

Buddhist Elements in Royal Tombs of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms

Period of the 10th Century

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The impact that the introduction of Buddhism had on burial customs in China has long been a question that has captured the close attention scholars. In seeking the answer, many scholars have focused on Buddhist visual elements in tombs since the Eastern Han period to analyze and discuss this from various perspectives. The Buddhist outlook on life and death can be seen to have gradually penetrated Chinese burial customs, but only is revealed in fragmentary ways. It has not created any obvious changes in the traditions of funerary art. However, after the Tang period the situation began to change, especially in the tenth century during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period when Buddhist elements began to be increasingly apparent. There are two important aspects of this can be seen in: 1] influence of stupa burials of monks on the design of tombs of laypersons, and 2] the influence of the making of images of abbots containing their ashes (true likeness) on burials of laypersons. Furthermore these two kinds of traces were deeply imbued with Buddhist funerary concepts. This paper focuses on evidence of a few Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period royal tombs to discuss the beginning of new forms of funerary arts and its relationship with later tombs.

First, the paper examines the tombs of Wang Jian and Meng Yan of the Former and Later Shu, two royal tombs of the Southern Tang, the Wu Yue kingdom tomb of Qian Yuan'guan, the tomb of Wu Hanyue and others for Buddhist elements and the relationship of the deceased with Buddhism. The above-ground architectural forms of the Southern Han Kangling and Wang Jian tomb are considered to have features of stupa mounds. These stupa-tombs may derive from tombs of the Tang period in Khotan and can be seen to have a close relationship with esoteric and Chan Buddhist sects. During the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period, with the continuation and spread of Esoteric Buddhism in peripheral areas of China, the stupa-tomb became an important architectural type of burial in the Song, Liao, Jin, and Xixia Kingdoms. This influence extended as far as Japan.

Secondly, through discussion of the modeled or carved images of the deceased in the burials of Wang Jian and the Kangling, this paper argues that the new funerary art is closely related to Buddhism, especially in the concepts of *dharmakaya* and the reverence to the relic image of the Zen masters. The making of tomb figures in the likeness of the deceased which appear in the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period and also to the subsequent representation of the of the husband and wife shown seated facing one another in the brick tombs of the Song and Jin period—these expand on the traditional theme of the “the deceased husband and wife feasting.”

In summary, these royal tombs of the tenth century not only represent the introduction of Buddhist content into burials in China, but, in this period, traditional Chinese funerary concepts went through a process of interaction with Buddhist burial customs and produced new traditions of funerary arts.