓葬, Fine Art in Time and Space 时空中的美术.
- <sup>2</sup> "Life concept" 生命观 refers to the understanding of life and death and the concept formed by the individual life. "Life consciousness" 生命意识 refers to the conscious awareness of each existing living individual to his own life, including survival consciousness, safety consciousness and death consciousness. The above two concepts overlap in connotation, but in terms of extension, life consciousness is broader than life concept. This article makes a slight distinction.
- <sup>3</sup> "古礼庙祭, 今俗墓祀。……墓者, 鬼神所在, 祭祀之处" (Wang 1990). While ancient etiquette dictated the use of temple offerings, today's fashion favors burial offerings. ... In Chinese culture, the tomb is a place where ghosts and gods are located and where people offer sacrifices.
- <sup>4</sup> "在唐代, 一般品官, 即使是正一品, 只要没有皇帝的殊荣, 也是不能使用双室砖墓的" (Su 1995). In the Tang Dynasty, only the emperor could use the two-chamber brick tomb, and all officials, even dignitaries of Zhengyipin, did not have this right.
- <sup>5</sup> "Pile molding" 堆塑 was a decorative method for creating a three-dimensional pattern and pasting it onto the utensil. Pile plastic bottles 堆塑瓶 are an instrument used in the underworld, also known as barn jar 谷仓罐, soul bottle 魂瓶, originated in the Western Han dynasty, prospered in The Three Kingdoms, flourished in the Song dynasty, and declined in the Republic of China. It was a kind of burial object mainly popular in southern China.
- <sup>6</sup> "未能事人, 焉能事鬼". See (Cheng 1990). If you can't serve people, you can't serve ghosts and gods.
- <sup>7</sup> The number and distribution of mural tombs of the Tang dynasty with the Painting of Crane are shown in Feng (2020).
- <sup>8</sup> The number and distribution of mural tombs of the Tang dynasty with the Four Gods Painting are shown in Wu (2017).
- <sup>9</sup> 齐度游四方, 各系泰山录。人间乐未央, 忽然归东岳。(Guo 1979). Humans travel as long as they live, eventually returning to the Tarzan gods who rule death. The happiness of the world has not ended, and suddenly the soul returns to Mount Tai, how short life is.
- <sup>10</sup> Marginalization "边缘化" mainly refers to a concept of burial that is different from the mainstream trend. In the Han dynasty, the colorful painted coffin unearthed in Mawangdui No. 1 Tomb in Changsha 长沙马王堆1号墓, the stone statue unearthed in Tengzhou West Household located in Shandong 山东滕州西户, the tomb murals unearthed from Xinmang 新莽 (9–23) to the early Eastern Han dynasty in Haotan, Dingbian, Shaanxi 陕西定边郝滩, and the mural paintings remaining in Wuliang Temple in Jiaxiang County, Shandong 山东嘉祥县, etc. All of the scenes were shaped with the fairy world as the background, and the characters were also dominated by fairies such as the West Queen Mother and the East Prince. This kind of convergence reveals that the imagination of immortals occupied the mainstream in the thinking of life and death of people during the Han dynasty.
- <sup>11</sup> 丧礼者, 以生者饰死者也, 大象其生以送其死也。故如死如生, 如亡如存, 终始一也。(Wang 1988). Funeral, is to decorate the deceased with the appearance of life, roughly imitating the appearance of his life when the deceased is sent away. Therefore, serve the dead as if they were living, and the dead as if they were alive, and both life and death can be done according to the provisions of rites.



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