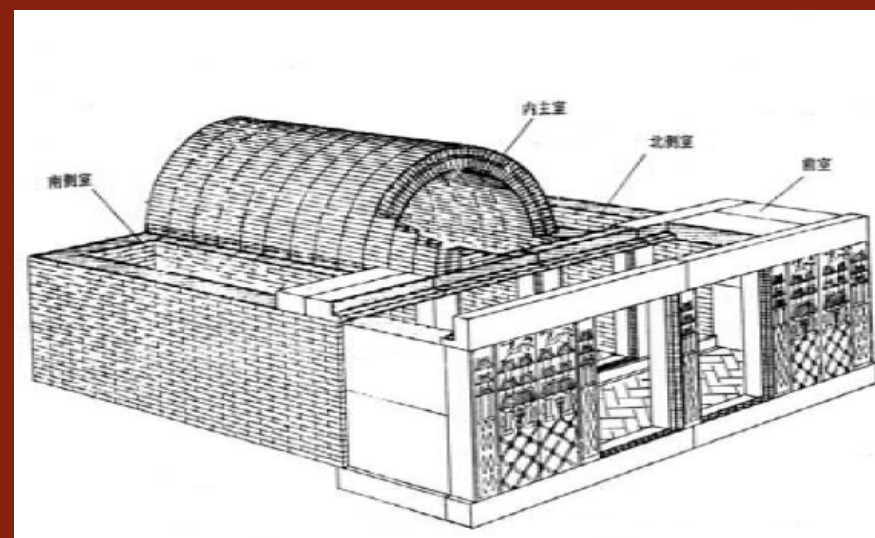
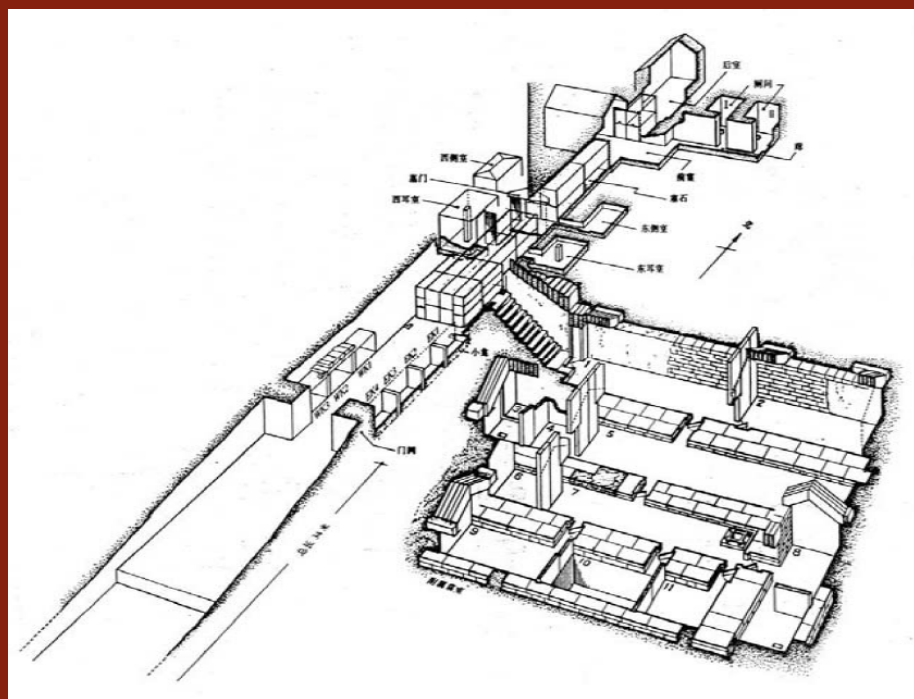


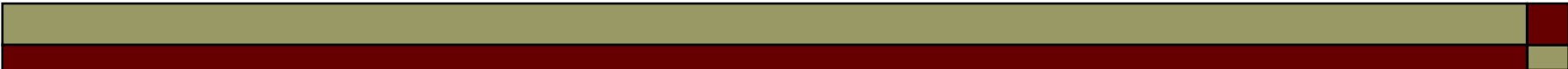
Death and the Afterlife:

Notions of 'heaven' and 'hell' in ancient and medieval China

Development of tombs

- ❑ Diversified types of Han sepulture
- ❑ 2nd cent. BCE to 1st cent. CE: shift from vertical pit burials with nested coffins to horizontal constructions, rock-cut or subterranean tombs → image of dwelling of the living
- ❑ Funeral rites celebrated inside tomb
- ❑ Burial of husband and wife in the same tomb
- ❑ Funerary banners disappeared at end of Western Han → iconography on tomb walls





Social developments reflected in burials

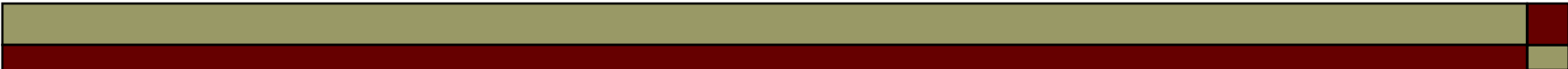
- ❑ Primacy of tomb over ancestral temple
- ❑ Deceased seen as an individual
- ❑ Tomb place where living and dead communicate
- ❑ Communication with the dead raises issue of rites to protect the living during this contact, e.g. talismans, formulas of exorcism

Decorations and their interpretation

- ❑ Tomb as an entrance to paradise
- ❑ Décor evokes ascension of the tomb occupier
- ❑ Images to protect those who communicate with dead
- ❑ Multiple connotations of decorations, e.g. banquet scenes or procession of carriages
- ❑ Religious interpretation dominates: décor represents cosmological system and mortuary rites; social interpretation not eliminated
- ❑ Use of *mingqi* ‘brilliant artefacts’, objects specifically produced for the dead, generalised during 1st century BCE (significance of that?)

Lavish burials (*houzang* 厚葬)

- ❑ Wealth of some families allowed luxurious burials
- ❑ Emphasis on virtue of filial piety
- ❑ Descendants tried to distinguish themselves through building luxurious tombs for the forebears
- ❑ Funerals/tombs used to tighten political links
- ❑ Luxurious tombs disappear after the fall of the Han (220 CE); reasons: lack of wealth, tomb robbery, movement against ritualism of the Han



Tomb as cosmological system

- ❑ Han: Tomb as ‘cosmic mandala’ (Pirazzoli); conception of tomb as microcosm
- ❑ Cupola represents the vault of heaven; heaven conceived as circular above the square earth

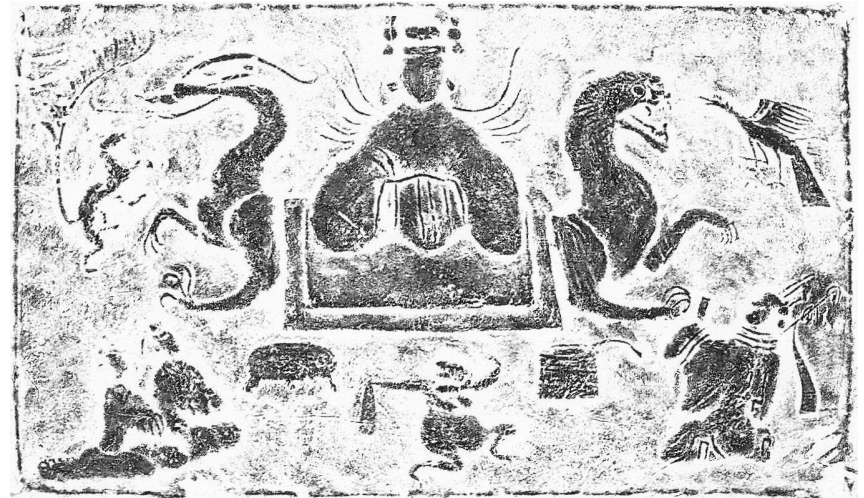
Representations of the other world

- “The living have their district, the dead have the tomb. The living go forward, the dead backward. Dead and living follow different roads. Let them not meet.”

生人有鄉， 死人有墓. 生人前行， 死人卻行.
死生弈路， 毋復相[忤] (Pirazzoli, p. 977)

Xiwangmu: Queen Mother of the West

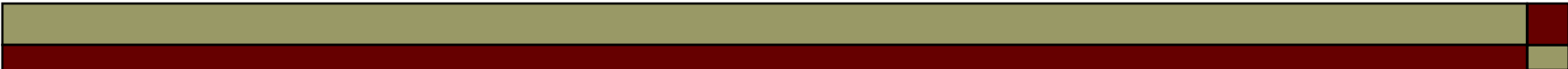
- ❑ Assumed many different forms in Han mythology
- ❑ In mortuary art she was portrayed as a benevolent matriarch who welcomes the hun souls of the dead into her heavenly paradise atop Mount Kunlun



Rubbing of a brick relief from the Han period, showing the Queen Mother sitting on her throne. To her right hand, a nine-tailed fox (jiuwei hu 九尾狐) and a dragon are facing each other, and to her left, a three-legged crow (sanzu wu 三足鳥) and a tiger are facing each other. Just in front of the Queen Mother, a toad is dancing (see the story of Chang E 嫦娥), while male and female onlookers (immortals?) are sitting to the right and left sides of the scene. Source: *Zhongguo meishu quanji bianji weiyuanhui* (1993), no. 216.

Where does the soul go?

- Two souls – *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄
- destination of *po* 魄-souls was some place deep under the earth
- Yellow Springs (*huangquan* 黃泉); in Warring States period (403-221 BC)
- Various alternative terms found in the ancient texts, such as the Nine Springs (*jiuquan* 九泉) or the Nine Sources (*jiuyuan* 九源)
- “The position of Water is in the northern quadrant. In that quadrant the vital ying-breath is beneath the Yellow Springs, where it nourishes the myriads of beings.” (*Baihutong*)
- → These places evoke darkness and coldness but not ideas of good and evil or punishment.
- 幽 commonest word used to describe the condition of afterlife: “hidden”, “sunken”, “deep”, “distant”, “dark” etc.
- The “Dark Regions”, “Dark Capital”, “Dark Realm”, “Dark Road” etc.



Yangzi-Region Afterworlds

- [Chuci]
- Common idea in afterlife scenarios in north and south China: the soul encounters nothing but misery.



“The Son of Heaven properly sacrifices to Heaven, the Three Dukes to the five sacred mountains, the feudal lords to the mountains and rivers, and the people sacrifice on the five auspicious *la* [...] days to their ancestors, and in the second and eighth months to the gods of the soil and the stove. Aside from these there should be no other sacrifices. Whoever sacrifices to the god of the soil and stove on other dates, violates the [prohibition] of excessive cults.”

Earth as link

- Realms of the living and the dead are supernaturally linked by earth, more concretely by earth deities
- Deities exercise surveillance over human actions and destiny
- Mountains as prime manifestations of earth → Taishan is “younger brother of Heaven”; mountains as places where souls return after death

Mountains as Heavens (from *Declarations of the Perfected*): Notion of the Six Heavens

“Mt Lo-feng is in the north, in the *kuei-region*.²⁸ The mountain is 2,600 leagues high, and 30,000 leagues in circumference. Beneath the mountain lie the Cave-Heavens (*tung-tien*). [The area] enclosed by the mountain is 35,000 leagues. Both above and below there are mansions (*kung-shih*) of the spirits of the dead (*kuei-shen*). On the mountain there are six palaces, and within the Cave there are six palaces. [Each] is in fact a thousand leagues in circumference. These are the palaces of the spirits of the dead of the Six Heavens. Those on the mountain are the Exterior Palaces, while those within the Cave are the Interior Palaces. But their governance is the same.”
(Thompson 1989, pp. 38-39)

Kaltenmark, “Ideology of the T'ai-p'ing ching”, p. 36f.

The TPC's concept of life beyond the grave remains very archaic. The souls of the dead live below the earth in the family soil, whose fertility they assure. They must lead a life that is without worry and joyful. But for them to be joyful, they must have known how to live joyfully in their lifetimes. It is also necessary that their descendants behave well, in which case life is transmitted. If, on the contrary, the descendants become bad and maltreat their own bodies, which is [*sic*] composed of cosmic *ch'ü* (i.e. vital breath) and is a heritage from the ancestors, the fertility of the race will be exhausted When the subterranean genies or souls . . . see someone newly deceased arrive, they question him about his activities and about the times he has repented, and determine by this examination which register he is in. Elsewhere it is specified that Heaven keeps the register of life and that Earth keeps the register of death. Still elsewhere the supreme judge is said to be the Lord of Heaven (*T'ien-chun*⁴); the spirits under his authority report good and evil, which are written down in the registers of good and bad actions. The Lord of Heaven appears to be identical with the spirit of the heart (*hsin-shen*⁴), which is present in the interior of the human body (cf. [a passage] where the Director of Destiny, the *ssu-ming*, is in the heart).²⁴

Sin, punishment, purgatory

- ❑ Chinese took over Buddhist conception without much changes
- ❑ Heavenly Master sect regards illness as punishment for evil deeds (punishment of living but the realm of the dead serves as instrument to mete out punishment) → possibility of appeal against unjustified action of celestial bureaucracy

Tao Hongjing, “Declarations of the Perfected” (Daoist text)

“It would seem that this is in fact the place where the King of Souls [*Kuei wang*] of Northern Feng passes judgement on the sinful. Its spirits would seem in fact to have passed by where King Yama (Yen-lo Wang) resides. The King [of Northern Feng] is in fact the present Great Emperor of the north (Pei-Ta-Ti·). But I don't know who the great spirits of the Five Paths might be. All beings who are born and reborn are, upon their deaths, without exception under his (i.e. the King of Northern Feng) or their (i.e. the great spirits of the Five Paths) control. So far as purgatory (ti yu) is concerned, it is not only a single place; Mt. Tai, the rivers (or, the Yellow River, ho) and the ocean all have [purgatories].”

- souls of the good, not of the evil come to the Six Heavens in preparation for their salvation.
- But idea of purgatory is accepted by that time, i.e. 5th-6th century CE.

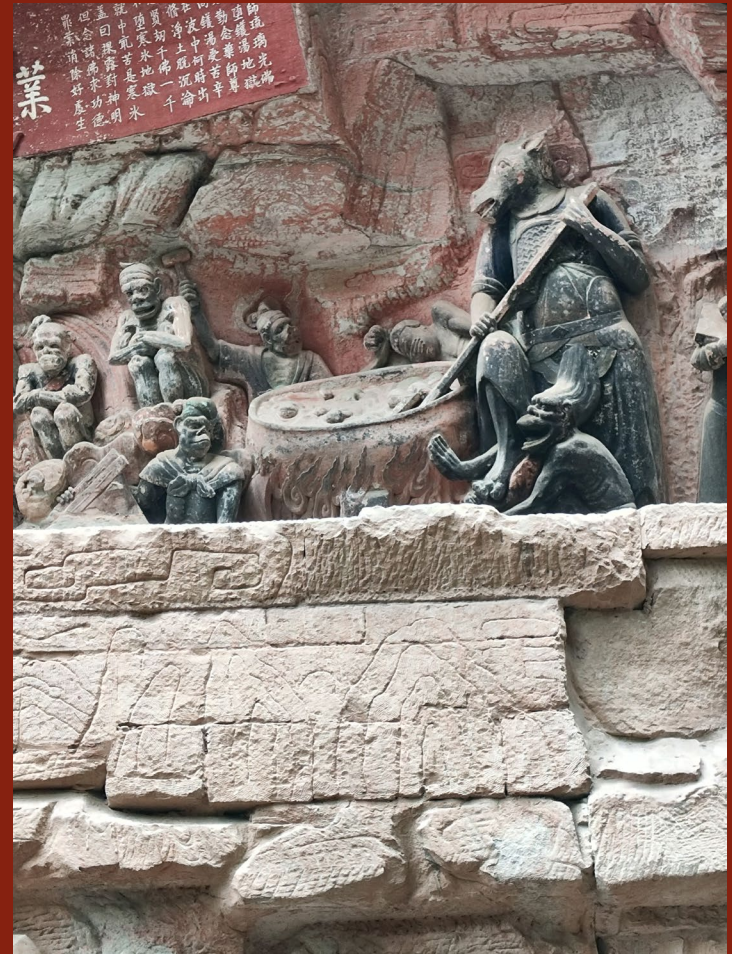
Buddhist canonical ideas of hell

- Early Buddhist canonical sources contain a variety of traditions concerning the subterranean prisons, called *naraka* in Sanskrit, *diyu* 地獄 in Chinese, and *jigoku* in Japanese
- According to Chinese Buddhist texts hells are said to number eight, ten, eighteen, thirty, or sixty-four
- Two uses of hell: 1) to scare the unwitting layperson into a Buddhist way of life; 2) for monks, the torments of hell are used to illustrate the power of their own mental fabrication
- Important: extra-canonical representations of hell need to be included in consideration (popular representations – “the first purpose of artistic renderings of hell was to draw not a correct picture of the otherworld, but rather, a convincing one”, S. Teiser 1988, p. 439)

Extra-canonical representations of hell

- Zhang Xiaoshi 張孝師 (ca. late seventh to early eighth centuries) first painter to make a specialty out of scenes of hell
- “Chang Hsiao-shih was a commander of the intrepid cavalry. He was good at painting. Having once died and returned to life, he was especially good at painting scenes of hell. These were all what he had seen on his journey through the dark world and could not be compared to anything obtained through imagination. Wu Tao-hsuan saw his paintings and based his transformation scenes of hell on them. While painting critics maintain that the majority of his creations had merit without being perfectly good, the most distinguished [painters] showed their esteem for his transformation scenes of hell. This is why Tao-hsüan would have been willing to copy them.” (From Teiser 1988, p. 440)
- Heavens and hells depicted on walls were originally part of a meditative tradition → performative character of hell art

Depictions of Buddhist *diyu* 地獄, Dazu, Sichuan



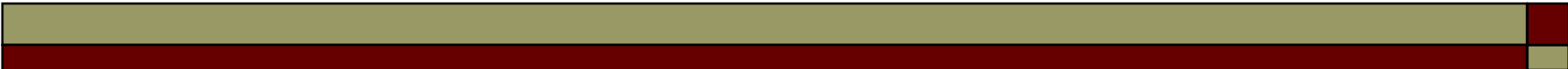
Depictions of Buddhist *diyu* 地獄, Dazu, Sichuan



Mulian story (early 9th century)

- *The Transformation Text on the Great Maudgalyāyana [Mu-lien] Saving His Mother from the Dark Region (c. 800 CE)*
- story of the filial son and diligent monk named Mulian 目蓮, who descended to purgatory to save his mother (Mdm. Liu, a.k.a. Lady Niladhi) from punishment
- Origin of the Ghost Festival (Chinese: 鬼節; pinyin: guǐjié)





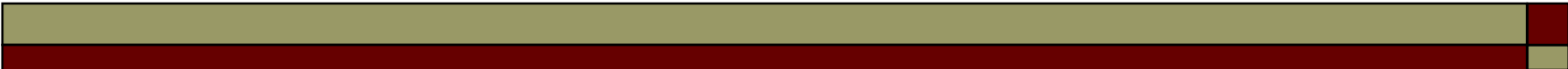
“Having been granted the awesome power of the Buddha, Maudgalyayana was enabled to visit his mother. But the roots of her sin were deep and fast; the karmic forces difficult to eliminate. Thus, although she was freed of the torments of hell, she fell upon the path of hungry ghosts. Here the sorrow and suffering were dissimilar, for misery and joy were completely polarized. When placed next to her previous existence, the difference was intensified hundreds, thousands, even ten thousands of times. Her throat was like the eye of a needle, through which a drop of water could not pass. Her head seemed to be Mount T'ai, which the three rivers could hardly fill. She never even heard the words 'broth' or 'water.' Months would accumulate and years would pass while she endured the miseries of hunger and emaciation. She might see in the distance some clear, cool water but, when she came near, it would turn into a river of pus. Even though she obtained delicious food and tasty meals, they would immediately be transformed into fierce flames.” (transl. by Victor Mair, [Mulian Rescues His Mother \(reed.edu\)](#))

Ten Kings, according to *Sūtra of the Prophecy of King Yama*

1. The Far-Reaching King of Ch'in: first 7 days after death
2. The King of the First River: 8–14 days after death
3. The Imperial King of Sung: 15–21 days after death
4. The King of the Five Offices: 22–28 days after death
5. King Yama: 29–35 days after death
6. The King of Transformations: 36–42 days after death
7. The King of Mount T'ai: 43–49 days after death
8. The Impartial King:²⁶ 100 days after death
9. The King of the Capital: one year after death
10. The King of the Cycle of the Five Paths: three years after death

- earliest systematic exposition of system that remains universal feature of Chinese folk religion since Song (960-1279)

Name
Qinguang, 秦廣王
Chujiang, 楚江王
Songdi, 宋帝王
Wuguan, 五官王
Yanluo, 閻羅王
Biancheng, 汴王
Taishan, 泰山王
Dushi, 都市王
Pingdeng, 平等王
Lunhui, 輪回王



Literature Recommendation

Teiser, Stephen F. 1988. *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China*. 1st ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Thank you for listening!

感謝大家