The localization of exotic Buddhism——Forms of Hunping (Soul Jar) and its animals and Buddhist images

Ruowei Su*

College of Arts and Humanities, Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, Guangzhou, Guangdong, 510000, China

Abstract. The hunping is an unusual shape of the buried Ming’s vessels. The characteristics of its shape originated from the realization of people's concepts of life, death and funeral in ancient times, which has a strong local color and carries a variety of research values such as artistic decoration, living customs and religious myths at the same time. This paper will sort out the morphological changes of hunping in different periods, including how it evolved from the wulianguan to hunping, and analyze the reasons why wulianguan & hunping are mostly found in the South in relation to the areas where they were excavated. Then, this paper will discuss and conjecture around the funerary concepts and Buddhist connotations reflected in the Buddha statues and other decorations on hunping. The Buddhist elements on hunping aren’t an indication that Buddhism was widely spread and deeply rooted in people's minds at that time, but only vaguely existed as part of the idea of the Divine Immortal's formula.

1 Introduction

Hunping, translated as soul jar or soul vase, is a type of ceramic funerary urn often found in the tombs of the Han dynasty and especially the Six Dynasties periods of early imperial China. Such jars are characterized by rather plain lower portions, often with low-relief designs on the surface, juxtaposed with complex sculptural assemblages that adorn the upper portions.

Most scholars believe that such tomb plainware, including hunping, was made as a dwelling place to house the souls of the dead. Late Tang Dynasty Writings "Miscellaneous Notes" recorded, Food bottle five grain halo that made the former Bo Yi Shu Qi brothers... starved to death in the Shouyang Mountain [1]. Carrying the body to return home, fear of soul hungry, that is, set up cooked food bottle, five grain bags to attract the soul, now the funeral with the gift [2]. This shows that the "Cooked Food Vase" was initially placed in the tomb to solve the problem of hunger of the soul after death, but in the middle and late stages, after adding more contents to the decoration and shape, it was expanded to be the hope and trust for the soul and the world after death, reflecting the evolution of the ancient people's understanding of death and funeral, and "Hunping" also got its name as a result [3]. Kominami Ichirō argued that the jars at the top of hunping represent the Five Sacred Mountains in ancient mythology, and the larger jar in the center represents the Kunlun Mountains [4]. There is also a high frequency of decorative motifs, especially animal and Buddhist elements, on some of the objects.

Therefore, this article will first categorize the classification and morphological proportions of soul bottles by examining pictures as an example, and sort out their morphological evolution, including the chronological evolution combing, the different forms of five-tube bottles and soul bottles. Secondly, the article will summarize the factors affecting the changes in the styles of soul bottles based on the above and previous information. Lastly, the article will discuss the discussion around the soul vase, summarize the previous research and draw conclusions and conjectures. From the evolution of the shape of the hunping, it is possible to further study the ancient people's understanding of death in a specific era and region, as well as the people's way of honoring the souls of the dead.

2 Morphological evolution

Due to the diversity of its morphological evolution, it is still necessary to distinguish between the different forms of expression of hunping. Wulianguan usually features a large jar with four smaller jars attached to the neck. Differing from that, hunping is divided into two parts. Separated by a clay platform, the upper layer is more diversely decorated. This is an important basis for distinguishing the two.

2.1 Wulianguan's form

The Wulianguan evolved from a stumpy shape with no decoration to a waist with decoration (e.g, bears, birds, etc), and eventually human figurines. As the variety of decorations increased, the shape of the wulianguan...
evolved from short and fat (Fig.1) to tall and thin (Fig.2). When enlarging its belly could not satisfy further needs, the clay platform was created, and hunping emerged.

![Fig. 1. Primitive porcelain wulianguan, Eastern Han Dynasty, Shaoxing Museum, China. (Photo credit: Original)](image1)

When enlarging its belly could not satisfy further needs, the clay platform was created, and hunping emerged.

![Fig. 2. Northern Song Dynasty Wuzhou kiln celadon wulianguan, Zhejiang Provincial Museum, China. (Photo credit: Original)](image2)

**2.2 Hunping’s form**

The period from the end of the Eastern Han dynasty to the Sun-Wu regime was a time of significant transition from wulianguan to hunping. The evolution of the form of hunping is similar to that of the Wulianguan, mainly in terms of decorative elements and overall shape. There are two key developments in the structure of the vessel: first, the creation of a platform for the jars; and second, the gradual addition of a cover to the upper body and the emergence of a tower [5]. The small jars are no longer used as visual subject matter, but are gradually transformed into the form of a pavilion. Some of them still maintain the form of the jars (Fig. 3). In terms of the level of the jars, the stacked plastic platforms made a clear distinction between the top and bottom of hunping structure during this period, and the overall height of the objects continued to increase. From the point of view of decorative techniques and the distribution of decorative elements, a large number of animals and Buddhist elements began to appear in the decoration (Fig.4).

The period from Wu to the Western Jin Dynasty was the culmination of the development of hunping objects, while the technique of stacking plastic gradually matured and the style became fixed. The main body of the platform decoration is dominated by the four-cornered pavilion building, and the layered pavilion gradually appears. Immortals, unicorns and other decorative images began to be arranged in an orderly manner, and the relief decorations and bird images on the lower canisters were reduced; the overall modeling was simplified, moving from lively to solemn (Fig.5) [6].

![Fig. 3. Western Jin Dynasty Porcelain Mounding Jar, Shaoxing Museum, China. (Photo credit: Original)](image3)

![Fig. 4. Western Jin Dynasty blue-glazed jug with stacked figures of birds in pavilions (265-317 A.D.), Shanghai Museum, China. (Photo credit: Original)](image4)
Paying attention to the areas where these hunping were unearthed, it’s obvious that the appearance and evolution of hunping began in the south, and only gradually developed to the north in the later period. However, in Qin and Han Dynasties, the Emperor offers fengshan (The large-scale ceremonies of ancient Chinese emperors sacrificing to heaven and earth in times of peace and prosperity, usually held on Mount Tai by the emperors themselves) in Shandong, which far away from the Jiangsu and Zhejiang (where hunping was unearthed), so what’s the reason that make things related to the belief in immortals at here first? The eastern Zhejiang region’s economy and culture develop with the rise of the immortals, and as a bearer of the immortals like yin and yang, Wulianguan were manufactured and used in tombs. After that, Buddhism reached the eastern seaboard of China and combined with local Chinese belief, then hunping was made.

3 Discussions about Hunping

3.1 Funeral concepts reflected in Hunping

As early as the Warring States period in the Wu-Yue culture, there was a tradition of flying birds and figures on pillars being used to symbolize the celestial realm. This notion was also quite common in shamanic, or witchcraft, cultures around the world, such as the Cosmic Tree, which was believed to be a medium for communicating between the human and celestial realms [7]. The stacked plastic platform of hunping is often intricately decorated with a large number of flying birds affixed next to the pillars of the small canisters. The small canisters are molded with a doorway, arching seated figurines, Buddha statues and other shapes underneath the canisters. These reflect the ancient people's imagination of the human realm and close to the entrance to the celestial realm (Fig.6). Hunping from the Western Jin Dynasty add hipped roofs to this foundation, recreating the scene of "Hundreds of Birds Gathering Like Smoke, Mountain Beasts Stirring Lin and Warding Off Evil" in Han Lefu Poetry - Dong Ge Xing [7] (Fig.7).

The gateway queens, which appear in abundance in soul vases at a later date, are symbols of the graves of the dead. The arching seated figurines should play the role of serving the deceased in the burial chamber (Fig. 8). The animal-riding deities, Buddha statues, and beasts (including the blue dragon, white tiger, and unicorn, etc.) are equivalent to the leaders and companions on the way from the tomb of the deceased's soul to the world of immortality. The dogs, snakes, and fishes which mostly appear directly on the platform of the mounded figurines or in the belly of the jars under the platform, should be regarded as the symbols of the real world or the world under the ground [8] (Fig.9).
3.2 Connections to Buddhism: Buddhist decorations on Hunping

When hunping developed to a later stage, the frequency of Buddha statues gradually increased. However, in the early stages of the spread of Buddhism, people lacked an understanding of the true meaning of Buddhism, and simply incorporated it into their local beliefs as a new system of foreign gods [9]. The Buddhas on hunping all appear to be childish images, showing a combination style of foreign (Indian) features and native images of gods.

The representative style corresponding to the era in which hunping was in its heyday of development was Gandhara. Compared the buddha statue on hunping (Fig.10) with Gandhara Buddha statue (Fig.11), it is obvious that most of these Buddha statues all have a fleshy bun, a collar light on the back, a through-shoulder garment, a U-shaped clothing pattern, cross-legged sitting, and a lotus seat. All of these are typical Indian features [10].

At the same time, these statues sat on the "Dragon and Tiger Seat" or "Double Lion Seat", which is very similar to the statue of the Queen Mother of the West in the Han dynasty statues in the Sichuan area. Although the figures on the seat (the gods and goddesses) changed, the shape of the throne is very close to the gods and gods seated on the throne in the gesture are also very similar [12] (Fig.12).

Considering the meaning of hunping, the participation of Buddha as a "foreign god" in Chinese funerary activities, and symbolizing the pursuit of wealth and happiness in the afterlife is clearly incompatible with the meaning of Buddhism. The possible reasons for this state of affairs are: on the one hand, Buddhism was first introduced to China, but the people still lacked a true understanding of it. On the other hand, Buddhism, as a foreign religion that had just been introduced, wanted to take root in the land of foreign cultures [10]. Blurring the strict definition of the religion itself and taking the localized pro-people route was precisely one of the most important and effective ways to do so.

4 Conclusion

Early in the formation of Chinese funeral concepts have shown the core of the concept of life and death, that is, the soul does not die, and burial rites and customs have also developed a solemn set of systems, the Jiangdong
region basically continued the East Han Dynasty style of thick burials. During the Qin and Han Dynasties, fairy magic was prevalent, and the images of Queen Mother of the West, and East Duke, were often seen in Ming wares. The Buddha, as a foreign thing, appeared in hunping as a kind of fairy magic, and all of them were for the fundamental purpose of the hunping to bless the departed souls. In other words, at this time, Buddhism did not have the prestige to be believed and worshiped alone.

References