

Buddhism Art in the Tombs in Pingcheng Period of Northern Wei Dynasty

Study on the Image of Seven Past Buddhas in Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb

Jiahao Li¹

¹ *School of Fine Arts, Shanxi University, Taiyuan, Shanxi 030006, China*

¹ *Corresponding author. Email: 202122104006@email.sxu.edu.cn*

ABSTRACT

The Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb excavated in Datong in 2015 caused quite a stir in academic circles, with its interior painted with Buddha images, an isolated case never seen before in similar stone house of Northern Wei Dynasty excavated in the region. The stone house has been discussed and studied by a number of scholars since its excavation. This study focuses on the image of the Seven Past Buddhas on the upper south wall of the interior stone house, in an attempt to investigate the special meaning and role of this image in the funerary context through the study and sorting out of this image. In addition to the abstract and conclusion, this study consists of four specific chapters. In the section of the introduction, the main problems that exist at present are summarised by sorting out and analysing previous academic results on the study of the Seven Past Buddhas in Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb, one of which is that the study of the image of the Seven Past Buddhas in Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb is not deep enough, and the other is that the study on the role of the Seven Past Buddhas in Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb is obviously weak. On this basis, the specific research object, content and idea of this study are determined. The first chapter provides a brief overview of Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb, the excavation information and the configuration of the images. The second chapter describes the relationship between the style, composition and colour of Seven Past Buddhas from the perspective of the former pictorial analysis, and carries out a reflection on the sequence and interrelationship between the painting of the Buddhas and the production of the stone house through the observation of the material. In the third chapter, the meaning, style and spatial layout of the images of Seven Past Buddhas in Buddhist art are examined from the perspective of iconography, and the identity of Seven Past Buddhas in the Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb is examined in relation to the physical material. In the fourth chapter, the meaning and role of Seven Past Buddhas in the Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb are analysed from the perspective of iconography, illustrating the role of Seven Past Buddhas with the cite of the contents of "The Lotus Sutra", "Buddha Dhyana Samadhisagara Sutra", and the "Book of Wei Dynasty — Records of the Shizu", returning to the material itself, and examining the meaning and significance of Seven Past Buddhas in its original context. In conclusion, the interaction between Buddhism and funerals has occurred since the very beginning of its introduction. By examining the particular case of Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb, it is of great significance to reveal both folk Buddhist thought and the concept of funerals in Pingcheng Period of the Northern Wei Dynasty.

Keywords: *Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb, Seven Past Buddhas, Buddhism and funerals.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Reasons for the Selection and Value of the Topic

In 2015, the Datong Institute of Archaeology rescued a long-sloped tomb-way earthen cave tomb in the south of Datong, the owner of which was Xing Hejiang, who was buried in the third year of the Huangxing period (469) of the Northern Wei Dynasty. The tomb yielded a collection of painted stone slabs, which were restored and pieced together to form a room-shaped stone house painted with images of Buddha. Although a number of images with Buddhist elements have been found in tombs of Northern Wei Dynasty in Datong, this is the only example of a standard Buddha image, making the image configuration in this stone house a unique example among tombs in the same period of Northern Wei Dynasty [1]. Many scholars have differentiated and interpreted the Buddhist images on the wall according to the unearthed materials. And the image of Seven Past Buddhas on the north of the south wall has aroused the great interest of the author. The images of Seven Past Buddhas in Xing Hejiang's tomb predated the images of Seven Past Buddhas in the niche of the upper eastern wall of Cave 11 of the Yungang Grottoes in the seventh year of the Taihe period (483)[11]. This leads to the inference that the motif of Seven Past Buddhas in Xing Hejiang's stone coffin may not have come from the Yungang Grottoes, reflecting the fact that the belief of Seven Past Buddhas must be first accepted by the people of Pingcheng as Buddhism spread. In other words, the images of Seven Past Buddhas in Yungang Grottoes arose from the folk beliefs of the Pingcheng period [2], and the people of Pingcheng in the Northern Wei Dynasty incorporated and applied it to the language and iconography of funerals. It is therefore important to explore people's perception of images of Seven Past Buddhas after they were introduced to Pingcheng and reasons for the selection of Seven Past Buddhas in a funerary context, in order to explain the the layout of this particular stone house and the concept of funeral.

1.2 Current Research Status in China and Foreign Countries

In addition to the Seven Past Buddhas on the north side of the south wall, some scholars in China believe that the six sitting Buddhas on the east and west walls and the north wall and the Statue of

Shakyamuni and Prabhutaratna sitting side by side comprise the theme of Seven Past Buddhas. Based on Liu Jinglong's article "Huangfu Gong (1609) Cave in the Longmen Grottoes, Huangfu Gong Cave was completed in the third year of the Xiaochang regime (527) of the Northern Wei Dynasty, with the Three Buddhas theme of the Statue of Shakyamuni and Prabhutaratna sitting side by side with sitting Buddha as the subject. Chang Qing believed that the Statue of Shakyamuni and Prabhutaratna sitting side by side on the north wall also acted as a past Buddha, and Sakya was on the outside of the west wall, with his right hand touching Mahoraga's head, forming the Seven Past Buddhas together with the past Buddhas painted on the remaining panels [3]. However, most scholars still studied the Seven Past Buddhas on the north side of the south wall. With the use of iconology, starting from Buddhist art and the stone house as a whole, Li Meitian and Zhang Zhizhong argued that the Seven Past Buddhas on the south wall reflected the popular Sukhavati beliefs of the Sixteen Kingdoms of Northern Dynasty, and that similar themes were very common in the western regions and the west of the Yellow River in the 4th-6th centuries. While citing the translation of the Buddha's "Sutra on Buddha Dhyana Samadhisagara Sutra" of the Eastern Jin Dynasty and being in conjunction with the interior space of the stone house, they believed that worshipping the Seven Past Buddhas could enable the deceased to be reborn in the Pure Land of Maitreya at the time of death, and mentioned that this was different from the death view of becoming immortal. Buddhists expressed their pursuit of the pure land world dominated by the Seven Past Buddhas in the way of Buddha worship and statue making, but they were also concerned about death and longing for the future. Li Meitian and Zhang Zhizhong also cited the association between the Seven Past Buddhas and the deceased in Cave 35 in Wang Yuejin's article, "A Temporal and Spatial View of Buddhist Caves and the Attachment of Images — A Conceptualization of the Carving Layout of the Northern Wei Dynasty in Cave 38 of Yungang Grottoes", and also pointed out the interaction between the Seven Past Buddhas and the funerals. At the same time, Ma Boyao adopted a sociological approach, made an analysis from the perspective of the dissemination of ideas and the text of Buddhist scriptures, and argued that the Seven Past Buddhas on its south wall were the embodiment of the Seven Past Buddhas introduced in the images of "Saddharmapundarika Sutra" in Northern Dynasty and the Sculpture of Two Buddhas Sitting Side by

Side. Also, based on the tomb owner's biography in Chang'an and the widespread popularity of the "Saddharmapundarika Sutra" in Chang'an and Pingcheng, he believed that Xing Hejiang had sufficient conditions to know the "Saddharmapundarika Sutra", and there were representative images of Saddharmapundarika Sutra at the central position of his burial waves. Therefore, it is inferred that the images of the Seven Past Buddhas in Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb should have an important connection with the "Saddharmapundarika Sutra". In addition, considering the practice of "Saddharmapundarika Sutra" and the burial of the senior monk Hui Shi of Pingcheng period, he further suggested that the stone house was not contrary to the traditional concept of "honoring the dead as the living", but was merely a subterranean Buddhist state created by Xing Hejiang, a Buddhist believer, to continue his meditation after his death [4].

1.3 Research Methods and Difficulties

With the use of iconography, sociology, archaeology, documentation, functionalism, and visual culture, the researcher would follow the research ideas and perspectives of the above-mentioned scholars. When applying the methods, it should be noted that whether it is archaeological research, pictorial research, functional research or visual culture research, each method has its own special contribution, and they are in a progressive relationship with each other. At the same time, the new methods cannot replace the old ones, presenting a state in which the old and the new are parallel and complementary to each other. When conducting a comparative examination of literature and images, it is important to be careful about the binding of the text to the image. Usually, the maker and user of the image have their own logic, and the original iconographic approach is static, but the neglect of the dimension of time leads to the absence of an examination of the ins and outs of the image, and the changes of the image therein [6]. Therefore, pictorial analysis requires revisiting images as well as archaeological sources, searching for the origin and form of the original canonical subject in documents related to the Seven Past Buddhas as much as possible. In the pictorial analysis stage, it should not only focus on what the images of Seven Past Buddhas mean, but also explore what it does. In this stage of iconographic analysis, it is suggested to focus on "what it contains — what it is — why it is", explore what

the images are used to "do" in the context of the time. The purpose why the Seven Past Buddhas exist is clarified, and questions that cannot be answered by literature alone are answered [7]. It should also be noted that Akira Miyaji, the Japanese scholar, proposed three approaches of Buddhist iconography in his book "Iconography of Nechon and Maitreya", namely, the classical research, the synchronic approach, and the generic approach, which should focus on the formation and evolution of specific images and take into account the period and geographical context in which the images change. In addition to the spatial dimension, the images of the Seven Past Buddhas change and evolve with the time, and the evolution of the religious connotation to which they belong represents a change in the way it articulates the content of the images and the relationship with the viewer [8]. This requires that the interaction between the soul and the Seven Past Buddhas should be examined in stone house as much as possible, i.e., setting up a "target viewer" to explore the role of the image content and the relationship between them from the viewer's perspective. The setting of "viewer" also needs to consider the factors of its era and regional background, and avoid using the "God perspective" that seems to be objective but is actually affected by the current era.

2. OVERVIEW OF FUNERAL STONE HOUSE OF XING HEJIANG'S TOMB

In 2015, Datong Institute of Archaeology rescued a batch of painted stone portrayal slabs from the Fuqiao Power Plant in the south of Datong City and restored them to a room-shaped stone coffin ("Figure 1"), which belonged to a destroyed cave tomb with a long sloping tomb path facing north and south. The stone coffin consisted of balustrade, four walls, beams and a roof plate, and was rectangular in shape with a hanging roof, with a width of 2.42 meters, a depth of 1.79 meters and a height of 1.67 meters. The sarcophagus was placed in the northern part of the coffin, and the human skeleton and the burial artifacts didn't exist. A round-headed rectangular tombstone ("Figure 2") was also found with the tomb, indicating that the tomb owner was Xing Hejiang, who died around the third year of Huangxing period of the Northern Wei Dynasty (469) [2].

The Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb was composed of four parts: the ground balustrade, the side walls, the beam frame, and the

top plate, in which images were painted on the side walls and the top plate. The Seven Past Buddhas were located on the back of the south door beam,

facing the Shakyamuni and Prabhutaratna on the north wall of the interior ("Figure 3") ("Figure 4").

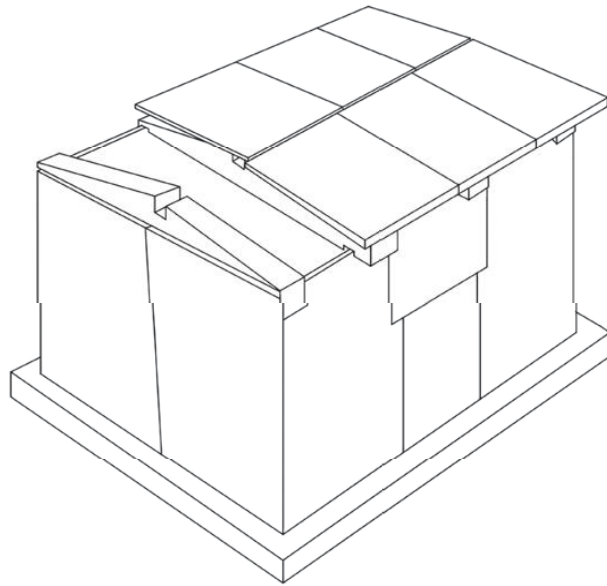


Figure 1 Restoration of Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb, line drawing, Northern Wei Dynasty.

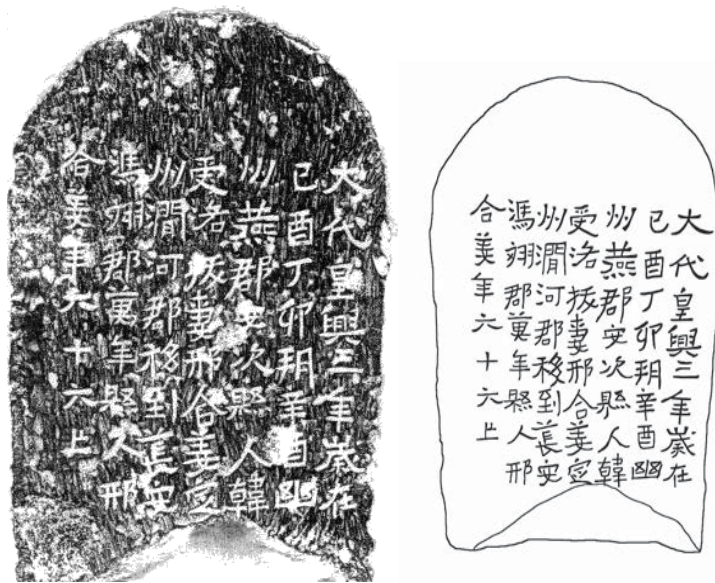


Figure 2 Rubbings of Xing Hejiang tombstone (left) and line drawing of Xing Hejiang tombstone (right) of Northern Wei Dynasty.

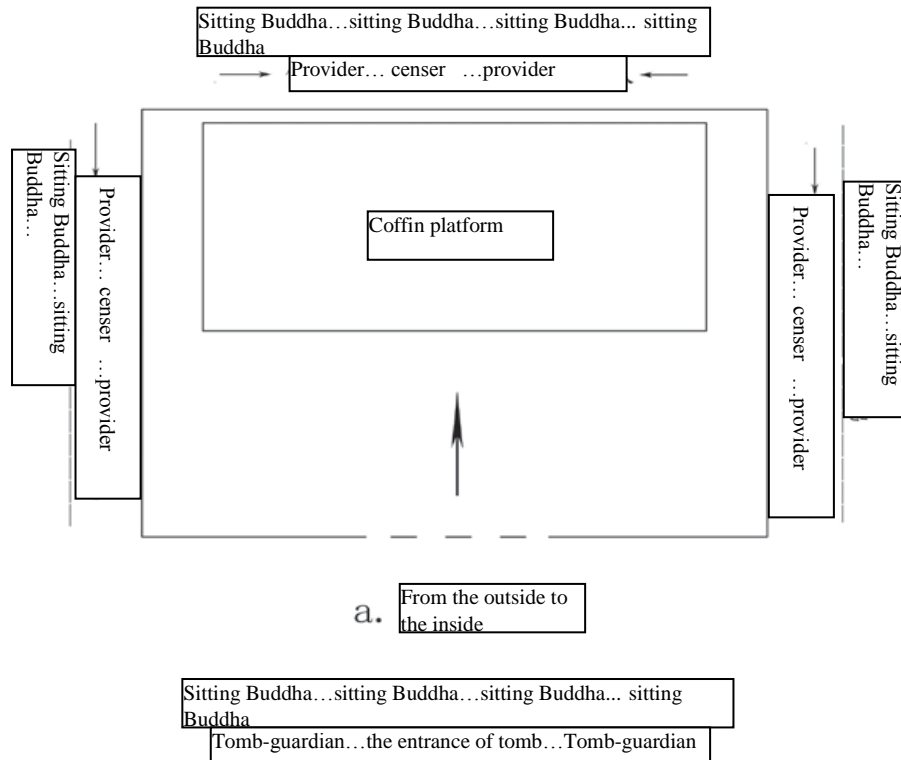


Figure 3 Painted layout chart of Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb, line drawing, Northern Wei Dynasty.



Figure 4 Colored spatial location of Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb, Northern Wei Dynasty.

3. PRE-ICONOGRAPHY ANALYSIS ON SEVEN PAST BUDDHAS IN THE FUNERAL STONE HOUSE OF XING HEJIANG'S TOMB

The Seven Past Buddhas on the north side of the south wall were all dressed in Kasaya of shoulder-covering style and sitting cross-legged on top of a lotus with a circular head light and an oval backlight behind them, with the eaves above their heads slightly obscured by the body light. It could be judged that the Seven Past Buddhas were not under the eaves but were in a relationship with them, which was different from the practice in the

grottoes. Whether they had special meaning in the context of funeral remained to be discussed. In addition, except for the sitting Buddha numbered 1, which had lotus buds on only one side, the other sitting Buddhas had flying lotus buds on both sides (Figure 5), and the Buddhas numbered 2, 4, and 6 were darker than those numbered 1, 3, 5, and 7, forming a rhythmical relationship. Whether this phenomenon was intentional or natural fading needed further examination.

3.1 *Painting of the Statue and Production of the Stone House*

According to the relationship between the slots of the stone slab and the Buddha, especially the cracks on the body of the Buddha No. 3, it was clear that the layout of the Buddha did not exactly follow the boundary line given by the slots. Could it be inferred that the stone slab was cut after the completion of the painting of the Buddha? In other words, the Buddha was painted without taking into account the impact of the grooves on the image. Perhaps the artist was not necessarily aware of the meaning and effect of the image on the user at the time of painting. Just talking about a single batch or patterned production of images, the Xing family, as the purchaser, could decide the role of the slabs.

For example, what about hiring a craftsman to make a stone house for them? Of course, these inferences still lack sufficient evidence. But whether or not the artist was aware of it, there was no doubt that the Xing family chose this image as part of the underground stone house, and the moment the image of Seven Past Buddhas was chosen, in addition to conveying its proper Buddhist ideology, it also became an inseparable part of the funerary context, with Buddhist thought and funerary concepts interacting ambiguously at this point. To understand the meaning of this image in the funerary context, it is necessary to further explore the meaning of the motif of Seven Past Buddhas itself and the connection between it and funeral.



Figure 5 Seven Past Buddhas above the north side (inner side) of the south wall of the Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb.

4. ICONOGRAPHY ANALYSIS OF SEVEN PAST BUDDHAS IN THE FUNERAL STONE HOUSE OF XING HEJIANG'S TOMB

4.1 *The Identity and Spatial Layout of the Seven Past Buddhas in Buddhism*

The image of Seven Past Buddhas, as the main image above the inner south wall of the stone house, should first be examined for its meaning and origin in its own Buddhist context. According to the interpretation of Buddhist scriptures, the "Seven Past Buddhas" refer to Sakyamuni and the six Buddhas who attained enlightenment before him. And seven Buddhas included Vipasin, Sikhin, Vis'vahu, Krakucchandha, Kanakamuni, Kasyapa, Sakyamuni. The main Buddhist scriptures on the Seven Past Buddhas are: "Bhadrakalpika Sutra" in the Western Jin Dynasty, "Dirghagama" in the Later Qin Dynasty, and "Sutra of the Seven Past Buddhas". The arrangement of the Seven Past Buddhas in the sutras was determined by the order in which they appeared in the sutras, and the order of their images in terms of structure. Historically, the images of the Seven Past Buddhas can be

divided into two structures. The first is the sequential arrangement of images, which is mostly found in sutra banners for the purpose of right-handed worship. The second is a symmetrical structure with Vipasyin as the center, which progresses sequentially to the sides. And examples of this structure are found in the Yungang Grottoes, Cave 13, and others [10].

4.2 *The Identity of the Seven Past Buddhas in the Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb*

Since the Seven Past Buddhas in the Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb didn't show inscriptions suggesting the dignity of each statue, it became particularly difficult to identify the Seven Past Buddhas by direct comparison with the scriptures, but it may be possible to find traces based on the physical materials left in Pingcheng period of the Northern Wei Dynasty. Considering the influence of the Yungang Grottoes as a huge project created during the Northern Wei Dynasty, their excavation by the imperial family, and their consistency in the timeline, it became a reliable reference. The earliest dated images of the Seven Past Buddhas in the Yungang Grottoes were the Seven Past Buddhas in the niche in the upper east wall of Cave 11 in the seventh year of Taihe period (483) ("Figure 6"), followed by the Seven Past Buddhas in the niche in the lower east side of Cave 17 in the thirteenth year of Taihe period (489) ("Figure 7"), with a 14-year gap between the former and the third year of Huangxing period (469) recorded on Xing Hejiang's tombstone [11]. At the same time, the image of Seven Past Buddhas in both caves were located above the lintel of the Statue of Shakyamuni and Prabhutaratna, forming a complete system of images that echo the combination of subjects in the Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb, and the Seven Past Buddhas were also dressed in Kasaya of shoulder-covering style and sitting cross-legged on top of a lotus with a circular head light and an oval backlight behind them, with the eaves above their heads slightly obscured by the body light. Indeed, there's reason to link the two to some degree. Unlike the moderately large Seven Past Buddhas in the Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb, the Seven Past Buddhas in Cave 11 and Cave 17 were the largest in the center. As they were not attached to a circular space for worship, the researcher concluded that the arrangement of the Seven Past Buddhas in these two caves and the Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb

followed the second type mentioned above, i.e., a symmetrical structure with Vipasyin Buddha as the center, moving in turn to the sides. However, the dignity of the remaining six Buddhas remained to be verified.



Figure 6 The image of Seven Past Buddhas in the niche of the upper eastern wall of Cave 11 of the Yungang Grottoes in the seventh year of Taihe period of (483) Northern Wei Dynasty.



Figure 7 Seven Past Buddhas in the statue niche on the lower east side of the Ming Cave in Cave 17 in the 13th year of Taihe period (489) of Northern Wei Dynasty.

5. ICONOGRAPHY ANALYSIS ON THE SEVEN PAST BUDDHAS IN THE FUNERAL STONE HOUSE OF XING HEJIANG'S TOMB

5.1 *Reasons for the Appearance of the Seven Past Buddhas in the Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb — the Connection with the "Saddharmapundarika Sutra"*

According to the tombstone, Xing Hejiang had visited Chang'an and Pingcheng, the two most flourishing Buddhist cities at that time, and Xing Hejiang included this in tombstone, indicating the importance of this event to her. In other words, it also proved her devotion to Buddhism and explained why she chose such a stone house full of Buddha statues as her final resting place. When examining Buddhist thought in that period and region, it's necessary to mention the "Saddharmapundarika Sutra", which was introduced into China during the Eastern Han Dynasty and whose teachings were widely believed by Chinese Buddhists, and was even revered as "the secret collection of the Buddhas and the entity of all scriptures" [12]. The "Saddharmapundarika Sutra" was translated into Chinese six times before and afterwards, and the "Lotus Sutra" was translated by Kumarajiva in Chang'an in 406 A.D. Afterwards, he created the "Dharma Samadhi" meditation based on the "Saddharmapundarika Sutra - Seeing the Pagoda" (i.e., viewing the past Prabhutaratna Buddha and Sakyamuni Buddha living together in the Pagoda and viewing the Buddhas in the three worlds and ten directions to understand the past, present and future). This was so influential at the time. Cave 169 at Bingling Temple was considered to be the earliest extant Zen cave where the "Saddharmapundarika Sutra" was practiced. The statue of Sakya and Prabhutaratna Buddha in niche 6 of the cave, which was built in the first year of the Western Qin Dynasty (420), was believed to be the earliest statue of two Buddhas sitting side by side in Chang'an, the capital of the Western Qin Dynasty. Although the tombstone didn't mention the exact period of Xing Hejiang's visit to Chang'an, it's certain that the idea of the "Saddharmapundarika Sutra", which was popular in Chang'an before the seventh year of Taihe period (469), undoubtedly influenced every believer who went there, and the image of the two Buddhas sitting side by side in Xing Hejiang's stone house was another proof of the influence of the "Saddharmapundarika Sutra".

Based on the spatial arrangement of Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb, there's also reason to believe that Xing Hejiang had mastered the meditation method of "Saddharmapundarika Sutra" during his lifetime and attempted to continue meditation after his death, which was also in line with the traditional funerary concept of "honoring the dead as the living".

5.2 Reasons for the Appearance of the Seven Past Buddhas in the Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb — the Connection with the Pure Land

Regarding the meaning of the image of the Seven Past Buddhas, some scholars have pointed out that the carvings of Seven Past Buddhas in the Yungang Grottoes are rarely seen in the royal and official cave rooms, and that the carvings of the Seven Past Buddhas are in obscure places that do not reflect the thematic ideas of the carved overall grottoes, while the belief in the Seven Past Buddhas is popular among the people. However, the material from the Yungang Grottoes is ultimately later than the images of the Seven Past Buddhas in Xing Hejiang's tomb, so it is necessary to return to the scriptures. The "Buddha Dhyana Samadhisagara Sutra" translated by Buddha Bhadra was a popular Buddhist sutra in the Northern Dynasty. The tenth volume of the "Sutra of the Seven Buddhas" described in detail the various relationships of the Seven Buddhas and the various benefits brought to people by their ideas. "Long ago, there was a Buddha, ... people who worshipped me could remove the sins of birth and death. Seeing me now, you would remove all obstacles, ... In the future, you will attain Buddhahood. There are also sentences describing Vessabhu, the third Buddha. "Having seen this Buddha, ... he will be born to all Buddhas in the future." And seeing Kakusandha, the fourth Buddha, people will always be born in a pure country. At the end of life, the Buddhas will come." Each Buddha has its own function, and the Seven Past Buddhas can save one from the sins of the world, be born in the home of the Buddhas and enter the Buddha Kingdom. As a devotee, Xing Hejiang must have been familiar with these elements and imagined being guided by the Buddhas after death.

The combination of "Sakya and Prabhutaratna Buddha" + "Seven Past Buddhas" was also one of the characteristics of the "Saddharmapundarika Sutra" in the Northern Dynasty [13]. The configuration of the Buddha statues in the Funeral

Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb undoubtedly confirms this. The "History of Wei Dynasty · Records of the Shizu" recorded a movement of migration during the reign of Emperor Taiwu: "In the second month of the first year of Taiyan period, each of the states of Ruru, Yanqi, and Cheshi sent an envoy to offer. It was decreed that the people of Chang'an and Pingliang would migrate to the capital, and that those who were old and alone and could not survive would be returned to their hometowns". This migration undoubtedly had an impact on Buddhist thought in Pingcheng and the subsequent excavation of the Yungang Grottoes, and Xing Hejiang must have been among those who were influenced, not to mention her visit to Chang'an. In conclusion, the researcher concluded that the images of Sakya, Prabhutaratna Buddha, and the Seven Past Buddhas were introduced to Pingcheng before the seventh year of Taihe period (469), but that they had a profound influence on the lower classes because of their function of extinguishing sins and bringing about death, so that the images of the Seven Past Buddhas in the Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb were not inconsistent with the funerary context of the time.

5.3 The Role of the Seven Past Buddhas in the Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb — the Underground Buddhist Kingdom Honoring the Dead as the Living

After a series of documentary, archaeological and sociological analyses and examinations, it's necessary to return to the material itself, to the space composed of the images of the stone house, and to examine the role of the images and the relationship between the images and the stone house. The door of the stone house where the image of Seven Past Buddhas was located first caught the researcher's attention, and the different functions could be found by examining the ritual aspects of the funeral. "Figure 8" was the outside of the south wall of stone house. And mourners and funeral-goers could reach the inside of the stone house after passing through the stone gate, meaning that the target viewer outside the south gate was a living person or an "outsider" to Xing Hejiang, the owner of the stone house. The imitated wooden decorative cylinder on top of the outer side of the stone door conveyed to the "outsiders" that this was an imitated wooden building, and symbolized the lifetime residence of the tomb owner. The

doorkeepers on either side were at this moment both the owner's escort in the underworld, and also acted as greeters of the funeral procession and ushers of the dead, depicted in a respectful posture on the stone slabs, symbolizing eternal service and guardianship of the tomb owner. At the same time, due to imitated wooden structure and imitation of secular doorkeepers, the mourners didn't have the illusion of time and space during the burial process, but would take the stone house as a clan temple, thus performing ritual activities for the deceased.

When the funeral was over, the "outsiders" withdrew from the stone house, and the burial chamber and tomb passage were refilled and closed, and only then did the stone house serve as a space exclusively for Xing Hejiang. At this time, the soul of the deceased was separated from the body, and the soul flew to the sky while the body resided on the ground. The "target viewer" also became Xing Hejiang's "spirit", and the "viewing" of the south wall changed from being outside to being inside to being inside to being outside, and the image on the inside took effect ("Figure 9"). At this time, the spatial guardian of the "soul" was transformed from a doorman in the real world into a god beast with a long tongue. There's no need for imitated wooden decorative cylinder on the lintel to imply that it was an imitation of the residence of the deceased. The physical space was transformed into an abstract space here. The physical size of the stone house itself didn't represent the space where the deceased lived after his death. The flying apsaras on the upper wall of the stone house also alluded to the special nature of this space — the pure land of Buddhism, the sacred beast guarding the heaven gate, and the Seven Past Buddhas on the lintels leading the dead to the paradise. On the way to the Buddha Kingdom, another verse from the "Reciting the Seven Buddhas", Volume 10 of "Buddha Dhyana Samadhisagara Sutra" pointed out: "Seeing me, people will eliminate all obstacles in the future."; "Seeing this Buddha, ... there's certainly no doubts that people will be born in the family of the Buddhas"; "Seeing this Buddha, ... the Buddhas will come at the end of life."

Considering the special role of the Seven Past Buddhas for the deceased in Pingcheng period and the funerary context in which the images of the stone house were located, each Buddha should be associated with the deceased, not just as a replica of the Buddha House in front of the deceased's body in the matter of death, but more as a transcendental function.

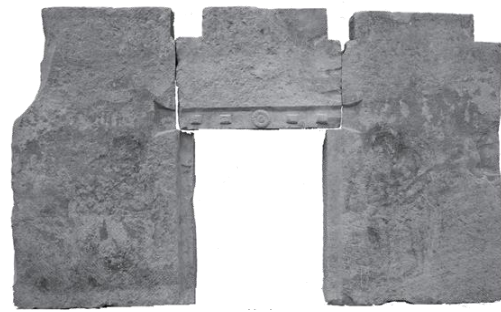


Figure 8 Seven Past Buddhas on the south side (outside) of the south wall of the Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb.



Figure 9 Seven Past Buddhas on the north side (inner side) of the south wall of the Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb.

Functionally, it satisfied Xing Hejiang's yearning for the Buddha Kingdom. Therefore, the researcher agreed with Chang Qing's view that the six seated Buddhas on the east and west walls and Prabhutaratna Buddha comprised the Seven Buddhas [3], while the Seated Prabhutaratna Buddha on the outer side of the west wall with his right hand caressing the top of Rahula's head was Sakyamuni, which together with the Seven Past Buddhas painted on the slabs. The replacement of one of the past Buddhas with Sakyamuni was the meditation method under the influence of the "Saddharmapundarika Sutra": "viewing the past Prabhutaratna Buddha and Sakyamuni Buddha living together in the Pagoda and viewing the Buddhas in the three worlds and ten directions to understand the past, present and future." Based on the biography in the tombstone and the previous discussion, it's assumed that she must have understood and practiced this meditation. Back in the stone house, it's suggested to observe and comprehend through the viewpoint of the "soul", and the divine beasts and the Seven Past Buddhas behind the viewpoint acted as the "future". Xing might not realize that her long-cherished wish had

been achieved. Along with the beautiful dance and music, the introduction of the Buddhas, Xing Hejiang's "soul" entered into the Buddhist Kingdom.

Forty-six years later, under the Seven Past Buddhas carved in the arch of the niche on the east side of the entrance to Cave 35 in Yungang Grottoes, there're words for the statue: "on the 14th day of the first month of the 4th year of Yanchang period (515) ..., Maitreya and the Seven Past Buddhas were made for my deceased brother An Fenghan." [15] Once again, the Seven Past Buddhas acted as guides to lead the departed spirits to Maitreya's Pure Land.

6. CONCLUSION

This study discusses a series of issues related to the Seven Past Buddhas in Funeral Stone House of Xing Hejiang's Tomb, using an image-based approach to the interaction and main line of Buddhism and funeral and placing them in a reconstructed spatio-temporal context. However, there are still many unresolved issues, such as the confirmation of the inviolable human dignity of Seven Past Buddhas at the stage of iconography. If the two systems proposed by Meng Jihui are followed, the identity and arrangement above the inner side of the south wall cannot be judged by size alone at present. If Chang Qing's view is valid, the Buddha statues on the north and west walls also need to be further verified. Which past Buddha was replaced by Shakyamuni and Prabhutaratna? Is the method of rehearsal consistent between the two systems of Seven Past Buddhas? What are the implications for the deceased and the funerary space? There are equally many questions in the iconographic stage. Next, the researcher will continue to make more detailed observations and interpretations of the images themselves, and focus on more social materials, Buddhist thought and burial materials of that time to further refine the existing inferences.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Jiahao Li.

REFERENCES

- [1] Lin Shengzhi. "Tombs, Religions and Regional Workshops: A Discussion on Buddhist Images in Tombs of the Northern Wei Dynasty" [J], "Art History Research Collection", No. 24, 2008. (in Chinese)
- [2] Li Meitian and Zhang Zhizhong. "Research on the Murals of Xing Hejiang's Sarcophagus in the Northern Wei Dynasty" [J], "Art Research", No. 2, 2020. (in Chinese)
- [3] Chang Qing. "The Relationship between Buddhist Art in Pingcheng of the Northern Wei Dynasty and Chang'an of the Later Qin Dynasty" [J], Journal of the Palace Museum, No. 8, 2020. (in Chinese)
- [4] Ma Boyao. "The Grottoes in the Tombs: A Discussion on the Murals of Xing Hejiang's Sarcophagus" [J], "Journal of the Palace Museum", No. 11, 2021. (in Chinese)
- [5] Liu Weidong. Iconology and Research on Chinese Religious Art [J], New Art, No. 3, 2015. (in Chinese)
- [6] Li Song, "Walking Back to the Image" [J], "Art and Design", No. 5, 2010. (in Chinese)
- [7] David Freedberg, The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989; W.J.T. Michell, "What do Pictures Want?" in W.J.T. Michell, What Do Pictures Want? Chicago: University of Chicago [J], 2005.
- [8] Lin Weizheng. "Religious Image History and Visual Culture Analysis of Manjusri Riding a Lion in Wutai Mountain" [J], "Art Research", No. 1, 2019. (in Chinese)
- [9] Wang Huimin. "Vasu and Deer Head Brahma" [J], "Dunhuang Research", No. 2, 2002. (in Chinese)
- [10] Xinghua Mural "Seven Buddhas Dharma" [J], Meng Sihui, Forbidden City, 1998 (03). (in Chinese)
- [11] Wang Yanqing. "Analysis on the Themes of the Seven Buddhas in Yungang Grottoes", edited by Yungang Grottoes Research Institute: "Proceedings of 2005 Yungang International Symposium" [M], Cultural Relics Press, 2006. (in Chinese)
- [12] Taisho Tripitaka: Volume 9 [M]. (in Chinese)
- [13] Zhang Yuanlin. "Investigation on the Art and Beliefs of the Lotus Sutra in the Northern Dynasties in Dunhuang" [J], "Dunhuang Research", No. 5, 2006. (in Chinese)
- [14] "Book of Rites" [M], Liaoning Education Press, 1997. (in Chinese)

- [15] Mizuno Seiichi, Nagahiro Toshio. "Yungang Grottoes: Archaeological Investigation on the Buddhist Caves of Northern China in the Fifth Century of the Western Calendar" [M], Volume 15, Yungang Institute of Human Sciences, Kyoto University, 1955. (in Chinese)