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Ritual Practices and Material Culture: The Provenance and Transformation of Stūpas in Medieval China

Wen Sun

Institute of Humanities, Xidian University, Xi'an 710071, China; sinosunwen@163.com

Abstract: This paper examines how Chinese people perceived and accepted Buddhist *stūpas* in medieval China. Doctrinal and ritualistic developments can potentially contribute to the emergence of new ritual objects. Ideological connotations of *stūpas* witnessed a transition associated with the transformation of the *stūpa* cult in China. *Stūpa* burial became progressively accessible to ordinary clerics and laypeople who showed sympathy with Buddhism. The similarity between *stūpas* and tombs in terms of funerary function largely determined people's interpretations of *stūpas* in the early medieval period. However, tombs cannot be the precise manifestation of *stūpas* in medieval China. *Stūpas* evolved into multidimensional meanings in medieval China. The perceptions of *stūpas* witnessed an ongoing process of reconstruction, which reveals how cultural transmission and transformation work throughout history.

Keywords: Buddhism; *stūpa*; ritual; material culture; medieval China

1. Introduction

Modern scholars tend to delineate the genesis of *stūpas* from the perspective of architectural manifestations associated with the symbolic meanings of each part of *stūpas* (Zhanru 2006, pp. 183–86). However, questions such as the transformation and reception of *stūpas* in China remain unsolved. According to *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, the Chinese character *ta* 塔 is explained as follows:

A tumulus, or mound, for the bones or remains of the dead, or for other sacred relics, especially of the Buddha, whether relics of the body or the mind, e.g., bones or scriptures. As the body is supposed to consist of 84,000 atoms, Aśoka is said to have built 84,000 stūpas to preserve relics of Śākyamuni. Pagodas, dagobas, or towers with an odd number of stories are used in China for the purpose of controlling the geomantic influences of a neighborhood (Soothill and Hodous 2000, p. 398).

The above excerpt provides a general explanation of Buddhist *stūpas* in modern scholarship. However, how did people explain such an exotic term in medieval China?

In medieval China, *stūpas* can be divided into two categories in terms of their distinct commemorative and funerary functions.[1] First, as spiritual symbols of Buddhism, these *stūpas* are usually built in monasteries for enshrining sacred relics, such as *śarīra*, Buddha images, statues, and *sūtras*. Second, individual funerary *stūpas* erected for deceased monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen, and ordinary people. Such funerary *stūpas* erected for individuals derived from Indian prototypes erected for the Buddha and the saints. Additionally, similar to early Buddhist steles erected for accumulating merit and praying for blessings, there emerged the votive *stūpas*, which were erected for family members, local communities, or the emperors. *Stūpas* evolved into different variants with distinctive connotations and significance. This paper aims to explore people's conceptions formulated and changed associated with the reception of Buddhist *stūpas* as familiar material culture in medieval China.

2. The Etymology of *Ta* 塔 in Chinese Literature

The Sanskrit term "stūpa", originally denoting a funerary mound, can be traced back to the Neolithic period (Pant 1976). Buddhism transformed the original meaning of *stūpa* to a higher, transcendental level, something continually existent as a symbol of Buddhism and a ritual object. The earliest surviving Buddhist *stūpas* are the mud *stūpas* at Piprahwa and Vaishali (Singh 2008, p. 362). The *stūpa* became an essential symbol in early and later Indian Buddhism because of its ability to spiritually represent the Buddha and other departed saints (Ray 1994, p. 344). Serving at the outset as containers for the *śarīra* of the Buddha, *stūpas* subsequently developed new variants.

Original Buddhist *sūtras* state canonical limitations on who had the credentials of being worshiped in *stūpas* (e.g., T 7, 1: 200a20–b3; T377, 12: 903a9–a19; T 1421, 22: 173a6–a8). This tendency found continuity in Tibetan Buddhism, where *stūpa* burial is perceived as the funerary practice of the highest rank (Bsod nams Tshe ring 2003). In medieval China, by contrast, *stūpa* burial became progressively accessible to ordinary clerics and laypeople who showed sympathy with Buddhism. Remarkably, ideological connotations of *stūpas* witnessed a transition associated with the transformation of the *stūpa* cult in China. For example, the Chinese monk Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) accepted the distinction depicted in previous Buddhist scriptures on *stūpas* and *caityas*. He combined these Indian objects with traditional ancestor worship in China. He defined the relationship and distinction between *stūpas* and *caityas* as follows:

> The *Miscellaneous* [*Additions to the*] *Heart* [*Discourse*] states that [a reliquary] containing *śarīra* is called *stūpa*, while [a reliquary] without [*śarīra*] is called *caitya*. *Stūpas* are sometimes called *tapo*, and sometimes are called *toupo*, which is also designated as *zhong* [tombs] and *fangfen* [square graves]. *Caityas* are called [ancestral] temples. [Ancestral] temples symbolize the presence of ancestors. (Tak 2012, p. 361)[2]

> 雜心云：有舍利名塔，無者名支提。塔或名塔婆，或云偷婆，此云塚，亦云方墳。支提云廟。廟者，貌也. (T 1804, 40: 133c25–c26)

Here, *miao* 廟 refers to ancestral temples rather than ordinary Buddhist monasteries. Daoxuan drew an analogy between *caityas* and ancestral temples (*zumiao* 祖廟) rooted in ancestor worship, and he regarded *stūpas* as similar to traditional tombs. Ancestral temples were places where the descendants could make offerings and pay homage to their ancestors, perpetuating the memory of their ancestors and reminding the descendants of the prestige of their patrilineal clans. *Stūpas* or *caityas*, as Buddhist shrines, represent the presence of the Buddha, symbolizing the truth of Buddhist teachings. Such an analogy reveals the typical perceptions of *stūpas* in medieval Chinese literature. Wei Shou's 魏收 (506–572) *Wei shu* 魏書 (*The History of the Wei Dynasty*) provides a similar recounting related to *stūpas*, comparing *stūpas* to ancestral shrines (*zongmiao* 宗廟).[3] This interrelation is based on the similar commemorative function of ancestral temples/shrines and *stūpas*, providing the possibility for the analogy, which, in turn, reveals how people perceived *stūpas* in the medieval period. However, when and how the Chinese terminology *ta* 塔 frequently appeared and was widely used remains unclear.

Buddhist scriptures provide earlier evidence revealing the etymology of *stūpa* than lexicographical works compiled in later periods. The Chinese word *ta* 塔 was employed early in the Buddhist scriptures—*Bozhou sanmeijing* 般舟三昧經 (*Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sūtra*) and *Daoxing bore jing* 道行般若經 (*Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*)—translated by Lokakṣema (ca. 147–?), purportedly completed in the second year of the Hanguang 漢光 period in the Eastern Han dynasty (179).[4] It is plausible to assert that the genesis of the character *ta* was earlier than the Hanguang period. The Chinese word *ta* 塔 in these scriptures refers to a sacred space for enshrining the Buddha's *śarīra* (Zhuang 2015).

The annotation for the meaning and pronunciation of *ta* 塔 can be found as early as the Jin dynasty (265–420) in Ge Hong's 葛洪 (283–343) *Ziyuan* 字苑 (*Essays on Chinese Characters*).[5] With respect to the lexicographical works prior to the Tang dynasty, neither the ear-

liest extant Chinese character dictionary, *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (*Explaining Simple Graphs and Analyzing Compound Characters*) attributed to Xu Shen 許慎 (ca. 30–124), nor the Chinese phonetic work ordered by radicals in accordance with *Shuowen jiezi*, namely, *Yupian* 玉篇 (*Jade Chapters*) compiled by Gu Yewang 顧野王 (519–581) in 543,[6] contain an entry on *ta* 塔. However, it is plausible that the designation of *ta* 塔 had been accepted prior to the Tang dynasty. The first Chinese cleric who made his pilgrimage to India to seek complete copies of *Vinaya Piṭaka* was Faxian 法顯 (337–422), who composed the *Foguo ji* 佛國記 (*A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms*) after he returned to China. Faxian adopted the word *ta* 塔 in his work, which verifies that the designation of *ta* 塔 had been accepted in the Jin dynasty. Faxian delineated the Four Great *Stūpas*, in which the Bodhisattva cut off his flesh to ransom the dove, offered his eyes for other people, dedicated his head to a man, and threw down his body to feed a starving tigress. The word *ta* 塔 appears 43 times in *Foguo ji*, while the transliterations of *sudubo* 窣堵波 or *futu* 浮圖 are seldom used (T 1425, 22).[7]

During the Zhenguan 貞觀 period (627–649) and the Yonghui 永徽 period (650–655) in the Tang dynasty, the Buddhist lexicographical work, *Yiqiejing yinyi* 一切經音義 (*Pronunciation and Meaning in the Complete Buddhist Canon*), also known as *Datang zhongjing yinyi* 大唐眾經音義 (*Pronunciation and Meaning in the Buddhist Canon Complied During the Tang Dynasty*), compiled by Xuanying 玄應 (circa d.661),[8] contains entries on *ta* 塔 that enumerate various related expressions in Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures, such as the transliterated term *sutoupo* 蘇偷婆 (C 1163, 56: 994c3), and other disyllable translations, compare *tapo* 塔婆 (C 1163, 56: 6a18), *fota* 佛塔 (C 1163, 56: 899c9), *baota* 寶塔 (C 1163, 56: 905b15), *tamiao* 塔廟 (C 1163, 56: 906b21), and *toupo* 偷婆 (C 1163, 56: 970b8). It seems that disyllabic terms predominated in the Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures related to stūpas, at least prior to the Early Tang period. Later, Huilin 慧琳 (733–820) expanded the original version of Yiqiejing yinyi, known as Huilin yinyi 慧琳音義 (Pronunciation and Meaning in the Complete Buddhist Canon Compiled by Huilin), which is regarded as the archetype of the Chinese bilingual dictionary. Huilin continued to enumerate Buddhist terms in Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures. The most significant point is that Huilin stated that there was no record of the character ta 塔 in previous lexicographical works, except for Ge Hong's Ziyuan (T 2128, 54: 483b22). Similar to the description in Daoxuan's Buddhist work, the analogy between stūpas and ancestral temples is strongly verified in both Xuanying's and Huilin's works. Xuanying cited the explanation of miao from the Confucian work, Baihutong 白虎通 (The Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall), to explain the translated compound tamiao 塔廟. Borrowing indigenous terminologies to interpret Buddhist loanwords fostered the public acceptance of Buddhism. Similarly, Huilin adopted the glosses according to Ziyuan and Qieyun 切韻 (Cut Rhymes), establishing the semantic connection between stūpas and ancestral temples (T 2128, 54: 483b22).

In the Song dynasty, the Buddhist lexicographical work, *Fanyi mingyi ji* 翻譯名義集 (*Collection of Meanings and Terms in Translation*), compiled by Fayun 法雲, contains a relatively comprehensive explanation of *ta* based on the preceding lexicographical works and Chinese Buddhist literature. Examining Fayun's accounts is a way to figure out how people understood *stūpas* in medieval China. The *Jietan tujing* 戒壇圖經 mentioned by Fayun refers to the *Guanzhong chuangli jietan jing* 關中創立戒壇圖經 (*Illustrative Scripture on the Precept Platform Established in the Central Shaanxi Plain*), attributed to Daoxuan, who compared the precept platforms to *stūpas*. Daoxuan stated that the essential meaning of *stūpas* was the funerary function of enshrining the Buddha's bones. More remarkably, he further pointed out that tombs with square mounds on the top or round mounds denoted the significant meaning of *stūpas* according to the Tang Chinese (T 1892, 45: 809b6). The translations and interpretations of *stūpas* established a parallel between the funerary function of *stūpas* and traditional tombs. When clerics and literati strived to find substitutes to render the meanings of *stūpas*, the commemorative and funerary functions of ancestral temples and traditional tombs became the predominant elements in illustrating *stūpas*.

The striking significance of semantic examination, beginning with the etymology of *ta* 塔—its synonyms, metonymy, and correlations—is used to examine the preliminary conceptions of *stūpas* when Buddhism was introduced into China. Initially, clerics and literati strived to find parallels in Chinese indigenous culture to render *stūpas* conceivable and available to more audiences. The similarity between *stūpas* and tombs in terms of funerary function predominated the interpretations of *stūpas* in the early medieval period. The funerary function and ancestor worship played critical roles when the Chinese perceived *stūpas* as being similar to tombs. However, tombs cannot be the precise manifestation of *stūpas* in medieval China.

3. The Rise of *Stūpa* Construction in Early Medieval China

The Buddhist canonical texts provided the religious presuppositions to confirm the hallowed manifestation of *stūpas*. The spiritual significance of *stūpas* and the corresponding benefits related to *stūpa* worship promoted the reception of *stūpas* in medieval China. However, the ritual performance varied with the development of Buddhism in medieval China. The history of *stūpas* in early medieval China provides necessary clues for determining the social context to understand *stūpa* construction when Buddhism was introduced into China.

According to archaeological evidence, Buddhist elements were assimilated into traditional tombs since the Eastern Han dynasty, such as Buddhist images of *śarīra*, white elephants, and *stūpas*. Integrating Buddhist elements into conventional tombs implies that *stūpas*, as well as other Buddhist objects, were introduced into China no later than the late second century (Xie 1987; J. Shi 2014). Moreover, textual evidence provides another relatively comprehensive picture in terms of people's perceptions. The legendary stories about King Aśoka (circa 269–232 BCE) received great attention with the ascendancy of Buddhism in China. Aśoka is described as an enthusiastic worshiper who distributed relics to 100,000 people throughout the world and erected 84,000 *stūpas*, which inspired the Chinese to emulate his devotional conduct (Strong 2004, pp. 136–38). *Stūpas* came to be venerated as the signs of the presence of the Buddha and the eternal dharma, even if some *stūpas* had no relics enshrined within them. Ritualized practices became commonplace in front of *stūpas*.

Earlier in the Eastern Han dynasty, Emperor Ming 明帝 (28–75) erected a *stūpa* at the Baima Monastery 白馬寺 (in present-day Luoyang) (T 2122, 53: 383b4–b13). The *Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記 (*A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Luoyang*) states that a *Jetavana* was built above Emperor Ming's mausoleum after his death (Yang 1984, pp. 173–74). Then, ordinary people erected *stūpas* above their tombs by imitating Emperor Ming's Buddhist conceptions of funeral ritual in the hope of praying for blessings and divine protection, as the emperor had presumably done. The *Mouzi lihuo lun* 牟子理惑論 (*Mouzi on the Settling of Doubts*) is the first Buddhist apologetic treatise, although there is much controversy regarding the date and authenticity of the text (Ch'en 1973, pp. 36–40). Sengyou 僧佑 (445–518) quoted the accounts of Emperor Ming's dream from the *Mouzi lihuo lun* and expanded the plot in the *Hongming ji* 弘明集 (*Collected Essays on Buddhism*). However, the plot excludes the portrayal of *zhihuan* 祇洹; instead, it states that, above the mausoleum of Emperor Ming, Buddhist statues were sculpted. It can be inferred that there might have been groups of buildings, including a meditation hall above the mausoleum of Emperor Ming.[9] As indicated previously, Buddhist images or statues had been placed in traditional tombs in the Eastern Han dynasty. These Buddhist elements had been integrated with traditional funerals in early medieval China (Wu 1986). The combination of the empire-wide reputation of the emperor and the influence of Buddhism inspired ordinary people to erect *stūpas* above their tombs.

Although funerary *stūpas* did not comprise a large portion of *stūpas* in the Six Dynasties (220–589), Chinese monks acknowledged *stūpas* as a funerary form from the early medieval period. Pre-eminent Buddhist monks contributed to the process of promoting *stūpas* as a regular funerary form within the Buddhist community. Zhu Shixing 朱士行

(203–283) is regarded as the first Chinese monk and the first to make a pilgrimage to seek Buddhist sūtra in the Western Regions. He traveled to Yutian 于闐 (in the north of present-day Xinjiang Province) in the fifth year of the Ganlu 甘露 period in the Cao Wei 曹魏 dynasty (260). He obtained the original Sanskrit version of *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and later dedicated himself to transcribing this *sūtra* in Yutian. In 282, he sent his disciple to take his manuscripts back to Luoyang, while he chose to stay in Yutian until his death. According to the *Gao sengzhuan* 高僧傳 (*Biographies of Eminent Monks*), a *stūpa* was erected for Zhu Shixing after his death (T 2059, 50: 346c9–c14). As the purportedly first Chinese monk, who made a pilgrimage to the Western Regions, Zhu Shixing might be the first Chinese monk to be given a Buddhist funeral in the Western Regions. During the last years of the Western Jin dynasty (265–316), clerics from the Western Regions appeared to be given similar Buddhist funerals in Luoyang. For instance, Heluojie 訶羅竭 died in the eighth year of the Yuankang 元康 period (298). His disciples performed the cremation rite for him. However, as his body remained sitting in the fire without being destroyed, his disciples finally moved his body to a stone cave (shishi 石室) (T 2059, 50: 389a3). Zhu Fayi 竺法義 died in the fifth year of the Taiyuan 太元 period (380), and Emperor Xiaowu 孝武 (362–396) granted money and chose a place to erect a three-story stūpa for him (T 2059, 50: 350c16).

Apart from the *stūpas* erected for clerics and the *stūpas* indicative of objects of worship, the earliest *stūpa* recorded in Chinese literature might be the Xiangxiang *stūpa* 襄鄉浮圖 mentioned in the *Shuijing zhu* 水經注 (Y. Zhang 2007, p. 155). The Xiangxiang *stūpa* was erected during the Xiping 熹平 period (172–178) in the northwest of Shangqiu 商丘. The person buried under the *stūpa* is unknown, but his brother erected a stele inscribed with an inscription to praise his virtues during his lifetime. It is clear that the *stūpa* for this man of the Xiping period was perceived as a funerary object. However, this *stūpa* reveals no apparent connection with Buddhism.

Stūpas appeared to transcend their original functions in commemorative and funerary contexts in early medieval China. Soon after the Baima Monastery, the construction of the Futu Monastery 浮屠寺 in Xu Prefecture 徐州 indicates that Buddhism was popular with aristocrats as well as common folk. According to the biography of Tao Qian 陶謙 in the *Houhan shu* 後漢書 (*History of the Later Han Dynasty*), Ze Rong 笮融 (d. 195) built a *stūpa* for a political purpose. The *stūpa* built by Ze Rong was adorned with golden plates above and multi-storied below, surrounded by halls and corridors, representing the early architectural structure of *stūpas* in China. More remarkably, the *stūpa* built by Ze Rong was not a Buddhist *stūpa* for enshrining relics; instead, the *stūpa* served as a sign of Buddhism to assemble the local communities against the turbulent social situation. Ze Rong conducted such devotional conduct for a political purpose, to establish his social identity in Xu Prefecture. Since Buddhism had been popular in the Xu Prefecture since the early years of the Eastern Han, the religion was perceived as a powerful catalyst catering to the masses. Consequently, Ze Rong took advantage of Buddhism to establish his credentials as a benevolent figure.

Wei shu was the first official history containing a separate chapter for the history of Buddhism and Daoism, entitled *Shi Lao zhi* 釋老志 (*Treatises on Buddhism and Daoism*). *Shi Lao Zhi* provides an insight into the imperial patronage of Buddhism from the Han to Jin dynasties:

> In the time of Emperor Chang of the Han, Prince Ying of Ch'u delighted in observing Buddhist fasts and religious practices. He sent a *lang-chung-ling* to make a presentation of thirty pieces of yellow silk and white silk. He went to a minister of his own state and paid atonement for his sins. An Imperial edict said in response: The Prince of Ch'u reveres the Buddhist shrines. He purifies himself and fasts during three months. He has made a vow to his god. Why should we suspect him? Why should we doubt him? He must be repenting his sins. Let the ransom be returned and used to supplement the food of the upāsakas and śramaṇas. Let this be promulgated to all the provinces! In the time of Emperor Huan, HSIANG K'ai spoke of the Way of Buddha, the Yellow Emperor, and Lao-

tzǔ, and thereby remonstrated with His Majesty. He wished to cause His Majesty to love life-giving and hate killing, to lessen his desires and do away with extravagance, and to hold inaction highly. Emperor Ming of the Wei once wished to dismantle the reliquary west of the palace. A foreign śramaṇa then filled a golden basin with water, placed it in front of the palace building, and threw the relics into the water. Immediately a five-colored ray arose. Thereupon the Emperor sighed, saying, "If it were not divine, how could it do this?" On the former site of the reliquary was dug the Mêng-fan pool and lotus planted in its midst. Afterward there was an Indian monk, T'an-ko-chia-lo, who entered the Capital and publicized and translated the Discipline. It is the origin of śīla in China. After the Po-ma-ssǔ had been built in the Capital, the reliquaries were highly adorned and the paintings very lovely, and they became the model for all corners of the Empire. The general rule for reliquaries, still based on the old Indian form, is one, three, five, seven, or nine storeys. People of the world, learning the words one from the other, called them *fou-t'u* or *fo-t'u*. In the age of Tsin there were forty-two such reliquaries in the Capital. (Hurvitz 1956, pp. 45–47)[10]

Imperial patronage and elite involvement played significant roles in promoting the transmission of Buddhism in the early medieval period. In addition to monasteries and grottos built under imperial sponsorship, a great number of Buddhist paintings, sculptures, and other Buddhist artistic forms became popular in early medieval China. The Northern Wei dynasty (386–534) witnessed a flourishing of Buddhism and Buddhist material culture. The most magnificent Buddhist grottos, such as Yungang 雲崗 and Longmen 龍門, built during the Northern Wei dynasty, represent the blossoming of Buddhist art in medieval China. As well as the initiatives accredited to the emperors, such as Emperor Daowu 道武 (371–409) and his son Emperor Wencheng 文成 (440–465), there was a lenient attitude toward Buddhist material culture, such as Buddhist statues and *stūpas* (Y. Li 1984). Social instability and vagrant life fueled vigorous Buddhist statue construction during the age of turbulence, even though the Buddhist aspiration for future life was inconsistent with the Confucian tradition that people had insisted on for centuries. The Buddhist notions of heaven and Pure Lands conformed to people's aspiration for a peaceful life for practical purposes. The soteriological mechanism predicated on the perceptions of the afterlife in the Buddhist context inspired people to participate in Buddhist statues and *stūpa* construction.

The imperial and elite support continued to advance monastery construction and *stūpa* erection. Such a tendency continued during the Tang dynasty. The architectural structure of *stūpas* was initially inherited from *stūpas* in India and heralded a process of transformation in China. The architectural form of *stūpas* changed as it integrated Chinese elements. For instance, Chinese architects integrated the traditional style of tower buildings into *stūpa* construction to develop a new style. The Great Goose Pagoda in Xi'an, which embraces the hollow interior with wooden staircases for people to ascend, was erected to deposit Buddhist scriptures and represented a template of brick *stūpas* popular in the Tang dynasty (Yan 1981, pp. 16–19).

Stūpas, serving as funeral objects, emerged in the early medieval period. In addition to funerary *stūpas* erected for some eminent monks, non-clerics also participated in building *stūpas*. As well as the religious significance, *stūpas* appeared to be built for practical needs, such as the *stūpas* erected by the ruling class for political purposes. The meanings of *stūpas* built for clerics, for the laity, and for the ruling class inevitably varied in accordance with their different identities. However, no matter the reason for the construction of *stūpas*, *stūpas* were highly accepted in the early medieval period. Scrutinizing the transformation of *stūpas* in the medieval period might provide a new perspective for re-examining the transformation of Buddhism in medieval China.

4. The Interaction of Ritual Practices with *Stūpa* Construction in Medieval China

Pictorial carved stones (*huaxiang shi* 畫像石) interred in tombs could date back as far as the Han dynasty (Zhou 1987). New archaeological finds provide physical evidence verifying the existence of Buddhist stories on Han pictorial carved stones, representing an early stage of Buddhist art in China (Wei and Chen 2010, pp. 79–83; Zhu 2015, pp. 85–90). The integration of Buddhist elements into traditional funerary rituals indicates how Buddhism affected the perceptions of the Chinese at that time. The combination of Buddhism with the material culture in China hints at the acceptance of Buddhist conceptions among the Chinese.

Influenced by the *stūpa* erection, Buddhist statues engraved in *stūpa*-shaped shrines emerged prior to the Tang dynasty, which can be designated as *zaoxiang ta* 造像塔 (votive *stūpas* engraved with Buddhist images). In the past century, fourteen votive *stūpas* have been found in Wuwei 武威, Jiuquan 酒泉, Dunhuang 敦煌, Turfan, and other locations. These stone *stūpas*, constructed primarily during the Northern Liang (397–439) period and built mostly for repaying the kindness of one's parents, represent the earliest known examples of ancient Chinese *stūpas* with a well-defined chronology (B. Zhang 2006, pp. 13–28). The votive *stūpas* from Northern Liang typically featured carvings of the Seven Buddhas and Maitreya Bodhisattva, combined with images of Eight Trigrams. This integration exemplifies the collision and fusion of Buddhism and Chinese traditional culture (Yin 1997). Chinese archeologist Su Bai 宿白categorized various structures as part of the Liangzhou Type, including the Northern Liang stone *stūpas*, caves No. 1 and No. 4 on Tianti Mountain in Wuwei, the grottos in Jinta Monastery in Sunan 肅南, and three grottos on the front hill of Mañjuśrī Mountain in Jiuquan (Su 1986). Notably, the Liangzhou Type is characterized by *chētiyagharas*, referred to as *tamiao ku* 塔廟窟 (*stūpa*-shrine cave) in Chinese, which features a central square pillar connecting the cave's top to the ground. This pillar symbolizes the *stūpa* and likely evolved from the *chētiya* construction in India (Y. Shi 1956).

During the Northern Dynasty, *chētiyagharas* continued to be the predominant architectural form of grottos in China. However, a new trend emerged with the construction of *stūpas* that incorporated traditional Chinese architectural elements, taking the form of multi-storied square pavilions. This architectural style gained popularity in Yungang and Dunhuang, with the patterns of Liangzhou Type and Yungang exerting a significant influence on the formation and development of the *stūpa*-shrine caves in the northern Central Plains (C. Li 2003, pp. 249–57, 264). Accordingly, pavilion-shaped *stūpas* also became popular in early medieval China. An illustration of this trend is the votive *stūpa* discovered in the Liquan Monastery in Xi'an (see Figure 1). It is believed that the original *stūpa* featured a suspension roof (Wang 2000, pp. 3–4). This square *stūpa* is adorned with niches on all sides, exhibiting a pavilion-shaped design in one niche of the *stūpa*, engraved with Amitābha sitting in the middle, and flanked by two bodhisattvas. Similar to the typical Buddhist votive steles, the inscription inscribed below the *stūpa* solely includes the names of the donors.

Chinese Buddhist steles with iconic images for commemorative and funerary purposes emerged in large numbers in the fifth and sixth centuries. Dorothy Wong designates these upright stone tablets carved with Buddhist images and symbols as "Chinese Buddhist steles," which reveals the combination of Indian and Chinese artistic and cultural practices. Wong reveals that this type of Buddhist steles only flourished in specific historical periods during the Northern and Southern dynasties but "planted the seeds for major achievements in figural and landscape arts in the ensuing Sui and Tang periods" (Wong 2004, p. 11). With respect to the textual and physical evidence, constructing Buddhist statues and erecting Buddhist steles appeared to serve communal worship, signifying the communal identity of the people who conducted these practices. Donor inscriptions and steles inscribed with Buddhist images indicate the connection between the mundane world and people's imagination of the heavenly world.

Figure 1. Pavilion-shaped *stūpa* carved with Buddhist statues. Note: Engraved during the Northern Wei dynasty (385–534); unearthed from Liquan Monastery 禮泉寺, present-day Lianhu District Xi'an, in 1987; exhibited in the Museum of Xi'an. Source: Reprinted from Xi'an Institute of Cultural Heritage Conservation (2010, p. 41).

Among the donor inscriptions, *futu ji* 浮圖記 (*stūpa* records) related to votive *stūpa* erection emerged during the Northern and Southern dynasties. Hou Xudong collected 55 *futu ji* organized in chronological order from the Northern Wei dynasty to the Northern Zhou dynasty (520–569) (Hou 1998). *Stūpas* served as one of the Buddhist symbols engraved or erected to pray for blessings and accumulate merit. A few *stūpas* were erected as funeral objects, and few *stūpa* records prior to the Tang dynasty appeared in the funerary context similar to those Tang funerary *stūpa* inscriptions.

The emergence of new ritual objects can be attributed to doctrinal and ritualistic advancements. Ye Changchi 葉昌熾 ascribed the decline of *futu ji* to the rise of *sūtra* pillars (*jingchuang* 經幢) in the mid-Tang period (Ye 2018, p. 131). The *sūtra* pillar was a Buddhist production associated with the popularity of Esoteric Buddhism and *Uṣṇīṣa-vijaya-dhāraṇī Sūtra* in the Tang dynasty. The stone pillars engraved with Buddhist *sūtras* resembled the sculptural shape of *stūpas* (Kuo 2014). With the great popularity of *sūtra* pillars in the mid-Tang period, pillar records emerged. Similar to donor inscriptions, some pillar records state donor names and their prayers. In addition to such votive pillar records, pillars erected for funerary functions and pillar records composed for the deceased emerged (S. Liu 2003).

The relic cult obtained imperial patronage in the Sui dynasty, especially under the auspices of Emperor Wen 文帝 (r. 581–604). The flourishing of relic-veneration ceremonies promoted the erection of *stūpas*, and the *stūpas* occupied a central position in monasteries in the Sui dynasty (Su 1997). In the Tang dynasty, Empress Wu and her husband, Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 650–683), continued to conduct relic-worshiping activities. Later, Emperor Suzong 肅宗 (r. 756–761), Emperor Dezong 德宗 (r. 779–804), Emperor Xianzong 憲宗 (r. 805–819), and Emperor Yizong 懿宗 (r. 859–872) all performed the practice of bringing the relic to the palace in Chang'an (Yu 2018, pp. 167–69). Inspired by the relic cult and the symbolic meanings of *stūpas*, people in the Tang dynasty extensively participated in erecting *stūpas*, especially funerary *stūpas* for clerics and laypeople. At the same time, *stūpa* inscriptions composed for the deceased appeared in large numbers during the Tang dynasty. The making of *stūpa* inscriptions involved inscription composition, *stūpa* erection, and stone carving. *Stūpas* underwent a process of transformation, integrating with traditional funerary rituals. *Stūpa* inscriptions represent the manifestation of integrating *stūpa* erection into the Chinese stele tradition.

The Xiang Prefecture played a significant role in the history of Chinese Buddhism in northern China since the Eastern Wei dynasty (Henan Research Institute for the Preservation of Ancient Architecture 1991, pp. 1–3). During the Sui dynasty (581–618), a *stūpa* forest at Mount Bao in Xiang Prefecture 相州 (present-day Anyang 安陽) progressively emerged. The *stūpa* forest carved in relief into cliff faces constitutes the celebrated Buddhist sacred site Wanfogou 萬佛溝 (Valley of Ten Thousand Buddhas), which is now regarded as the largest *stūpa* forest carved in relief (*fudiao talin* 浮雕塔林) in China.[11] Among the *stūpa* forest on Mount Bao, the *stūpa* for Daoping is the earliest. This *stūpa* was built by Daoping's disciple Lingyu in the second year of the Heqing 河清 period (562) and is juxtaposed with another *stūpa* in an east–west direction. They are known as the twin *stūpas* of the Northern Qi dynasty (Zhong 2008). Above the arch-shaped niche of the western *stūpa*, a short inscription reads as follows:

> The cremated-body *stūpa* for the dharma master Ping, Great Interpreter of *Śāstras* from Baoshan Monastery
> 寶山寺大論師憑法師燒身塔

On the eastern side of the niche, the date of the construction is inscribed in smaller characters (see Figure 2). The *stūpa* erected for Daoping served as a funerary object. However, the inscription inscribed on the *stūpa* is more akin to the literary form of votive inscriptions, consisting of the name of the occupant and the date of the construction while excluding the biographical records of the deceased.
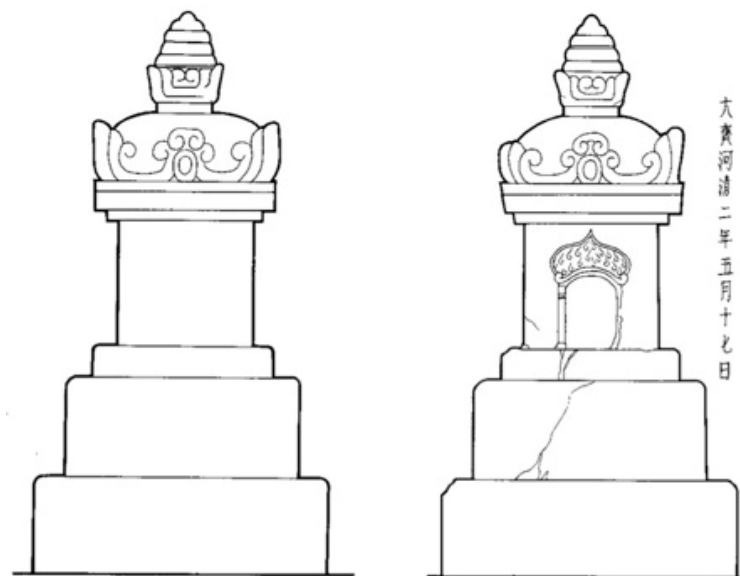

Figure 2. Front and rear side of the western *stūpa* for Daoping 道憑 Inscription on the eastern side of the niche states that the *stūpa* was built in the second year of the Heqing 河清 period (562). Source: Henan Research Institute for the Preservation of Ancient Architecture 1991, p. 128.

Stūpa inscriptions found in Xiang Prefecture prior to the Tang dynasty mostly resemble the literary pattern on the *stūpa* for Master Daoping. The physical presence of *stūpas* carved in relief on Mount Bao might limit the length of the inscriptions inscribed on these *stūpas*, and these inscriptions served primarily as textual testimony to identifying the occupants of these *stūpas*. *Stūpas* erected for the deceased serve as reliquaries for relics or corpses. Regular *stūpa* inscriptions attest that the protagonist of the inscription was given a *stūpa* burial after his or her death. However, the disposal of the deceased in *stūpas* was diverse since different funerary rituals might have been conducted prior to the *stūpa* construction. Thus, various designations of *stūpas*, such as *huishen ta* 灰身塔, *shenta* 身塔, *lingta* 靈塔, *suishen ta* 碎身塔, and *xiangta* 像塔, emerged during the Tang dynasty. Accordingly,

variants of *stūpa* inscriptions emerged, and various designations of *stūpas* have deeper cultural connotations in regard to funerary rituals and perceptions of the afterlife than the superficial manifestation of different titles.

Daoxuan 道宣 delineated the Buddhist burial formats in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 as follows:

> Funerals known from the Western Regions have four types. Cremation was to burn [corpses] with firewood; the water burial was to submerge [corpses] in deep mud; the earth burial was to bury [corpses] beside banks; the forest burial was to scatter [ashes] in the wild. Kings of dharma and cakravatin were cremated, which were highly regarded but were seldom conducted for others. Forms of funerals that were popular in Eastern Xia were forest burial and earth burial, while water burial and cremation were unheard of in society. Consequently, the coffin for Yu covered with tiles was the beginning of discarding forest burial. Since the divine Zhou dynasty after the Xia dynasty, earthenware coffins became popular. Ancient people of Yin used wood coffins bundled with rattan. The period of Wenchang, in middle ancient times, implemented the policy of benevolence. Although the earth burial was recognized, the number of people who performed it was still small. So, [people instead] collected bones and rotting corpses to bury them in caves. In early ancient times, building tombs with mound was not allowed for the common people. After the construction of the mausoleum for Lu family leaning on the grand mountain ridge, building mausoleums flanked by mountains appeared. The earth burial continued and was inherited in latter ancient times. As the situation is complex and hard to record, [I will] omit [the details]. Glorifying [the deceased's] virtues and recording their words might inspire the living of later generations. Executing wheels and erecting stūpas are aimed to glorify [the eminent monks'] meritorious deeds during their lifetime.[12]

Daoxuan classified Buddhist burial formats into four types: *tuzang* 土葬 (earth burial), *shuizang* 水葬 (water burial), *huozang* 火葬 (cremation), and *linzang* 林葬 (forest burial). He stated that forest burial and inhumation were early burial formats popular in ancient China. Inhumation underwent a long process of adaptation and reception by ordinary people. Cremation, as the Buddhist burial format performed for the Buddha, was seldom accepted in ancient China, which indicates the magnitude of the influence of Buddhism in later periods when cremation was progressively accepted in medieval China. It is interesting to note that forest burial had witnessed a long history before the introduction of Buddhism, which suggests that the employment of forest burials by clerics in China might not be ascribed to the Buddhist tradition. Daoxuan equated the construction of *stūpas* with other Buddhist burial formats. For Daoxuan, erecting *stūpas* served the same function as that of the Chinese stele tradition to memorialize and glorify the meritorious deeds of the deceased during their lifetime. *Stūpas* erected for departed clerics symbolized their achievements during their lifetime.

In addition to the funerary *stūpas* for eminent monks recognized by Daoxuan, funerary *stūpas* became a popular burial format during the Tang dynasty. The variant designations of *stūpas* reveal how people treated and perceived *stūpas* in medieval China when Buddhism was introduced into China and was widely accepted by Chinese people. As representatives of Sui and Early Tang *stūpas*, the Anyang *stūpa* forest provides the basic paradigm for the *stūpas* constructed in later periods. Rather than cremation, forest burial predominated in the Anyang area, while inhumation was popular in the Central Plain, corresponding with the conventional Chinese funerary rites. Variant designations of *stūpas* reflect variations of *stūpa* burial. The variant designations of *stūpas* provide us with multidimensional perspectives to understand the relationship between the erection of *stūpas* and Buddhist funerary rituals. Thus, the next section aims to make a case study on the ideological connotations of *huishen ta* widely appearing at Mount Bao in Anyang to delineate the interaction between material culture and ritual practices.

5. Ideological Connotations of *huishen ta* (Cremated-Body/Destructed-Body *Stūpa*) on Mount Bao in Anyang

Specific expressions used to describe stūpas delineate the acceptance of stūpas in Chinese society. The designation huishen ta 灰身塔 widely appeared during the Early Tang period, especially in the Zhenguan 貞觀 and Yonghui 永徽 periods (627–655). Qing scholar Ye Changchi stated that,

> There were cremated-body *stūpas* and fragmented-body *stūpas* erected during the Sui and Tang dynasties. The inscription for master Linghui was entitled shadow-*stūpa* inscription. The inscription for the vinaya master Fang was entitled image-*stūpa* inscription. These *stūpas* served as places for depositing the corpses. Some might be cremated and then memorialized in images on *stūpas*. Buddhism calls this ritual *jhāpita*.
>
> 隋唐間刻有灰身塔，有碎身塔，靈慧法師稱影塔銘，方律法師稱象塔銘。當是藏銳之所。或以火化，兼供影象，彼教所謂荼毗也. ([Ye 2018](), p. 129)

Cremation is variously referred to as *huohua* 火化 (transformation by fire), *huozang* 火葬 (fire burial), *shaoshen* 燒身 (burning the body), *fenshi* 焚屍 (burning the corpse), or other disposals of corpses related to fire in Chinese. The *stūpa* for Daoping, designated as a "burned-body *stūpa*," indicates that Daoping's corpse was cremated, which might be the precedent of *huishen ta*. Ye Changchi also established the connection between *huishen ta* and cremation. The designation *huishen ta* appears to be reminiscent of *stūpas* erected for cremation burial. However, the meaning of *huishen ta* is more complicated than that of the superficial relationship with cremation.

The inscription engraved on the cremated-body *stūpa* for Lingchen 靈琛 (554–628) states that Lingchen made his last will before he died, hoping that he would be given a forest burial to comply with the ritual prescribed in Buddhist scriptures to achieve the unsurpassable dharma (T 2146, 55: 212b).

> [Lingchen] left a testament, [asking to] perform the forest burial for him according to the Buddhist scriptures and devote his blood and flesh to the living creatures so they may seek to obtain the unsurpassable dharma […] [His disciples] grieved and were sad for losing [him]. They sent Lingchen['s corpse] to the forest. After his flesh and blood had been totally consumed, he was given a cremation and a *stūpa*.
>
> 康存遺囑，依經葬林，血肉施生，求無上道……含悲傷失，送茲山所，肌膏才盡，闍維鏤塔. ([Zhou and Zhao 1992](), p. 26)

The *stūpa* inscription for Lingchen states that he was the disciple of Xinxing 信行 (540–594), who is regarded as the patriarch of the Three Stages Sect. In the fourteenth year of the Kaihuang period of the Sui dynasty (594), Xinxing died in the Huadu Monastery 化度寺 of Daxing 大興 city. His disciples conducted the forest burial for him and then collected his bones. Afterward, Xinxing's disciple erected a stele and a *stūpa* for him at the foot of Mount Zhongnan (T 2060, 50: 560a23–a26). In this respect, Lingchen appeared to follow the burial ritual of his master. *Duwei* 闍維 in the inscription refers to cremation. The *huishen ta* erected for Lingchen can be particularly interpreted as cremated-body *stūpa*.

However, the interpretation of cremated-body *stūpa* might not be applicable to all *huishen ta* on Mount Bao. Among the surviving 51 *stūpa* inscriptions designated as *huishen taming* on Mount Bao, most only contain the names of the deceased, the names of monasteries the deceased came from, the dates of their death, and the names of disciples or relatives who erected the *stūpas*. It is, therefore, difficult to conclude whether the clerics or laypeople were cremated. Only the following two *stūpa* inscriptions contain expressions similar to *duwei*, denoting cremation:

- *Baoying si gu da Haiyun fashi huishen ta* 報應寺故大海雲法師灰身塔 (Cremated-body *stūpa* for the deceased great dharma master Haiyun of the Baoying Monastery) (Henan Research Institute for the Preservation of Ancient Architecture, p. 84);

- *Cirun si gu da Huixiu fashi huishen taji* 慈潤寺故大慧休法師灰身塔記 (*Stūpa* record of the cremated-body *stūpa* for the deceased great dharma master Huixiu of the Cirun Monastery) (H. Guo 2016).

The *stūpa* inscription for Haiyun uses the term *duwei* 闍維, while the *stūpa* inscription for Huixiu (548–646) adopts the term *dupi* 闍毗 referring to cremation. More importantly, the *stūpa* record for Huixiu explains the meaning of *huishen* as follows:

> Arhats' destruction of body symbolizes the attainment of *anāgāmin* of tranquil concentration. The cremation given for [Huixiu] complies with the previous saints' instruction.
>
> 羅漢灰身，那含寂定。今乃闍毗，宗承先聖. (H. Guo 2016)

Huishen refers to the state of burning one's flesh body to ashes, and *miezhi* embodies the attainment of unconditioned nirvāṇa. *Huishen miezhi* 灰身滅智 (the destruction of the body and the annihilation of the mind) symbolizes the attainment of *anupādisesa-nibbāna* (Chn. *wuyu niepan* 無餘涅槃) in the realm of Theravāda Buddhism (Soothill and Hodous 2000, p. 382). For Mahāyāna Buddhism, *anupādisesa-nibbāna* is perceived as one of the appropriate means to attain Buddhahood (Ciyi 1988, p. 2475). For Huixiu, his body was burned to ashes, so he achieved a state of destruction of the body. Cremation served as the appropriate means for the disposal of his corpse, and the *stūpa* was erected to aid him in attaining Buddhahood by transcending the fire in the *kalpa* of destruction. The *stūpa* became the symbol of his attainment of Buddhahood after death, as the motivation for erecting the *stūpa* states as follows:

> This spiritual *stūpa* serves to record the virtues and memorize the prestige [of Huixiu] in the hope of [aiding Huixiu] to transcend the fire in the *kalpa* of destruction.
>
> 建茲靈塔，記德留名，覬超劫火. (Zhou and Zhao 2001, p. 26)

Prior to the period of Huixiu, Zhiyi 智顗 (438–597) explained the idea of *huishen miezhi* in his Buddhist work (T 1783, 39: 1c23). Zhiyi employed the concept to verify the true meaning of nirvāṇa, which is different from the *anupādisesa* of Theravāda Buddhism. The notion of nirvāṇa is an intrinsically complex matter in the history of Buddhism since the distinctions not only exist in Mahāyāna and Theravāda contexts but also in the evolution of different Buddhist schools in China (L. Guo 1994; Yao 2002).

According to another inscription for Huixiu, Huixiu learned the *Vinayas* from the Vinaya Master Shu 樹 and learned the *Huayan jing* 華嚴經 (*Āvataṃsaka Sūtra*) from Lingyu. Furthermore, he also learned the doctrines of Nāgārjuna and Aśvaghoṣa, was proficient in *Tripiṭaka*, and wrote a large number of Buddhist works, including treatises concerning Theravāda philosophy (S. Chen 2005, p. 2222). It is plausible that Huixiu and his disciples might have known clearly about the concept of *huishen* in the realm of Theravāda philosophy. Nevertheless, they might have accepted and imitated the cremation and *stūpa* burial mostly because of the precedents accredited to the Buddha and their masters.[13] For Huixiu and his disciples, they believed in the inevitable death. However, the process of transmutation from the physical body to relics aided them in achieving calmness and extinction (*jimie* 寂滅) and attaining Buddhahood. The symbolic meanings of *huishen* played a more important role than the distinction between Mahāyāna and Theravāda. Considering the previous example of Lingchen once more, Huixiu was perceived as a disciple of the Southern Branch of the Stages Treatise (Dilun 地論) Teachings, which was founded by Huiguang 慧光 (468–537) in the Northern Qi, while Huixiu was regarded as a disciple of Xinxing. Since the forest burial and the erection of *stūpas* became popular practices on Mount Bao, it is unlikely that the erection of *huishen ta* was ascribed to the influence of the Three Stages Teachings. Identifying sectarian affiliation by such popular practices requires further scrutiny.[14]

The pervasive presence of *huishen ta* on Mount Bao mostly refers to *stūpas* erected for the destruction of the physical body after death. The relationship between *huishen ta* and

cremation needs to be treated with caution. Only the following two *stūpa* inscriptions refer to the process of collecting ashes before the erection of *stūpas*:

- *Shengdao si gu da biqiuni Jinggan chanshi huishen taji* 聖道寺故大比丘尼靜感禪師灰身塔記 (*Stūpa* record of the destructed-body *stūpa* for the great Buddhist nun, the meditation master Jinggan of the Shengdao Monastery);
- *Guangtian si gu da biqiuni Puxiang fashi huishen taji* 光天寺故大比丘尼普相法師灰身塔記 (*Stūpa* record of the destructed-body *stūpa* for the deceased great Buddhist nun Puxiang of the Guangtian Monastery). (Henan Research Institute for the Preservation of Ancient Architecture, pp. 93–94.)

The *stūpa* record for Puxiang states that her disciples collected her relics after they dealt with her corpse, according to the Buddhist scriptures. The relics signaled the destruction of her body, manifesting the meaning of *huishen*. Whether she was given a cremation or a forest burial is uncertain, whereas the erection of a *stūpa* is certain. The *stūpas* erected for depositing the destructed body of the deceased symbolized their attainment of *nirvāṇa*. Considering the physical presence of *stūpas* carved in relief on Mount Bao, some *stūpas* appear to have square reliquary cavities excavated in front of the pedestal of the *stūpa*-shaped niches, which verifies the possibility of collecting and burying the cremated ashes of the deceased.

Cremation was not a predominant ritual in Buddhist scriptures, and no *sūtra* states that one's fate after death is contingent upon funerary rituals such as forest burial or cremation (S. Liu 2000; Ebrey 2003, p. 146). However, the symbolic meanings of relics and *stūpas* inspired clerics and laypeople to establish the connection between funerary rituals and the afterlife. The biographies of eminent monks in the Tang dynasty seldom mention whether the departed monks were cremated after they died, whereas the erection of *stūpas* was recorded. However, the biographies of eminent monks in the Song dynasty often mention the process of cremation (Nishiwaki 1979). Although some surviving *stūpa* inscriptions from the Tang dynasty contain accounts of cremation, cremation was not regarded as an essential part of the *stūpa* burial in that period. In all likelihood, for clerics, cremation was regarded as the customary funeral rite introduced from Buddhism because the Buddha entrusted his disciple Ānanda to perform the cremation after his *nirvāṇa* and to collect his *śarīra* (T 1, 1: 28b10–b17). The significance of erecting *huishen ta* demonstrates the destruction of the body and attainment of *nirvāṇa*. Accompanying the emergence of *huishen ta*, other related variants of destructed-body *stūpas*, such as *sanshen ta* 散身塔 (scattered-body *stūpa*) and *huishen ta* 毀身塔 (devastated-body *stūpa*), reveal variations on a similar theme.

The spiritual significance of *stūpas* and the corresponding benefits related to *stūpa* worship promoted the reception of *stūpas* in medieval China. However, the ritual performance varied with the development of Buddhism in medieval China. In the meanwhile, variants of *stūpas* emerged. The funerary *stūpas* not only verified the achievements of the deceased during their lifetime but also embodied the truth of the Buddha dharma that would aid the deceased in achieving Buddhahood and liberation in the afterlife. Moreover, the people who erected funerary *stūpas* could accumulate merit for themselves and express veneration for the deceased. Thus, funerary *stūpas* established a connection between the deceased and the living, as well as a link between the deceased and Buddhism in the afterlife.

6. Concluding Remarks

Material culture is an essential part of Chinese Buddhist history. As John Kieschnick has suggested, "material culture is as much a part of religion as language, thought or ritual. Hence, unless we appreciate the place of material culture in Chinese Buddhist history, our picture of this history remains skewed and incomplete (Kieschnick 2003, p. 23)." Buddhist *stūpas* allow people to experience Buddhism in such a manner that they can pray for spiritual demands when they are alive and continue to keep their connection with Buddhism even after death. Objects, spaces, practices, and conceptual frameworks collectively constitute religious material culture (Morgan 2010, p. 73). Accordingly, material culture is not just objects. Beliefs embedded in objects established the relationships between the person,

the practice, and the object. Specific purposes and needs that drive people's activities make an impact on how they use and perceive objects (Smith 1987, pp. 72–73). The tradition of the *stūpa* cult provides the ideological basis for accepting *stūpa* as a burial type.

The similarity between *stūpas* and tombs in terms of funerary function largely determined people's interpretations of *stūpas* in the early medieval period. The funerary function and ancestor worship played critical roles when the Chinese perceived *stūpas* as being similar to tombs. However, tombs cannot be the precise manifestation of *stūpas* in medieval China. *Stūpas* evolved into multidimensional meanings in medieval China. The various designations of *stūpas* represent deeper cultural connotations related to funerary rituals and perceptions of the afterlife rather than the superficial manifestation of different titles. *Huishen ta* 灰身塔 widely appeared during the Early Tang period, demonstrating the destruction of the body and attainment of nirvāṇa. Other variants of *stūpas*, such as the image-*stūpa* with images engraved on *stūpas*, became emblems of the spiritual presence of the deceased. *Shenta* 身塔 (body-*stūpa*) implies the whole-body burial conducted for the clerics, while the designation of *lingta* 靈塔 (spiritual *stūpa*) emphasizes the distinguished identity of the occupants of these *stūpas*.

Stūpa burial continued into the ensuing dynasties, and ritual practices and material culture continued to present interactions between the *stūpa* cult and the construction of *stūpa* after the medieval period in China. For example, in the Song dynasty (960–1279), demarcations appeared between Buddhist monks and Buddhist nuns and between eminent monks and ordinary monks. New forms of *stūpas*, such as *luanta* 卵塔 (egg-shaped *stūpa*) and *putong* 普通 (or 同) 塔 (common *stūpa*), emerged. The *putong ta* is a *stūpa* for public storage of departed clerics' cremated remains (S. Zhang 2016). The perceptions of *stūpas* witnessed an ongoing process of reconstruction, which reveals how cultural transmission and transformation work throughout history.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Abbreviations

T: *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經, followed by text number, volume number, page number by register [a,b,c], and line number. Ed. Takakusu Junjiro & Watanabe Kaigyoku, et al. Tokyo: Taisho issaikyo kankokai, 1924–1932.

C: *Zhonghua dazangjing* 中華大藏經, followed by text number, volume number, page number by register [a,b,c], and line number. Ed. *Zhonghua dazangjing* Editorial Bureau. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984–1997.

Notes

[1]   Some scholars have classified *stūpas* from the perspective of their different functions, asserting that the Chinese *stūpas* can at least serve two types of functions, viz., funerary function and commemorative function, which are mostly related to relics and scriptures; see (Bao et al. 2004, pp. 132–36).

[2]   Tak Pui Sze's translation of "*mao* 貌" that refers to "the outlook [of the dead's residence]" should be revised. The similar exegesis for *miao* 廟 can be found in the *Gujin zhu* 古今註 in the Jin dynasty. An ancestral temple was erected for enshrining the spirit of the deceased, symbolizing the presence of the ancestor. In that case, Tak Pui Sze's statement about Daoxuan's analogy between *stūpas* and caityas with ancestral temples showing no holy nature should be reconsidered.

3   For the English translation, see (Hurvitz 1956, p. 42). For more on the meaning of *zongmiao* 宗廟, see (Miller 2007, pp. 32–35, 58–62). Tracy Miller also cites the texts mentioned above in her discussion about Yuance's 圓測 (aka. Wǒnch'ǔk, 613–696) depiction of *ta* 塔; see (Miller 2018, p. 95).

4   The character *ta* 塔 appears 16 times in the *Daoxing bore jing* and once in the *Bozhou sanmeijing*. For other Buddhist scriptures, translated in the Eastern Han dynasty, which contain the character *ta* 塔, see (Zhu and Zhang 2017, pp. 166–70).

5   The original work *Ziyuan* has been lost, but both the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 and the *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 contain one volume; see (X. Liu 1975, juan 46) & (Ouyang and Song 1975, juan 57).

6   The original complete version of *Yupian* is missing, but seven volumes have been preserved and reprinted in modern times, known as *Yuanben yupian canjuan* 原本玉篇殘卷; see (Gu 1985). The widespread Song version, entitled *Daguang yihui yupian* 大廣益會玉篇, was compiled in 1013; see (P. Chen 1983).

7   The *Foguo ji* is also known as *Faxian zhuan* 法顯傳, or *Foyou Tianzhu jizhuan* 佛遊天竺記傳. James Legge translated it into English; see (Legge 1986). James Legge employed the term "tope" to translate "*ta* 塔," and he argued that the Chinese word *ta* 塔 used by Faxian 法顯 was, no doubt, a phonetic manifestation of the Sanskrit word *stūpa* or the Pāli word *thupa*. He insisted that it was proper to use "tope" to translate *ta* 塔 for the architectural structure of topes usually manifested in the form of bell-shaped domes, which was more familiar for Cunningham and other Indian antiquarians.

8   The dating of Xuanying's *Yiqiejing yinyi* reaches no consensus among scholars. According to Xu Shiyi's research, Xuanying's *Yiqiejing yinyi* was dated no later than Longshuo 龍朔 (661–663) period. For a comprehensive study on the dating of Xuanying's *Yiqiejing yinyi*, see (Xu 2009, pp. 33–35). There existing various versions of *Yiqiejing yinyi* (Xu 2009, p. 81), references on which this article is based are from the *Zhonghua dazangjing* 中華大藏經 (C hereafter for short).

9   According to the historical records, there are 12 mausoleums from the Eastern Han dynasty, and 11 were located in the environs of Luoyang except for the mausoleum for Emperor Xian 獻帝; see (Han 2005; Wang and Zhao 2005).

10   Leon Hurvitz translated *fotu* 佛圖 and *ta* 塔 both to "reliquaries." *Fotu* in the quoted text translated as "reliquaries" by Leon Hurvitz referred to monasteries. However, as a composite of hybrid source materials from other proceeding historical books, the compound *fotu* in the *Shi Lao zhi* did not reach a consensus. One needs to be cautious about the meaning of *fotu* in Chinese literature, as Tracy Miller has suggested that "in pre-Tang sources, *futu* 浮圖/浮屠 was used interchangeably with *fotu* 佛圖 and *fota* 佛塔." See (Miller 2015, p. 236).

11   According to the archaeological study conducted by Henan Research Institute for the Preservation of Ancient Architecture in 1983, there are 80 caves executed in the form of stūpa-shaped niches among the total 120 niches caved on the cliff of Mount Bao, while 73 stūpa-shaped niches are found on the cliff of Mount Lanfeng; see (Henan Research Institute for the Preservation of Ancient Architecture 1991, pp. 23, 41).

12   T 2060, 50: 685b1–b12. Part of the English translation is based on James Benn's work. He cites this source in his discussion of Daoxuan's evaluation on self-immolation; see (Benn 2007, pp. 100–1).

13   Lingyu's disciple Tanqian 曇遷 (542–607) contributed to the empire-wide relic-distribution ceremonies during the Renshou period (601–604). The ritual meaning of the process of transmutation from body to relics may have affected the clerics' perceptions of funerary rituals at that time; see (J. Chen 2002, pp. 63–64).

14   Liu Shufen's viewpoint concerning the relationship between the Sanjiejiao and forest burial deserves reconsideration here. Liu states that she has located 58 inscriptions from the late sixth century, which describe Three Stages monks and nuns whose corpses were exposed in forests. She asserts that cloisters, such as Cirun Monastery, Guangtian Monastery, and Shengdao Monastery on Mount Bao, can be considered as Sanjie cloisters (2000). Adamek has re-examined the statement made by Liu Shufen and suggests that "*huishen ta* could refer to stūpa-niches for cremation relics without prior exposure," but the symbolic meanings of *huishen* and *huishen ta* are not clear in Adamek's article (Adamek 2016, pp. 20–22).

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