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Tears of stone and clay: the affect of mourning images in middle-period China

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Abstract

Representations of intense emotions are rare in the Chinese visual tradition in comparison with their counterpart in literary convention. While the reasons for this deserve an in-depth interdisciplinary study, such general reservation contrastingly highlights a distinct visual phenomenon that emerged and flourished during the middle period (9th-14th centuries). This time period witnessed a growing number of visual representations of grieving figures in funerary and religious (mainly Buddhist) contexts. By articulating various representational modes of mourning images, this essay discusses a significant development in the emotional lives of middle-period Chinese. Occupying seemingly disparate ritual spaces (the Buddhist pagoda crypt and the tomb) the images of sorrowful mourners conspicuously emerged as an appealing motif for adorning the burial spaces of their deceased. These two sites of intense affect reveal that era's desire for placing the virtual mourner in the space designed for the dead as a visual agency conveying the emotive surrounding the death of the beloved, be they local monks or family members, who often lacked literary means to express their feelings. Recognizing this affective mode helps us to better understand the complex interplay between the emotions, the social and cultural sanctions in expressing them, and the visual codes created thereof, in post-medieval China.

Keywords

Mourning, emotion, emotive, affect, death, tomb, Buddhist pagoda, middle-period China

Representations of intense emotions—pleasure, anger, sadness, fear, love, hate, and desire—are rare in the visual culture of traditional China. Although they do exist, images of these socially recognized emotions are far more reserved and inexplicit than their literary counterparts.[1] However, depictions of one particular emotion emerged in China's middle period and flourished during most of that period: grief. A growing number of visual representations of grieving figures depicted in a highly graphic manner is evident in religious and funerary art from roughly the 10th to the 14th centuries.

In such representations, facial expressions and gestures served as a mediator between the mourner's emotions and the cultural environment in which certain conventions of mourning were shaped. In approaching how feelings of grief were visually translated as a representation, I adopt a viewpoint

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that it is impossible to express one's feelings authentically and that a subject is always in constant negotiation between the inexpressible and the cultural protocol through which feelings come to be understood as signifying only certain emotions recognized in society.[2] In this framework, expressions of emotion are never considered as displaying unfiltered feelings, but as a constituent of what William Reddy has called the "emotive"—the affective expression that indicates an individual's attempt to translate inward feelings through cultural conventions so that the two correspond to each other (Reddy, 1997: 331–335). This approach resonates particularly well with the modes of emotional expressions in traditional China. For example, the term, *qing* 情, commonly understood as referring to "emotion" in English, was in fact a multifaceted concept ranging from "essential factors composing a situation" to "inward sensation," which was often paired with other terms that signify external stimuli or the specific content of feelings (such as "desire") in order for it to embody the full meaning of what we call "emotion" (Harbsmeier, 2003). In other words, there seems to have been solid awareness of interactive dynamics between what was felt and how it could be expressed in classical China.

All the cases discussed in the following pages center around the event of death: they are all figures shown crying after the loss of their loved ones. Why was there a surge of such images during the middle period, when there is no evidence that substantially larger numbers of people died then (compared to other time periods) or that the causes of death during that period were especially unusual? While the fact that the archaeological evidence on which any studies are based consists only of surviving material, and therefore makes this question seem open-ended, it is the unusual intensity of the emotional expressions carved or painted on funerary monuments, not their quantity, that validates the significance of this phenomenon.

At the core of this development is a set of interrelated pictorial modes in the image-making that cut across the boundary between Buddhist art and funerary art, which are part of two distinctive ritual fields.[3] The main source of grieving as a representational motif in Buddhist art undoubtedly derives from the discourse and representations of the Buddha's nirvana (*parinirvāṇa*), which became well known by the middle period.[4] The etymology of the term *parinirvāṇa* (literally, "quenching" or "blowing out" in Sanskrit) had a dual connotation: nirvana marks the state of enlightenment, that is, becoming free from all human suffering; however, it also marks the death of Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, and hence, from a mundane perspective, something to mourn over (Collins, 1998: 96–97; Lai, 1982; Lee, 2010: 12–14). Since the Buddha's disciples were monks who had yet to achieve enlightenment, their responses to the Buddha's nirvana are described in Buddhist scriptures as saturated with deep and violent outbursts of grief, as if mourning for the death of an ordinary human being.[5] Most representations in ancient India that depict the moment of the Buddha's nirvana convey these kinds of emotional responses recorded in the texts. In China, the distinction between the two connotations came to be visually manifested in two apparently corresponding modes by the middle period: one conveying calmness and solemnity, accentuated by the facial expressions of disciples with a "knowing" look, and the other showing the panoply of overwhelming grief. While the two modes coexisted, the latter became dominant, not only during the middle period but throughout the rest of Chinese history. It seems that this expressive mode was favored because it had the potential to reveal the emotive centering around the image.

Notably, the powerful affect nascent in this mode offered itself as a pictorial resource for depicting grieving figures in funerary art, independent from Buddhist discourse. A number of tombs built in the period between the 10th and 14th centuries in north China are adorned with pictorial and sculptural representations of mourning figures who were historically well known for admirable deeds of filial piety. The subject of children showing filial piety as a pictorial theme in tomb art can be traced back to the Han period (206 BCE–220 CE), but the specific emphasis on the act of grieving as well as the descriptive mode in its representation are seldom found in such art prior to the 10th century. The robust presence of such images in the burial space does not seem to be an incidental development unrelated to its Buddhist counterpart. Both share a particular type of affect in their

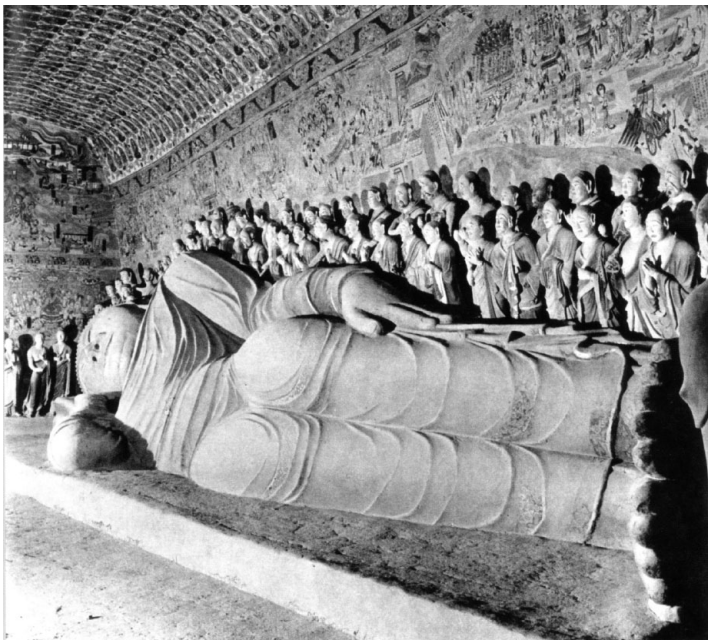

Figure 1. A group of mourners behind the Buddha. Mogao Cave 148, Dunhuang, Gansu province, eighth century.

explicit display of mourning, which was shaped through contemporary interests in creating a conduit of emotions between themselves and the mourned, firmly based on a strong sense of locality.[6]

The first part of this essay introduces a distinctive new pictorial mode in rendering the nirvana scene by focusing on a few selected cases from the concentrated time frame of the 10th and 11th centuries. By recognizing a densely agential quality in the emotion-driven monks depicted in the nirvana images,[7] my discussion delves into their dual role as fulfilling ritual and social needs in local Buddhist communities. The second part of the essay begins with a case that explicitly shows how lay Buddhists recognized the expressive mode of nirvana imagery as an effective vehicle for creating a virtual space of mourning for the death of an individual. The last section continues the inquiry into the efficacy of the particular visual mode by showcasing a series of images representing weeping figures in tombs. Regardless of their independence from the nirvana discourse, they echo a similar pattern and efficacy in connecting the mourners and the mourned in both ritual and social terms.

These representations, rather than just transmitting the makers' unfiltered feelings to the mourned via material and visual mediums, or inserted in the form of generic, unindividuated fictional figures to show emotions or to reinforce moral values, turn out to have played a multifaceted role in funerary contexts, responding to the needs of the local mourners.

Weeping monks

The scene of the Buddha's nirvana had already been represented in China in a highly graphic manner by the 10th century. A few representations of the moment of nirvana with expressive mourners made before that time have survived, including mid- and late-Tang murals and sculptures in the cave temples at Dunhuang, Gansu province (eighth to ninth centuries) (Figure 1). The composition of such images was largely standardized by then: the reclining Buddha in the center as the focal point, with his head placed at the left of the pictorial space, against the background of mourning disciples

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and bodhisattvas. The facial expressions of the disciples are often exaggerated to theatricalize the entire site of representation, turning it into something comparable to a mise-en-scène. The analogy of mise-en-scène here, despite the obvious risk of anachronism, acknowledges the irreducible distance between the "scene" of mourning and the space of the spectator, as well as the unmistakable theatricality in their display of sadness. This mode seems to have been especially useful for the framed spatial setting in which a viewer was expected to see the entirety of the representation as a complete scene. Of course, the Buddhist believer's experience as the "spectator" of such an image is assumed to have been largely participatory, in the sense that she or he was symbolically included in the mourning audience.[8] However, the fundamental emotional distance between the represented mourners in the image world and the individuals viewing it was maintained by the image of the iconic Buddha that was marked with the undeniable historical and ontological distinction.

Later images of the Buddha's nirvana are different from the earlier representations in that the role of the depicted mourners transcends the framed world of the nirvana tableau. Many of the new type of nirvana images were placed in the crypts underneath pagodas in monasteries, Buddhist burial sites for bodily remains. That they occupied the space containing relics—whether a reliquary or a burial chamber—shaped the capacity of the represented mourners in their engagement with two ontologically distinct objects of mourning: the physical remains and the representation of the Buddha. The presence of the relics (of the mourned) in such spaces thus gave the represented mourning figures a double agency in the act of mourning. In other words, the emotional responses depicted on reliquaries or crypt walls could be directed to the physical relics or to the image of the Buddha in the pictorial space, or to both.

Among several such cases, here I focus on the earliest known image of this kind, a stone reliquary discovered in Kaiyuan Monastery in Zhengzhou, Henan province (ca. 976). The Kaiyuan reliquary (Figure 2) was located in the center of the crypt built directly underneath a pagoda (Figure 3), which conforms to the typical structure of pagoda crypts in China (Joo, 2003; Shen, 2001; Whitfield, 1985; Xu Pingfang, 1995; Zhengzhou Museum, 1983: 14–18, 75). Made of limestone, the reliquary is in the form of a coffin, which had become common for a reliquary by the 10th century; this practice manifests one aspect of the complex appropriation of the Indic conception of relics by medieval Chinese Buddhists, demonstrating that they were comfortable with the idea that the physical relics were comparable to the body. On the two long side panels of this reliquary are figures expertly carved in relief. The upper panel on each side depicts five monks and a lion (Figure 4(a) and (b)). For anyone familiar with descriptions of the Buddha's nirvana written in *Mahaparinirvāṇa Sutra* (大般涅槃經), these monks are immediately recognizable as the Buddha's ten disciples expressing the throes of grief in various ways (Figure 5(a) to (e)), their dramatic facial expressions and gestures resonating deeply with the descriptions in the sutra: one with gaping mouth pounds his chest, as if screaming "alas, alas!"; another faints out of despair; some hold one another and weep together. The unusually vivid and naturalistic rendering of their emotional manifestations powerfully encapsulates even the sounds of collective mourning after the Buddha's nirvana, as if "the wailing of the crowd shakes the entire world."[9]

Although they seem to be only a skillful rendering of mourning disciples for the Buddha faithfully following the descriptions in the widely circulated scripture,[10] these images also present a new and complex strategy in conveying the emotive deriving from the event of the nirvana. The most salient feature that distinguishes this case from earlier nirvana representations is the absence of the object of such intense mourning in the pictorial space. All surviving images of the nirvana in China created before and around the 10th century displays the body of the Buddha or his coffin as the object of mourning and veneration (Chaoyang Bei et al., 1992; Huian Museum, 2008; Jin Shen, 2004). In the case of the Kaiyuan Monastery reliquary, the background is empty. Smooth and flat, the surface of the stone panels was prepared as a ground for only the weeping monks executed in high relief, and nothing else.

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Figure 2. Reliquary found in the crypt underneath a pagoda at Kaiyuan Monastery. Relief on limestone, h 53 cm (front), l 105 cm, w 50 cm (front). Zhangzhou, Henan province. ca. 976.

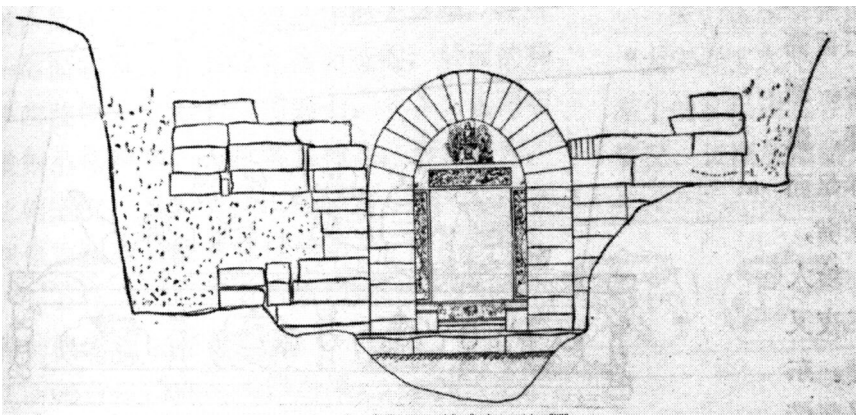

Figure 3. Elevation drawing of the pagoda crypt, Kaiyuan Monastery.

Figure 4. (a, b) Side carvings, Kaiyuan reliquary.

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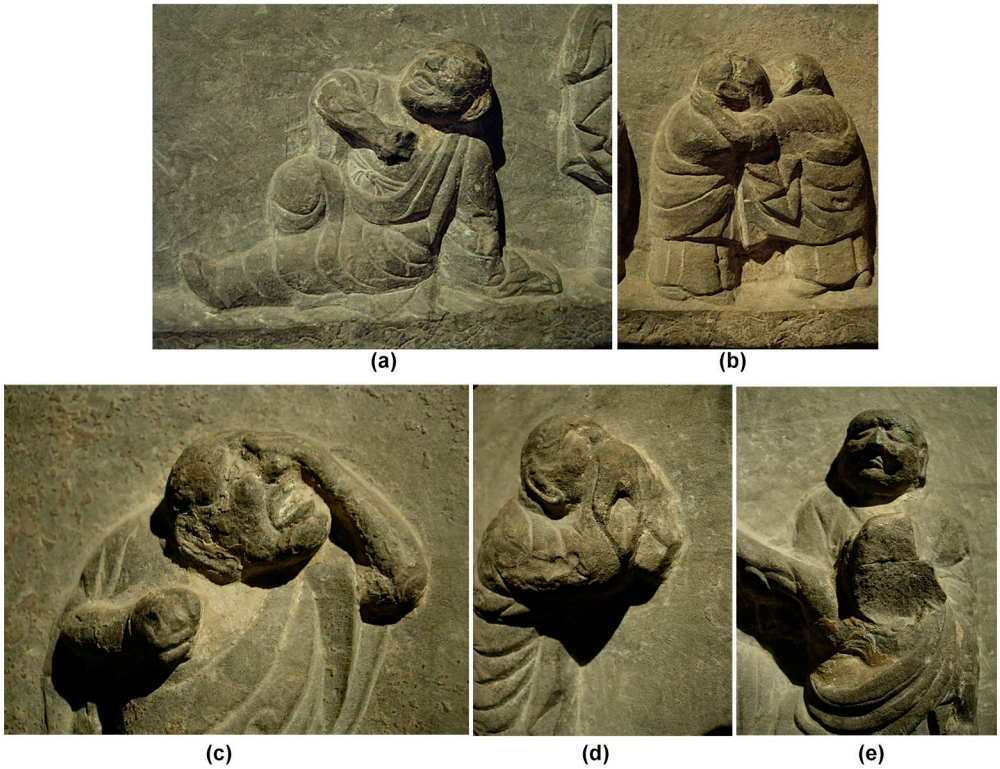

Figure 5e. (a–e) Side carvings on Kaiyuan reliquary: details.

By omitting the object of mourning from these panels and replacing the expected sight of the body with empty space instead, the images on the Kaiyuan reliquary break the viewing habits of the nirvana scene hitherto built upon the formulaic setting in which both the mourner and the mourned are presented as essential actors in the nirvana narrative. The result is powerful: the viewer, unable to locate the object of deep mourning in the pictorial plane, focuses solely on the emotion-driven faces of the monks. In such a way, the monks' bodies become a concentrated site of the affect in which prescribed emotions originating from the sanctioned discourse meet the empathizing gaze of the viewer. Rather than simply observing an enclosed nirvana narrative as a spectator, the viewer is thus invited to momentarily dwell in this site of emotional commingling, while searching for the object of such deep emotions.

That this design was chosen for adorning the reliquary and was eventually enshrined in the pagoda crypt in the monastery affirms that it was considered acceptable, qualified to represent the nirvana scene despite the absence of the reclining Buddha. While the image's association with the nirvana discourse is thus indisputable, whether this intense lamentation was directed to the Buddha is not immediately clear. This is not only because of the general complexity in the conception and practice of relic worship in traditional Buddhist culture in China,[11] but also because of the fact that some relics enshrined in monasteries belonged to revered monks, not to the Buddha.[12] Who was to be venerated and mourned through the image of weeping monks in the case of the Kaiyuan reliquary?

The inscription that covers the surface of the reliquary lid lists the names of several local donors who sponsored the making of the reliquary and pagoda, but there is no information about whose relics were enshrined in it. While the brevity of the donors' list, without any reference to the Buddha's relics, already signals the possibility that the content of the reliquary may not have been

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(a)

(b)

Figure 6. (a) Buddha's nirvana. Paint on brick, north wall of the relic repository at Jingzhong Cloister, Hebei province, ca. 995. (b) Buddha's nirvana, Jingzhong Cloister: detail.

believed to be Buddha's relics by the community at Kaiyuan Monastery, a clearer picture can be drawn by expanding our scope to a contemporaneous representation of the nirvana scene. A stone chamber built underneath a pagoda site in the Jingzhong Cloister, Hebei province (ca. 995), bears a painted image of the Buddha's nirvana on the north wall (Dingxian Museum, 1972, Figure 6(a)). As with the case of the Kaiyuan reliquary, several disciples are depicted in a deeply emotional state (Figure 6(b)). Among many other rich examples that this site provided (Lee, 2010; Shen, 2003: 37), the content of the inscription on a stone case found in the crypt deserves special attention. It suggests that the principal relics were those of a local monk named Yiyan. Together with the centrality of the monk's name on the stone case, the clear focus on the monk in this extensive inscription confirms that the relics enshrined in the pagoda belonged to him, not to the Buddha (Dingxian Museum, 1972: 45; Lee, 2010: 246–250). Aside from the unusually vivid presence of the grieving monks in the space designed for containing relics, the absence of the Buddha's name also points to an overarching pattern common to this case and the Kaiyuan reliquary as well as other prominent examples of pagoda relic deposits and objects found therein: when the relics were believed to be those of the Buddha, it was usually indicated by prominent inscriptions (Huian Museum, 2008;

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Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology, 2007). Thus, even though the identity of the relics was not inscribed on the Kaiyuan reliquary, it would have been known to the donors and monks at the monasteries that the relics did not belong to the Buddha but to a local monk.

Accordingly, the unrepresented object of the collective grieving on the stone surface of the Kaiyuan reliquary is most likely a local monk whose remains were enshrined in the reliquary. When the convention followed in the representation of the nirvana was to make the image of the Buddha's body or his coffin explicitly visible as the focal point of worship and mourning, it might have been perceived by Buddhist viewers of that time as transgressing the sacredness of classical iconography had the image of a monk been depicted in the center instead. By eliminating the object of mourning from the pictorial plane and leaving only the grief-driven mourners there, the designer avoided the potential encroachment of religious authority and directed attention to the physical remains of the person enshrined within the reliquary.

In fact, even aside from the absence of the object of mourning, the composition of the scene depicted on the Kaiyuan reliquary is unusual: the division of the ten monks into two groups turns the reliquary's entire surface into a virtual site of commemoration. It is treated not as a simple pictorial plane on which a single, complete scene of the nirvana is presented like a mise-en-scène, but as a continuous space in which two groups of monks grieve, one that surrounds the reliquary itself. By blurring the conceptual boundary between the body of the medium (i.e. the reliquary) and the pictorial plane, the deployment of the images of the monks—combined with the omission of the object of their mourning—thus created an in-between realm for the viewer to dwell in and mourn through them. Such a visual tactic indicates the likelihood that the mourners were fellow monks of the buried individual and would have been the central members of the monastic community deeply involved with his burial. In other words, the striking sight of collective mourning by the monks depicted on the reliquary can be seen as the personification of the monks at Kaiyuan Monastery. This intimate connection between the mourners and the mourned best explains the motivation behind the depiction of the monks' deeply human emotions and gestures. This incipient collapse of the distance between the represented agency of the emotions and the mourner turned out to be a mode that was becoming prevalent in the art of ancestral worship as well.

Weeping monks for a layman

It is not surprising that the efficacy of the visual representation of weeping monks was not only recognized within the specific Buddhist context by Buddhist authorities and laypeople, but also adopted for nonmonastic funerary occasions. An invaluable discovery of a Song-dynasty tomb illuminates how the affective capacity and discourse of the mourning figures in the nirvana imagery were appropriated in commemorating the death of an individual from ordinary life. A case in point is the mural of the nirvana scene conspicuously depicted in a tomb discovered in March 2009 in Hancheng, Shaanxi province, belonging to a member of the local elite (hereafter Hancheng tomb).[13] All three walls in this tomb are adorned with colorful murals: the Buddha's nirvana on the east wall (Figure 7), the deceased and his attendants in a workshop on the north wall (Figure 8), and the tableau of a theatrical performance on the west wall. The inclusion of Buddhist motifs in tomb space was certainly not unprecedented by this time period (Wu, 1986), but both the scale and iconographical sophistication of the nirvana scene in the Hancheng tomb set itself apart from earlier examples of Buddhist-themed images found in tombs.[14]

In the painting of nirvana on the east wall, the central space is occupied by a large Buddha reclining on a coach, with his eyes closed. Surrounding him are figures shown in diverse poses, including monks, laymen, men in loincloths (infidels), and lions. The overall composition and pictorial elements resemble a dominant form of nirvana representation made before and during the 11th century—the standard format mentioned above. The monks depicted around the Buddha, identified

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Figure 7. Buddha's nirvana. Paint on brick, east wall of Hancheng tomb, Shaanxi province, 11th to early 12th century.

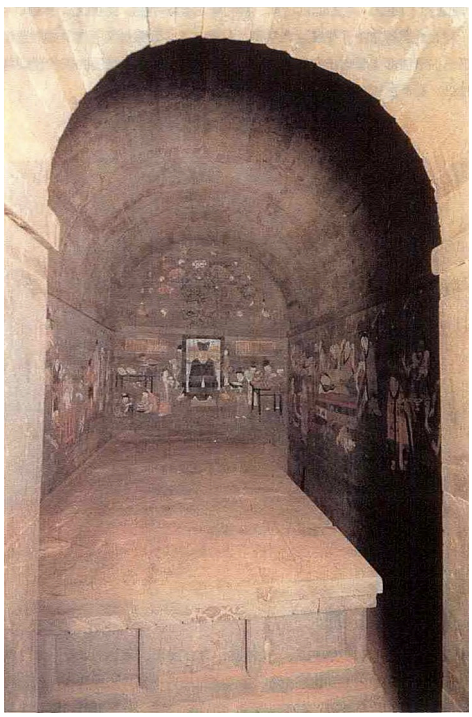

Figure 8. Location of the nirvana image on the east wall, Hancheng tomb. Seen from the entrance (south).

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as his disciples, dynamically express their deep sadness, the intensity of which echoes that of the Kaiyuan reliquary as well as of the relic deposit in the Jingzhong Cloister. This mural and the one in the Jingzhong Cloister also have in common a composition featuring the "complete" pictorial elements (including the Buddha) and the medium of mural painting. The presence of the laymen as the conductors of ritualized action in the Hancheng mural—touching of Buddha's feet and carrying an incense burner—reveals an interest during that period in inserting an agency of the ritualist in the pictorial world. For instance, the motif of the foot-touching itself derived from the action of mourning for the Buddha by one of Buddha's closest disciples, Mahakashapa, as described in the scripture; however, both men here wearing the non-Buddhist ritualist's attire represent fictional figures created by the painter and/or sponsor of the mural (Hong and Hinrichs, 2015).

Corresponding to the overall pictorial program in the tomb, the content of the ritual actions is tailored to fit the funerary occasion, rather than exclusively signifying the worshiping of the Buddha. First, the ritualists were fashioned in a way that they are distinguished from the disciples and other figures who were depicted based on the nirvana discourse recorded in the scripture. Second, the nirvana image is positioned on a side wall of the tomb, not the "main" (north) wall; by yielding the most significant ritual position to the image of the tomb occupant, the designer and/or sponsor of the tomb made it clear that the main object of worship in this burial space was the deceased, not the Buddha.[15]

While the choice of the nirvana scene itself can be seen as a proud affirmation of the tomb occupant's Buddhist faith, the ways in which the scene was appropriated point to his (or his family's) desire for reshaping the canonical image into a depiction of something vernacular, ingrained in the "here and now": the funerary commemoration of a layman. What might be characterized as "localization," this appropriation was realized not only by inserting images of noncanonical ritualists that would have been modeled after the contemporaneous local figures who presided over the funeral, but also by alluding to the double role of the weeping monks as mourning for both the Buddha in the pictorial world and for the tomb occupant in the tomb space. This second point (the monks mourning for the tomb occupant) is affirmed by the fact that even though there were other options in choosing a pictorial theme that could effectively convey both the deceased's devotion to Buddhism and the commemoration of the deceased, the Buddha's nirvana was chosen for adorning the tomb wall. For example, the motif of Western Paradise or the Mahāyāna concept of Pure Land (*sukhāvatī; jingtu* 淨土 in Chinese: the most desirable place in which a Buddhist could wish to be reborn) would have been equally appropriate (and perhaps more), in that it could project the destination wished for by the posthumous soul. The choice of the dramatic moment of the nirvana as a principal pictorial motif was thus not coincidental: the act of mourning graphically expressed in that particular way would have appealed to the sponsor and/or designer of the tomb.

Mourning children

By the 11th century, representations of weeping faces and mourning bodies for ritual purposes had thus been increasingly recognized as an effective medium through which grief could be conveyed. But whose emotions were to be conveyed? There were several distinctive communities involved in the image-making of mourning monks in the scene depicting the nirvana. Those who were responsible for the making of images in the monastic environment, such as the Kaiyuan reliquary or the Jingzhong relic deposit, include the people who commissioned it (the monastery's religious authorities, i.e. the monks and the abbot), the donors (who may or may not have known the deceased monk personally), and the artisans who created the images. Despite the lack of information about sponsorship and production here, due to the scarcity of written sources, one thing to be said with some confidence is that the site of the emotive—an affective visual expression, in this case—was centered on the community of the religious authorities; the expression of any personal feelings

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upon the death of the fellow monk would have been derived from them (and mediated through the artisans) rather than from the donors. However, in the case of the nirvana image in the Hancheng tomb, a significant portion of the involved parties overlapped, with the commissioner and donors of the tomb murals most likely having been one and the same. Although this case also suffers from a lack of information about the sponsor(s), the tomb occupant, and the artisans who created the funerary murals, the established tradition of tomb-making makes it clear that it would have been the family members or the deceased themselves who commissioned and funded the artisans who made the images for the tomb. This basic characteristic of tomb- and image-making as a substantial part of the larger context of ancestral worship is indeed what shaped a more cohesive and focused emotional community when a family member died.[16] Because the idea underlying the practice of tomb-making was the continuous—and mutually beneficial yet hierarchical—relationship between the dead and the living,[17] the emotions projected on the funerary monument inevitably originated from the children of the deceased, who, in most cases, would prepare the tombs of their parents. This resulted in the development of a motif distinct from the canonized Buddhist image of the nirvana: the representation of mourning men and women who were known for their filial piety.

A number of excavated tombs constructed sometime between the 11th and the 14th centuries are adorned with representations of filial children in various modes. It was a particularly meaningful practice for a specific stratum of society—consisting of merchants, well-off farmers, or other local elites not associated with scholarship or offices—who were affluent enough to build elaborate tombs and to sponsor adorning them with images (including those of filial piety, see Hong, 2014; Hong and Hinrichs, 2015). This was the first time that this social group, distinct from the literati or scholar officials, actively adopted such a motif in their tombs, as well as the construction of the elaborate tomb itself. Filial piety, which was a core moral value considered to be the foundation of the harmonious order in Confucian worldview, is one of several enduring pictorial motifs that, by the 11th century, had been employed in tomb art for more than a millennium. During the second century, their popularity grew as a major pictorial component in tomb art (Wang, 1999; Wu, 1989: 272–305). The occupants of such tombs mostly belonged to the learned gentry class. At that time, the number of episodes of filial piety depicted in tombs was small, and they were adopted from stories about sons and daughters transmitted either orally or through texts; but by the 11th century, the number and variety of episodes had expanded sufficiently to form a set of 24 stories, which was eventually published as a text, in several versions (Deng Fei, 2009; Dong Xinlin, 2009; Liu Wei, 2007).

Notable among the newly added episodes were several stories featuring protagonists who experience moments of deep sorrow caused by their parents' deaths or other comparable misfortunes. For example, a young girl named Cao E (mid-second century CE) hears the news from villagers that her father was swept away by a flood. The body is never found, and Cao E does not stop wailing for days and nights. Unable to overcome her grief, she jumps into the river and dies.[18] It is noteworthy that even though the story was already well known by the second century, representations of this episode seldom appear in tombs built before the 11th century; on the contrary, Cao E's presence is prominent in many tombs built during the 11th through the 13th centuries. Most often she is depicted in a setting in which she wears a mourning hood and covers her face with the long sleeves of her mourning robe, and is shown weeping in front of either a tomb or a skeleton of her father (Figure 9). Moreover, among all the scenes in the narrative that the artisans could have depicted—several of which would have made quite dramatic and effective visual representations, such as her jumping into the river—they usually chose the end of the story, which they altered, reframing the scene to focus on what seems to be the moment of mourning.

Another example of focusing on the subject of grieving from one of those twenty-four episodes and tailoring the original narrative is best illustrated by that of Zeng Shen, the paragon of filial sons whose images had been adorning tomb spaces since as early as the second century. There are several historical episodes involving Zeng Shen; in one of the best-known stories, his deep

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Figure 9. Cao E. Brick relief, Donghan Tomb no.1, Quwo, Shanxi province, 13th century.

filial piety enables him to have some kind of telepathic connection to his mother.[19] Earlier visual representations in tombs highlight a particular story relevant to such a connection: One day, in the market of village not far from where Zeng Shen lived, a murder was committed by another man named Zeng Shen. The first Zeng's mother was weaving when a townsman, who had assumed that the murderer was her son, came by and calls out to her that Zeng was a murderer. She ignores him. Then a second man repeats the charge, and the mother ignores him, too, believing that her son could never do such a thing. Although version of this story ends with her stopping the weaving, out of fear, when a third man informs her of the same news,[20] most versions of the story emphasize the indestructible trust and bond between mother and son. One of the few surviving images from the early tombs show Zeng's mother in front of a loom, turning to her son who is kneeling before her (Figure 10). Thus, both the known episodes and the images of Zeng Shen focus on the events that occurred while his mother was alive.

A radical change occurs in the representations of Zeng Shen in the tombs built between the 11th and the 13th centuries, in which he is depicted in a state of deep grieving, with no image of his mother included (Figure 11). In such examples, the weaving mother is often replaced by her coffin, and Zeng is shown weeping over it, wearing a mourning robe and headdress. No extant texts or oral traditions of Zeng Shen include such a scene. Together with the example of the filial daughter Cao E shown in the act of mourning, the changing of Zeng Shen's story to depict the moment of the funeral suggests that there was a growing interest in including images of mourning scenes in tomb spaces, even at the risk of creating inauthentic images based on fabricated stories of filial piety.

What did the sponsors of these tombs expect to accomplish by altering the original story? If the depiction of existing stories of filial piety in the tomb was intended only to show the sponsoring child's (or children's) commitment to Confucian values, the sponsors of the images did not need to change the original stories; in fact, maintaining the original narrative would have been more effective if that were the purpose. Underlying the apparently unnecessary alteration of the stories was the need to create a channel through which the individual sponsor's ritualized emotions of mourning in the site of the funerary space could be conveyed. A more recently discovered sarcophagus from an early-13th-century tomb reaffirms this point (Figure 12). Its panels bear finely carved images of selected episodes of filial piety. Among the many standard representations of each

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Figure 10. Zeng Shen (left) and his mother. Reconstruction of a rubbing of stone relief from Wu Liang Shrine, Shandong Province, second century (source: Feng Yunpeng and Feng Yunyuan 金石索1821).

Figure 11. Zeng Shen. Brick relief, tomb found in Jianxia Village, Qingshui, Gansu province, 13th century.

episode included there, the central scene depicted on one of the longer panels is of particular interest. It shows three men standing beside a tree and weeping (Figure 13). At first glance, it appears to be an image of the story of Tian Zhen and his two brothers (compare with the 11th-century image in Figure 14).[21] According to written sources, the three brothers, after their parents die, decide to split a redbud tree that they inherited from their parents into three parts, so that they can share it equally. But when they come out to cut the tree next morning, they find it already blackened and dead, as if it was hit by lightning. The elder Tian Zhen realizes that the tree had heard their conversation the previous day and died out of despair. The brothers weep over the tree, and as they

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Figure 12. Sarcophagus adorned with carvings of the motif "Twenty-Four Anecdotes of Filial Piety." Limestone. Zhengzhou, Henan province, ca. 1201.

Figure 13. Anecdote of Tian Zhen and brothers, detail of the Zhengzhou sarcophagus.

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Figure 14. Tian Zhen and brothers. Clay figurines from Macun Tomb no. 4, Jishan, Shanxi province, 13th century.

cry, the tree comes to life again. The appearance of the three weeping men vividly depicted on this sarcophagus corresponds to this episode. However, there is an unusual feature in this image that is not part of the known narrative. The funerary inscription carved right next to this scene—the only text present on the coffin —suggests that the story of Tian Zhen brothers was deliberately selected among all the scenes of filial piety on the sarcophagus as the central episode to which the inscription was attached:

> Inscribed by a son of filial piety, Li Zhongde
>
> On the eighth day of the eleventh month, in the fifth year of the Yong'an reign (1201)
>
> With a son of filial piety, Li Zhongbai,
>
> and a son of filial piety, Li Zhongqing.

Judging from the convention of tomb inscriptions, which often serves to inform the sponsor of the burial goods included in the tomb and who constructed the tomb, these three men who share the surname Li were probably the sons of the deceased enshrined in the coffin. While there is nothing special about the format or content of this inscription, the fact that it is placed right beside the scene showing the Tian Zhen brothers—as if it were intended to be a matching cartouche for the scene—suggests that the three Li brothers would have recognized this episode as particularly pertinent to their own situation.

As with most tombs from the middle period that were sponsored by non-literati elite, there is no other information available about the Li brothers, nor any about their deceased father. Viewed

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together with the above-discussed examples of Cao E and Zeng Shen, however, an unmistakable conceit underlying this design becomes clear—that is, the tomb sponsors' desire to identify themselves with the Tian Zhen brothers as sons of filial piety, implicitly evoking their own presence in the pictorial world by means of that widely known, iconic image. A few pictorial variations of the Tian Zhen episode affirm that the protagonist in the historical narrative was often personified as an actual mourner who was virtually present in the burial space, and that it was possible to alter the original situation of three brothers to fit different sponsors. This flexibility is exemplified in the mural of the same episode in an 11th-century tomb found in Yiyang county, Henan province, in which three women were depicted in the weeping scene, perhaps as wives or sisters of the brothers (Figure 15).[22]

Mourning "in person"

The "local turn" in the visual adaptation of the canonized children of filial piety evident in the last example leads us to yet another aspect of the newly emerging representational mode, which fully discloses the mourners themselves in the image world created in the tomb. Around the time when the above-discussed images of the filial piety began to adorn the burial space, images of mourning figures independent from the widely circulated stories of the filial piety also appeared in tombs. Although they were smaller in number, the salient emergence of these images suggests the contemporary recognition of the efficacy of representing individual mourners in both social and ritual terms. Adopting the visual representation of emotion-driven mourners in their tombs was suitable not only for expressing their grief, but also for fulfilling their ritual needs that was increasingly emphasized and practiced by the social group defined above, that is, members of a local elite who were affluent yet did not belong to the social category of literati or scholar officials. Traditionally considered to be part of the socially unprivileged class by the imperial government, which existed largely outside the world of the ritual protocol (or marginalized, at best) of the four most important ritual events (capping, wedding, funeral, and ancestral worship), they were now visibly participating in the ritual system and coming up with their own versions of the rituals (Ebrey, 1991).

One such example is a tomb discovered in Changzhi, Shanxi province. This elaborate brick tomb has six small niches along three walls, each of which is flanked by a pair of painted figures (Figure 16(a), (b)).[23] Tellingly, six male figures are represented in mourning robes and hoods; some of them are wiping away tears, some covering their mouths with their sleeves. Since each niche contained remains of bodies, it is reasonable to think that the weeping figures were there to express the tomb-sponsors' grief. While the Li brothers had their sorrowful feelings projected onto the image of the renowned sons of filial piety, the children (or other family members) of the deceased who most likely sponsored this tomb had their own images represented, thus lodging their grief on the tomb walls through their own actual identities.

This example from Changzhi helps refine the level of the "emotive" surrounding the image of mourners made in the funerary context. As discussed at the outset of this essay, when people express inner feelings of sadness, they engage in constant negotiations with the social and cultural conventions that constrain such feelings. In this sense, the common visual cues of mourners in the images presented so far—wiping away their tears with long sleeves or covering their mouths with them—may seem to be a result of only those conventions. It should be remembered, however, that representations of the mourners were, by default, mediated at two levels: through the existing conventions of emotional practice, and through visual translation. In fact, one notable pictorial element that is carefully rendered in these images subtly breaks what might seem a simple visual codification: their naturalistic facial expressions. In tombs adorned with representations of family members mourning for the deceased, as opposed to depictions of the historically well-known

Figure 15. Variation of the anecdote of Tian Zhen and brothers. Mural in tomb, Yiyang county, Luoyang, Henan province, 11th to early 12th century.

Figure 16. (a, b) Mourners painted next to niches containing human remains. Guzhang village, Changzhi, Shanxi province, 11th–12th century.

figures of filial piety, the vivid expressions of their mourning faces are particularly noticeable. Among the examples that demonstrate how the face served as the contested site between inner feelings projected by the sponsor and the cultural formula of mourning, sometimes enlivening a sense

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Figure 17. Mourners in funerary procession, Baitu village, Changzhi, Shanxi province, ca. 1088.

of ongoing ritual, one stands out: the mural of the funerary procession painted in a Song-dynasty tomb in Baitucun, Changzhi (Figure 17).[24] Wearing white mourning robes, all the women and men are weeping. Their clothing and gestures faithfully follow the conventional code of deep mourning as seen in previous cases, while their remarkably lively facial expressions heighten the level of authentic feeling in the scene. The emotion-driven mourners not only show the capacity to convey the grief of the tomb's sponsors, but also help anchor the entire procession scene in "historical" time, as if it were a pictorial documentation of an actual sight of mourning during the funeral. The strong sense of "here-and-now" embedded in these procession images harks back to the image of weeping monks carved on the Kaiyuan reliquary. This remarkable contemporaneity turns out to be a significant feature of the middle-period funerary art that distinguishes itself from those of the early and medieval periods.[25] The mode of naturalistic rendering of grieving expressions certainly contributed to the feeling of authenticity, which would have satisfied the mourners' desire to convey their feelings, at the same time fulfilling the social duty of being the children of filial piety who would conduct proper funerals for their parents.

Concluding remarks

The various representational modes of mourning images articulated in this essay suggest a significant development in the emotional lives of middle-period Chinese. Occupying seemingly disparate ritual spaces—namely the Buddhist pagoda crypt and the tomb—the images of sorrowful mourners conspicuously emerged as an appealing motif for adorning burial spaces. These two sets of grieving images show that era's desire for placing the virtual mourner in the space designed for the dead as a visual agency conveying the emotive surrounding the death of the beloved, be they local monks or family members.

The larger implication of this phenomenon is twofold. On the one hand, what we witness here is the middle-period Chinese wish to localize the expressions of grief in the manner that was possibly

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the most deeply ingrained in their time and environment. While conditioned by the social and cultural convention of subdued emotional expression in visual representation, certain members of society developed their own, new pictorial modes through which they could let out their feelings of grief either by adopting canonized images of renowned historical figures, or by representing themselves and having their images in lasting form in the burial space. Using culturally authoritative figures from the past as their personified agency—especially in the case of the exemplars of filial piety—would have been a highly effective way of displaying and promoting their virtue, the virtue that was considered the most significant foundation of society.

On the other hand, lingering in these images was the voice of those whose particular ways of behaving, including how they processed their emotions, are lost to history; the sponsors of these images did not have the literary means to express their feelings after people they cared about died. When compared to the well-known literary genre of "prayer text" (jiwen 祭文), commonly composed by literati, which served as those writers' emotional outlet after the death of loved ones and/or the commemoration of them since the late eighth century, the cultural weight of these images of mourners in funerary monuments is duly recognized (Shields, 2007). If the eighth century marked the "personal turn" in the expression of feelings among the literati (Owen, 1996), there is ample evidence that those who had no literary medium to "record" their grief adopted the visual representation as a site of negotiating their feelings with social and cultural conventions in funerary contexts.

It would therefore be misleading to claim that the unusual expressiveness in such representations reflects the mourners' unfiltered deep emotions, as if the middle-period Chinese were more keen on expressing their sadness over the death of their loved ones than early Chinese were.[26] Rather, it would be more productive to interpret this phenomenon as revealing a particular mode pursued by a newly emerging social group, in which they channeled their emotions through a socially and culturally encouraged frame. Recognizing this mode helps us to better understand the complex interplay between the emotions, the social and cultural sanctions in expressing them, and the visual codes created thereof, in post-medieval China.

Notes

1. For these so-called "seven emotions" (*qiqing* 七情), see the chapter on the transmission of rites (*liyun,* 禮運) in the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記). For studies on early perceptions and theories of emotions in China, see Bockover (1995), Eifring (2003), Puett (2003), and Harbsmeier (2003).
2. A larger frame of this conceptualization derives from Niklas Luhmann's take on emotions as signs (1986), but, as will be further explained below, a more immediate conceptual tool is borrowed from William Reddy's influential discussion of the "emotive" (1997, 2001). While Lumann's classical study is representative of the social constructionist perspective of the emotion, Reddy attempts to break out of the rather rigid frame by defining complex workings of the individual's inner effort to match the inward feelings and cultural convention of expressing emotions. Although they may seem theoretically incompatible, it should be noted that the "constructionist" view was a prerequisite for a more nuanced and complex approach such as Reddy's conceptualization, which takes both psychological and social aspects surrounding the emotional expressions seriously.
3. The two fields maintained independent ritual protocols and praxis throughout Chinese history since the initial reception of Buddhism, but they increasingly shared more visual and material environs toward the middle period, influencing one another at various levels. For a seminal discussion of how early funerary art adapted Buddhist elements, see Wu (1986). For in-depth cases of the middle-period development, see Li Qingquan (2008), Li Xingming (2011), and Hong (2015b, 2017).
4. For an extensive survey of the nirvana images produced in the central and north China during this period, see Li Jingjie (2008). For dynamic aspects of the nirvana images in specific historical contexts, see Lee (2010).

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5. See the Chinese translation 大般涅槃經後分 by Jñānabhadra, seventh century (*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (hereafter "T") vol. 12, no. 377: 905c).
6. Some of the theoretical stances surrounding the notion of the affect may fit in the workings of the images discussed in this essay. Throughout this article, however, I use "affect" in a common sense of the word meaning "inner disposition of feeling," rather than an external manifestation or action. For a useful discussion of the trajectory of the theories of affect, see Seigworth and Gregg (2010).
7. In the representations of emotions, the agential characteristic of emotional expressions themselves is further complicated by the visual, material, and spatial modes in the framing of emotions, which operates as yet another layer of agency between the dichotomy of "medium" and "message." Throughout this essay, I use the term "agency" in the sense proposed by Alfred Gell (1998). Among several conceptual suggestions made by Gell, I particularly subscribe to the view that considers art as the nexus of social relationships and interactions rather than simply as a medium for communicating meaning.
8. See Lee (2010: 143–155). Lee distinguishes a group of caves, viz. Cave 148 and Cave 158, from earlier caves with nirvana images in which the viewer was encouraged to participate in viewing by circumambulating the cave.
9. Jñānabhadra, T12, 377: 905c02.
10. With the earliest extant text dated to the third century, later texts related to nirvana began to be widely circulated in the early fifth century. See Mather (1981), Qu Dacheng (1994: 9–45), and Shimoda (1997: 3–42).
11. The authenticity of the supposed relic of the Buddha was a non-issue among the believers, whereas the idea of the "true body" prevailed in the question of whether or not to recognize an object as one of the Buddha's relics. For focused studies on ontological status of relics in visual and spatial contexts, see Wang (2005), Lee (2010), and Sharf (2011).
12. Enshrining bodily remains in a coffin-shaped reliquary was also practiced by lay believers, as many excavated tombs demonstrate, see Shanxi Provincial Committee (1960).
13. For the occupation and identity of the tomb occupant, see Hong and Hinrichs (2015). The tomb is described by Kang Baocheng and Sun Bingjun (2009).
14. This phenomenon was unfolding as part of the larger wave of the socialization of the sacred realm during the middle period. See Hong (2016).
15. For the ritual significance of the "portrait" of the tomb occupant on the main wall in tomb art, see Wu (2010: 68–84) and Hong (2014).
16. Adopted from Barbara Resenwein's conceptualization, the concept of "emotional communities" is used here to indicate communities that operate like social communities, such as family, guilds, or monastery, but that tie itself based on particular systems of feeling; see Rosenwein (2002: 842, 2006).
17. For a general introduction to ancestral worship in China, see Baker (1979: 71–106). For discussions on the multifaceted visual culture in ancestral worship and tomb-making throughout Chinese history, see Wu (2010) and Hong (2016).
18. The story is recorded in the *Book of the Later Han* (後漢書, *juan* 27) compiled by Fan Ye (398-445 CE); also see Ouyang Xun's (557-641 CE) *Yiwen Leiju* (藝文類聚, *juan* 4) and the *Taiping Yulan* (太平御覽, *juan* 31, 415 and 735), compiled in the 10th century under Li Fang's direction. The last version among the three accounts on Cao E collected in the *Taiping yulan* (735) explains that Cao E throws herself into the river to find her father's body.
19. See the essays (*Lunheng* 論衡) composed by Wang Chong during the first century CE (1979: 330–331), as well as the *Taiping Yulan* (太平御覽, 370).
20. Sima Qian (second to first century BC) tells the story in the *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記), see Sima Qian (1959: 2311) and Wu (1989: 275–278).
21. The story is told in Wu Jun's (469-520 CE) *Xu Qixie ji* (續齊諧記), see Wu Jun (1966).
22. A similar story can be found in Wenxi Museum (1988).
23. Zhu Xiaofang et al. Shanxi Changzhi shi Guzhang cun Song dai zhuandiao mu," Kaogu, no. 9 (2006): 31–41; 101; 104–105.
24. See Wang Jinxian (2000). Concerning funerary processions, see Zhengzhou Municipal Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology (1998, 2012) and Xu Giangji (2012: 141).

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25. For this effect of "authenticity" in middle-period tomb art, see Hong (2013, 2015a, 2015b).
26. This caveat corresponds to some of the recent reflections on history of emotions in Anglophone scholarship (Burke, 2005; Reddy, 1997; Rosenwein, 2002).

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