

Cremation and Body Burning in Five Dynasties China*

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Cremation—the disposal of the dead body by incineration—has a long history in China dating back to the Neolithic period, although throughout much of this historic era it was stigmatized and its use was largely localized to a limited number of ethnic minorities and religious groups. China, however, did witness a period of the widespread popularity of cremation, a development that began in the Tang (618–907), quickly expanded during the Five Dynasties (907–960), and reached its peak in the early Song (960–1276). This paper examines the practice of cremation during the Five Dynasties period.

A number of factors contributed to the rapid growth of cremation in China during the tenth century. Increased interaction with powerful northern ethnic groups and the influence of Buddhism helped familiarize the practice among the Han Chinese. Moreover, in the period characterized by incessant warfare and political upheavals, the convenient practicality of cremation transformed it into a realistic alternative to traditional burial. Yet, besides these three widely agreed-upon factors, there was another largely overlooked connection which, I believe, was responsible for popularizing the practice: namely, cremation's connection to positive body burning, which became particularly prominent during the Five Dynasties.

As Ebrey observed, although cremation in China has largely been perceived as a Buddhist practice, the religious connection is not easily noticeable in the archaeological and textual findings related to the Song and Yuan period cremation burials.¹ That is to say that Buddhist or outside cultural influence alone fails to paint a full and complex picture of the Chinese practice of cremation in the tenth century. For this, I believe the relationship between cremation and the Chinese practices of body burning—namely, retaliatory burning, burning of the diseased, and suicidal burning—needs to be evaluated. These three forms of body burning, which demonstrated the incineration of the body, whether living or dead, were not always viewed in a negative light, nor did they necessarily yield

* I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments. The Wenyuange 文淵閣 edition of the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (SKQS) was used for this research.

¹ Patricia Ebrey, "Cremation in Sung China," *American Historical Review* 95, no. 2 (April 1990), p. 414.

devastating outcomes, even in the Confucian and Daoist cultural context. In fact, the ideological basis for the burial custom—the belief in the social function and sustained corporeality of the deceased body—also gave rise to the three forms of body burning widely carried out by the Han Chinese throughout history. As we will see, the link between cremation and body burning became even more apparent in the socio-politically volatile Five Dynasties, as the boundary between the two often became blurred. The custom of body burning played a vital role in paving the way to the eventual acceptance and appropriation of cremation, an important detail that sheds light on cremation's deep roots in traditional Chinese culture. To present a contextual overview of the development of cremation during the Five Dynasties, we will briefly discuss its development in the preceding and succeeding Tang and Song dynasties.

Cremation in the Tang

Cremation had long been practised in the area presently occupied by China, even before the Tang dynasty. Evidence was found that could be dated back to as early as the Neolithic period (c. 3000–2000 B.C.E.).² Historical and archaeological research has shown that by the fourth century, cremation was performed in areas from Shandong 山東 to Shaanxi 陝西. For instance, in the Southern and Northern Dynasties period (420–589), cremation enjoyed considerable popularity among the Khitans 契丹, and the practice continued throughout the following dynasties.³ Since cremation was carried out mostly among the northern tribes, the Han Chinese regarded it as a strange custom belonging to the northern tribe called Rong 戎.⁴ In spite of this, for a long time they did not express hostile feelings against cremation simply because not many of their own people observed it, and the issue

² Archaeological excavations show us the evidence of cremation from the Longshan 龍山 cultural period (c. 3000–2000 B.C.E.) in the present area of Gansu 甘肅. See F. P. Lisowski, “The Practice of Cremation in China,” *Eastern Horizon* (Hong Kong) 19, no. 6 (July 1980), p. 21. But since most of these findings demonstrate cases of group burial or mixed burial, with scattered and sometimes even injured bones, archaeologists doubt whether these cases of cremation can be considered “proper” burial (*ibid.*, p. 2). Later, in the Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin, and Han periods there were actual cases of cremation. See Zang Rong 藏嶸 and Wang Hongkai 王宏凱, *Zhongguo Sui Tang Wudai xisushi* 中國隋唐五代習俗史 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe 人民出版社, 1994), p. 164.

³ Xu Jijun 徐吉軍, “Lun Songdai huozang de shengxing ji qi yuanyin” 論宋代火葬的盛行及其原因, *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究, 1992, no. 3, p. 80. Also see Hebeisheng wenwu yanjiusuo 河北省文物研究所, ed., *Xuanhua Liao mu: 1974–1993 nian kaogu fajue baogao* 宣化遼墓：1974–1993年考古發掘報告 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe 文物出版社, 2001), p. 368.

⁴ J.J.M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China: Its Ancient Forms, Evolution, History and Present Aspect; Manners, Customs and Social Institutions Connected Therewith* (Taipei: Literature House, 1964), vol. 3, p. 1392.

seemed foreign and almost irrelevant to them. Critical voices only began to emerge in the late Tang when a growing number of Han Chinese embraced the custom.⁵

Cremation became increasingly visible during the Tang, thanks to the cosmopolitan cultural policies and popularity of Buddhism. Many ethnic groups came to live under the roof of Tang, and they brought along their traditions and customs, which included cremation. These northern tribes practised cremation as a proper way of disposing of the dead. Historical records of the Tang tell us that Tibetans and Turks, and also the people of Qiang 羌, performed cremation as their local custom.⁶ *Huozang* 火葬, the Chinese term for cremation most commonly used today, is found in the *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 when describing the observance of cremation by the Qiang nationality in the north.⁷ Despite the fact that cremation was not a customary practice of the Han Chinese, the Tang government allowed the ethnic groups living among them to perform cremation as they wished. It is true that some of these migrants adopted Confucian and Daoist burial in their attempt to merge into the mainstream culture of the Han Chinese, but still many of them chose to follow their traditional custom. With the migration of northern tribes into areas primarily occupied by the Han Chinese and with the increase in cultural exchange between them, cremation was gradually divested of its foreignness and entered China's cultural scene.

Buddhism was another crucial agent for introducing cremation to the Han Chinese. During the Tang, a great number of Chinese men and women joined the *sangha* (Buddhist community) and vowed to live out the teachings of Buddha, and some of them even decided to be cremated, following in the footsteps of Buddha, who was cremated according to Indian custom. The stories of Buddha's elaborate funeral, recorded in the *Mahāparinirvā sūtra*, were well known to the Buddhists in China. The Chinese recognized cremation's Buddhist connection. The *Jiu Tangshu*, for example, underscores the Indian origin of cremation and its connection to the Buddhist religion: "In India, the dead are cremated and their ashes are kept, and they are considered Buddhists."⁸ Buddhist cremation grew in number, thanks to the popular cult of relics. What started as the worship of Buddha's relics for their supernatural powers also led to the veneration of the relics of famous masters and monks. *Sarira*—the relics of their cremated remains—came to be seen as the visible proof of their spiritual attainments: the more relics, the greater the spiritual authority. Cremation, in other words, became a necessary measure of spiritual assessment commonly performed by the Buddhist clerics of the Tang. While much less frequent in number, there are also reported incidents of lay people's cremation as well.⁹

⁵ Zhou Suping 周蘇平, *Zhongguo gudai sangzang xisu* 中國古代喪葬習俗 (Xi'an 西安: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe 陝西人民出版社, 1991), p. 132.

⁶ Liu Xu 劉昫 et al., *Jiu Tangshu* (SKQS), *juan* 121, p. 17a; *juan* 194a, p. 10a; *juan* 198, p. 3b; Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and Song Qi 宋祁, *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (SKQS), *juan* 215a, p. 15b; *juan* 222c, p. 4b.

⁷ *Jiu Tangshu*, *juan* 198, p. 3b.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 24a–b.

⁹ Liu Shufen's 劉淑芬 study of forest burial (*lin zang* 林葬), in which the corpse was cast into the wild to be consumed by animals and insects, shows that the remains of lay members of

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The Tang saw the emergence and gradual growth of cremation through its early and middle period. The effort to understand and examine the origin of Chinese burial custom and the customs of other ethnic groups became visible, as we see in the description in the *Tongdian* 通典 of the funerary customs of various cultures.¹⁰

In the burial of ancient China, bodies were covered with wood and grass and then buried in the open field. No mounds were erected and no trees planted. The sage-kings of later times changed this with the use of inner and outer coffins. In the present time, when parents die in Mohe Kingdom 靺鞨國 their bodies are thrown away in the open field and used to feed martens. In Liuqiu Kingdom 流求國 no inner and outer coffins are used. The body is buried after first wrapping in grass and then covering with earth. No grave is mounted. In the kingdoms of Yi 夷 and Di 狄, people practise burial, cremation, or submersion of body in water. The people of Tan and Heng states 潭衡州 just collect the bones of the dead, put them in small cases and install them in hollow rocks on mountain cliffs. Generally speaking, customs are extremely varied and their methods all different, therefore we cannot enumerate them all.¹¹

Increased awareness of cultural differences nurtured more positive views of cremation, although burial based on Confucian and Daoist traditions remained the dominant custom among the Han Chinese.

Cremation in the Five Dynasties

As the mighty Tang approached its end, its imperial court that once swayed the political scene of East Asia began to tumble. The rebellion of An Lushan 安祿山 (c. 703–757) and Shi Siming 史思明 (703–761) fatally undermined the already declining state control, and eventually twenty-three years after the end of the Huang Chao 黃巢 Uprising, Tang came to its demise. Following the fall of the Tang, five successive short-lived dynasties arose, thereafter called the period of the Five Dynasties. Despite the succinctness of its

(Note 9—Continued)

the Three Stages Sect 三階教 who underwent forest burial were later collected and cremated. See Liu Shufen, “Lin zang—Zhonggu fojiao lushizang yanjiu zhi san” 林葬——中古佛教露屍葬研究之三, *Dalu zazhi* 大陸雜誌 96, no. 3 (March 1998), p. 25.

¹⁰ De Groot incorrectly quoted from the *Tongdian* when he said “In ancient times, the dead were conveyed to the open country and covered there with firewood, and the osseous remains were thus committed to the earth. Therefore, when we act in the same way, we follow the customs of antiquity and do not offend again the rules of propriety. On account of the laws against it, cremation is no longer practiced nowadays.” The quote, however, does not appear in the *Tongdian*, but instead in Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (1567–1624), *Dian lue* 滇略 (SKQS), *juan* 4, p. 5a. It was Xie who first quoted incorrectly from the *Tongdian*. See de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vol. 3, p. 1393.

¹¹ Du You 杜佑, *Tongdian* (SKQS), *juan* 105, pp. 11b–12a.

duration and the devastation caused by prolonged political turmoil and warfare, the historical records of the Five Dynasties have left us with valuable information on the background and practice of cremation during this period. The popularity of cremation grew rapidly throughout the Five Dynasties, so that by the beginning of the Song it evolved into a prevalent custom observed by people from various sociocultural backgrounds.¹² Vital to the expansion of cremation in the Five Dynasties were: (a) the further empowerment of northern ethnic groups, (b) the steady advancement of Buddhism, (c) the widespread practice of positive body burning, and (d) the practicality of cremation.

The Five Dynasties was a period characterized by the political expansion of northern ethnic powers. The weakening authority of the central government in the late years of the Tang gave way to the empowering of peripheral governors, many of whom were of northern ethnic origins. After the fall of the Tang, they contended with each other to gain more control over the territory previously and largely occupied by the Han Chinese. Three of the five dynasties—Later Tang, Later Jin, and Later Han—were founded by Shatuo-Turk leaders. Besides the Turks, many other northern ethnic groups made up a large part of the population, each holding different views and methods of disposing the dead. The Khitan, Xi 奚, and Shiwei 室韋 communities practised tree- or sky-burial, which involved exposure of the corpse in the open air.¹³ The people of Tubo 吐蕃, who controlled the Ya'an 雅安 area in Sichuan, put the bones in a bottle and buried it.¹⁴ The natives of Mohe practised a burial without a coffin and offered as sacrifice the horse belonging to the dead.¹⁵ The Tubos and Mohes, who valued military prowess, honoured the strong and young and despised the old and weak; and they demonstrated this by having a designated mourning period for the young but not for the old.¹⁶ There is, however, no indication that such radically different customs affected the Chinese attitude towards the dead in any perceptible measure. What deserves our attention is the fact that the Shatuo-Turks, who ruled parts of China for three dynasties (923–950), practised cremation.¹⁷ Official history

¹² More archaeological investigations on the funerary practices in tenth-century China have emerged in recent years. Three cremation burial sites have been identified, including a Southern Han site in Taihegang 太和崗, Guangdong 廣東, and a Later Shu site in Leshan prefecture 樂山縣, Sichuan 四川, and another from the Kingdom of Min 閩 in Quanzhou 泉州, Fujian 福建. For information on the Southern Han cremation site, see http://news.ifeng.com/gundong/detail_2011_08/02/8109439_0.shtml (accessed 8 February 2012). The other two sites have been studied by Deng Yimo 鄭以墨 and Li Shulei 李蜀蕾. See Deng Yimo, "Wudai muzang meishu yanjiu" 五代墓葬美術研究 (Ph.D. diss., Zhongyang meishu xueyuan 中央美術學院, 2009), pp. 214, 248–49; Li Shulei, "Shiguo muzang chubu yanjiu" 十國墓葬初步研究 (Master's thesis, Jilin daxue 吉林大學, 2004), pp. 10 and 16.

¹³ Zang and Wang, *Zhongguo Sui Tang Wudai xisushi*, p. 210.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 206 and 211.

¹⁷ *Jiu Tangshu*, *juan* 194a, p. 10a; *Xin Tangshu*, *juan* 215a, p. 15b.

records two instances of cremation of the Shatuo-Turk imperial family: Queen Mother Li 李皇太后 (d. 950) and Concubine Dowager An 安皇太妃, both from the Later Jin dynasty. The cremations of these two women, which will be discussed in detail in textual analysis, are the only voluntarily practised cases of cremation in the history of the Chinese royal family in that they were done following the wishes of the deceased. The three-dynasty-long reign of the Shatuo-Turks explains, to a certain degree, the popularization of cremation among the general populace during the Five Dynasties.

Buddhism continued to act as a major promoter of cremation. If the Tang provided a fertile ground for the religion's expansion, the Five Dynasties proved to be the opposite. Buddhist institutions in general were suppressed throughout the Five Dynasties as the governments tried to curtail their political influence. Emperor Shizong 世宗 of Later Zhou (r. 954–959), in particular, displayed much enthusiasm in weakening the influence of Buddhism, which he deemed was detrimental to the amelioration of the empire. He persecuted the religion by banning people from entering the order and destroying the statues of Buddha and more than thirty thousand monasteries.¹⁸ But despite these attempts, the Buddhist religion in China endured: while most major sects underwent decline, the Chan School gained more followers. Although much reduced in scale, the sustained development of Buddhism became a significant ideological and spiritual support for cremation. The Five Dynasties witnessed the growth of cremation among the Buddhist believers, becoming a practice observed widely by both clerics and lay people. The adoption of cremation by the Han Chinese as a proper way of disposing the dead based on Buddhist religious conviction, however, did not replace the previously held Confucian and Daoist beliefs. On the contrary, Buddhism in China had to respect and make room for traditional Chinese ideals, such as filial piety and loyalty, in its doctrine and practice in order to meet the needs of the Chinese. The Buddhist understanding of the body congruously coexisted with the Confucian and Daoist views, as we will see in the cremation of Queen Mother Li. The increase of Buddhist cremation during the Five Dynasties led to the establishment of Buddhist crematories, which became the major institutional base for cremation in the Song.

Northern ethnic cultures and Buddhism represented the non-Han sources that impacted the expansion of cremation in China. Scholars have often attributed the rise of cremation in China to these two sources, and some identified grim socioeconomic reality as the main driving force behind cremation.¹⁹ But as important as these were, in order for cremation to gain broad acceptance among the Han Chinese, a more secure and

¹⁸ Liang Hongfei 梁鴻飛 and Zhao Yuefei 趙躍飛, *Zhongguo Sui Tang Wudai zongjiaoshi* 中國隋唐五代宗教史 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1994), p. 36.

¹⁹ For a discussion on the Buddhist influence on Chinese cremation, see W. Perceval Yetts, "Notes on the Disposal of Buddhist Dead in China," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (July 1911), pp. 699–725; de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vol. 3, p. 1391; Ebrey, "Cremation in Sung China," pp. 406–28. Xu Jijun pointed out the influences of ethnic cultures, Buddhism, and bleak social reality as the main driving forces behind cremation. See Xu, "Lun Songdai huozang de shengxing ji qi yuanyin," pp. 74–82.

time-honoured incentive was needed. In fact, there was something very “Chinese” about cremation, in the sense that it reflected and affirmed the conventional Confucian and Daoist beliefs. We see this in cremation’s close connection to the body burning practice of Chinese antiquity, whose rapid increase in the Five Dynasties period had a positive effect on the growth of cremation.

Body Burning

Body burning and cremation can easily be regarded as separate issues. As an act of political retaliation, the burning of an enemy can be a subject of political studies, and the burning of the sick a subject of pathological research probing the understanding of disease and the diseased. Suicidal burning as a method of voluntarily ending one’s life can be a research topic for anthropologists who study the meaning of life and death in a given culture; and finally, cremation, seen as a manner of disposing the dead, has drawn the attention of historians of funerary rites. Despite their differences, however, the four practices share much common ground in that they all deal with the “body” and the “burning” of it. The study of cremation in the Five Dynasties in conjunction with body burning is indispensable because, as it will be shown, often the line that separated cremation from body burning was ambiguous. The body burning practices in the Five Dynasties reveal what the burning of the body meant to the contemporaries and how cremation was understood by them.

The role of the body in the Confucian and Daoist philosophical and cultural traditions helps us to understand the context within which the practice of body burning came into being. Because of the body’s ritualistic function as the establisher and maintainer of relationships pertaining to filial piety, loyalty, locality, and personal identity, the destruction of the body often meant disconnection from family and ancestry, demolition of the place of return, and disappearance of the person. Thus, for these reasons, burning of the corpse became highly stigmatized. This, however, did not lead to the absolute abolition of corpse burning in China. In fact, precisely in order to induce the extremely appalling consequences following the destruction of the body and to prevent others from molesting and disgracing one’s body, the burning of the body was carried out by the Chinese. The practice of body burning in China has a long history, and the various occurrences of body burning can be categorized into four major types: burning of an enemy, burning of the diseased, suicidal burning, and cremation. The Five Dynasties period, in particular, witnessed the extensive practice of body burning, both with destructive and constructive intentions.

The burning of an enemy, or retaliatory burning of the body, was done to bring a curse on a person and his or her family. Instances of retaliatory burning are found in Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (c. 145–86 B.C.E.) *Shiji* 史記. When the Qin 秦 army attacked Chu 楚, they burned the Yi Mausoleum 夷陵 of the former Chu emperors, along with their corpses.²⁰ During its invasion of Qi 齊, the Yan 燕 army destroyed the grave mounds

²⁰ Sima Qian, *Shiji* (SKQS), *juan* 40, p. 41a.

outside the city wall, exhumed the corpses and burned them. At this the people of Qi wept and their indignation against Yan was greatly amplified.²¹ The burning of treacherous and rebellious officials, whose conduct brought challenges to the sovereignty of the emperor and jeopardized the well-being of the empire, falls under this category as well. The *Shiji* also records the death of defiant officials by burning. When Prime Minister Jiande 建德 and court official Wang Han 王悍 opposed the emperor's decision to dispatch troops, Emperor Liu Sui 劉遂 (d. 154 B.C.E.) of Zhao burned the two of them to death.²² The tradition of burning an enemy's body continued throughout Chinese history, and official historical records of the Tang make numerous references to the burning of enemies and treacherous officials.²³

A period of incessant political tumults and wars, the Five Dynasties naturally experienced more instances of retaliatory burning. The annals of the Five Dynasties—*Jiu Wudaishi* 舊五代史, *Xin Wudaishi* 新五代史, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, and *Wudai huiyao* 五代會要—record frequent happenings of retaliatory burning. Jiang Xuanui 蔣玄暉, who had a secret affair with Queen Mother He 何太后, was killed and his body burned.²⁴ The Later Tang emperor Zhuangzong 莊宗 (r. 923–926) desired to exhume the grave of Zhu Quanzhong, the first emperor of Later Liang, cut open the coffin and burn his body in order to pay retribution to him and to bring imprecation upon his family, but abandoned the plan after listening to the counsel of a court official.²⁵ Besides burning, other forms of molesting an enemy's body included dismembering, exposing of the body in the open air, and the grinding of the bones. As a measure of punishment, coffins were cut open and

²¹ Ibid., *juan* 82, p. 3a. More cases of retaliatory burning are also found in *juan* 39, p. 23b and *juan* 97, p. 8a of the *Shiji*.

²² Ibid., *juan* 50, p. 3b. Jiande's surname has been lost.

²³ There are many recorded cases of retaliatory burning of the body in the Tang. In most cases, burning signified total annihilation of the person and his or her family. For example, Hao Chujun's 郝處俊 (607–681) grandson Hao Xiangxian 郝象賢, who became a thorn in the eyes of Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (625–705), was ordered to be beheaded and his corpse dismembered. She commanded that the grave of his parents be exhumed and their corpses burned, and Chujun's coffin with corpse in it hacked with an axe. See *Jiu Tangshu*, *juan* 84, p. 17a. When Emperor Suzong 肅宗 (r. 756–762) was still a crown prince, Li Linfu 李林甫 (683–752) tried to harm him several times. After he came to the throne, he bore a grudge against Li and wanted to exhume his grave and burn his bones. His plan, however, was deterred by Prime Minister Li Bi 李泌 (722–789). See *Xin Tangshu*, *juan* 139, pp. 10b–11a. The *Xin Tangshu* also records the burning of the body of the treacherous official Zhu Quanzhong 朱全忠 (852–912). See *ibid.*, *juan* 223b, p. 14b. The *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 also records an instance of the burning of a grave. See Wang Pu 王溥 (922–982), *Tang huiyao* (SKQS), *juan* 86, p. 22a. The *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 includes two anecdotes of the burning of a corpse, in the stories of Hao Chujun and Xu Ji 徐勣 (1028–1103). See Li Fang 李昉 (925–996) et al., comps., *Taiping guangji* (SKQS), *juan* 389, pp. 12a–b.

²⁴ Ouyang Xiu, *Xin Wudaishi* (SKQS), *juan* 1, p. 13a.

²⁵ Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), *Zizhi tongjian* (SKQS), *juan* 272, pp. 28a–b.

corpses were exposed.²⁶ The Khitan ruler Yelü Deguang 耶律德光 (r. 927–947) ordered the bones of his enemy Zhebolie 哲伯埒 to be ground and scattered.²⁷ Xi 曦, the governor of Fujian, had Chen Kuangfan's 陳匡範 coffin destroyed and his corpse dismembered and thrown into water.²⁸ The body of Zhang Wenli 張文禮 (d. 921), a mutineer during the Later Liang period, was dismembered and his flesh eaten to show complete domination by the people of Zhao 趙.²⁹ The people of Later Jin, after the fall of the dynasty, dismembered Du Chongwei's 杜重威 (d. 948) body and ate his flesh because of the offence of betraying his own people for power.³⁰ The consumption of human flesh as a means of punishment and intimidation, described by Chong as a case of learned cannibalism, was another extreme measure against the enemy's body closely related to retaliatory burning.³¹

As these examples demonstrate, the retaliatory burning of a corpse brought about devastating consequences. Seen from the standpoint of Confucian and Daoist traditions, digging out and incinerating a corpse was one of the most extreme and severe ways to chastise a person and his or her family. The burning of a corpse signified the complete eradication of the person both in this life and in the life to come, since it denoted the destruction of the place of rest in life after death. As much as the proper treatment of a deceased body was believed to be a source of good fortune for the living descendants, its ill treatment was thought to be a cause of misfortune, even a curse, which would affect the entire family line.

Another form of body burning practised throughout Chinese history was the burning of the sick. For the safety of the community, those who died from contagious disease were burned after death and sometimes even alive. Two particular instances of epidemic are recorded in the annals of the Five Dynasties. The *Xin Wudaishi* describes an outbreak of pestilence in the army and how those who were infected and could not march with the rest were ordered to be burned alive. At this the infected soldiers, fearing death, all claimed they were in good health.³² When his Autumn Mansion came under the attack of pandemic outbreak, King Shizong 世宗 (r. 932–941) of Wuyue Kingdom 吳越國 ordered it to be burned; although not mentioned, it is likely those infected were also burned for the well-being of others.³³

²⁶ Ibid., *juan* 281, p. 30b.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 4a–b.

²⁸ Ibid., *juan* 282, p. 32b.

²⁹ Ibid., *juan* 271, p. 32a.

³⁰ Ibid., *juan* 287, p. 31b.

³⁰ *Xin Wudaishi*, *juan* 43, pp. 1b–2a.

³¹ Key Ray Chong, *Cannibalism in China* (Wakefield, NH: Longwood Academic, 1990), p. 48.

³² *Xin Wudaishi*, *juan* 43, pp. 1b–2a.

³³ Xue Juzheng 薛居正 (912–981), *Jiu Wudaishi* (SKQS), *juan* 133, p. 23a. Perhaps due to the pernicious intention and outcome of these two types of body burning, the expression “burning of body/corpse (*fenti* 焚體 or *fenshi* 焚尸)” was often used to describe a troubled socio-political state.

The burning of the sick, although distinct from retaliatory burning in its underlying cause, also aimed at dismantling the body to prevent any kind of reconstruction. These two types of burning can be characterized as *destructive or negative body burning*, which try to resolve conflict and danger by means of demolishing the body through burning. At first sight, it may appear as though destructive body burning undermines the Confucian and Daoist values by countering the preservation of the body. However, it is important to keep in mind that destructive body burning did not nullify the substantial position that the body occupied in the Confucian and Daoist framework; on the contrary, it strengthened and advocated those very values. The decision to burn the body was founded on the belief in the body's connection to family, place, and life-after-death. Destructive burning sought to pulverize the relationships mediated through the body; in other words, the body became the target of destruction because of its role as the instigator and sustainer of relationships. Affirming and reinforcing the body's ritualistic and symbolic role, destructive burning functioned as an offshoot of Confucian and Daoist treatment of the body.

The third type of body burning, whose number of occurrences in the Five Dynasties greatly surpassed that of the two previous types added together, was suicidal burning. Suicidal burning, as the term indicates, refers to an act of voluntarily ending one's life by burning oneself to death, and it also has its roots in Chinese antiquity. According to the *Shiji*, Zhou 紂 (d. 1046 B.C.E.), the last ruler of the Shang dynasty, took his life by burning after the eventual defeat by the Zhou 周. He ascended the Deer Platform, put on his garment made of precious jade, and jumped into the fire.³⁴ Likewise, the Qin General She Jian 涉間, upon losing a battle, not wanting to surrender to Chu, burned himself to death.³⁵

The historical accounts of the Five Dynasties include numerous cases of suicidal burning, mostly executed when individuals were confronted with the downfall of their family or empire. Facing the fall of his empire, the last emperor of Later Tang Feidi 廢帝 (r. 934–937) gathered his family and died with them by setting a fire when Shi Jingtang's 石敬瑭 (r. 936–942) army attacked the capital.³⁶ Suicidal burning also often marked the end of a failed military endeavour. The Later Tang Governor Wang Du 王都 (d. 929) and his family, the Later Jin Governors An Congjin 安從進 (d. 942) and Li Wenqian 李文謙 (d. 941), and the Later Han Governor Wang Jingchong 王景崇 (d. 949) all resorted to suicide by burning when their cities were overtaken.³⁷ The military insurgents Li Shouzhen 李守貞 (d. 949) of the Later Han and Wang Yin 王殷 of the Later Liang both turned to suicidal burning together with their families when their plans to revolt were thwarted.³⁸ The fall of the city also prompted large scale suicide by burning. We are told that when

³⁴ *Shiji*, *juan* 3, p. 15b.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, *juan* 7, pp. 12a–b.

³⁶ *Xin Wudaishi*, *juan* 15, p. 3b.

³⁷ For the account of the suicidal burning of Wang Du, see *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 273, p. 23a; of An Congjin, see *Xin Wudaishi*, *juan* 51, pp. 18a–b; of Li Wenqian, see *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 282, p. 27a; of Wang Jingchong, see *Xin Wudaishi*, *juan* 53, p. 2b.

³⁸ *Xin Wudaishi*, *juan* 11, p. 2b; *Jiu Wudaishi*, *juan* 8, p. 8b.

the city guarded by the Later Liang General Wang Yanqiu 王晏球 (873–932) finally fell into the hands of the Later Tang army, the people in the city set themselves on fire and died.³⁹ The death of the master led to the suicidal burning of female consorts: the murder of the Later Tang Governor Wang Rong 王鎔 (874–921) was followed by the suicidal drowning and burning of hundreds of his concubines.⁴⁰

The sheer number of examples reveals the extensive practice of suicidal burning in the Five Dynasties. What fundamentally distinguished suicidal burning from the previous two types of body burning was that the function it fulfilled was the exact opposite of the other two; instead of causing shame and dismantling relationships, suicidal burning protected one's honour and preserved relationships. We notice in the above examples that suicidal burning was practised at the sight of impending demise. The people, clearly perceiving the shameful chastisement which would be imposed upon them by their enemies, decided to protect themselves from such disgrace by doing away with their bodies. In other words, having the body charred by fire to make it unrecognizable, or even making it completely disappear by incinerating it to ashes, was a better choice than having the enemy molest their body. This defensive nature of suicidal burning was pointed out by Lady Yang of the Later Liang, who, noticing the looming danger, gathered her family and treasures, lit hundreds of torches and died in the flames. Her last words indicate that her decision to commit suicide by burning was to prevent the bodies of her family members from being disgraced by their enemies.⁴¹

Another purpose of suicidal burning evident in the examples is that it helped maintain and even strengthen the relationships the enemy intended to disrupt. For example, although he was given the chance to continue on with his life, Gao Yanchou 高彥儔, a general of the Later Shu 後蜀 Kingdom, decided to take his life by burning. At stake was his loyalty to his king, and by voluntarily ending his life Gao demonstrated his unfaltering allegiance.⁴² The concubines of Wang Rong also kept their commitment to their master in a similar manner by willingly committing suicide after his death. Thus, one's connections to family, kingdom, and individuals were preserved and even bolstered through the decisive act of suicidal burning. Another detail that deserves our attention is that suicidal burning, more than often, involved group action. Li Shouzhen and Shi Pu both died with their wives, and Emperor Feidi, Wang Yin, and Lady Yang with their families. The people of Wang Yanqiu's city and the concubines of Wang Rong set fires and perished together. If retaliatory burning sought to devastate not just an individual but his or her affiliates, the protective measures countered that by encompassing the affiliates as well. Hence, in contrast to destructive or negative burning, suicidal burning proved to be *constructive or positive*, in that it contributed towards fostering and strengthening the principal social bonds mediated through the body.

³⁹ *Xin Wudaishi*, juan 46, p. 10b.

⁴⁰ *Jiu Wudaishi*, juan 54, p. 6b.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, juan 17, p. 5b.

⁴² *Xin Wudaishi*, juan 64, p. 14a.

It holds true that the burning of the body has been a subject of severe criticism and condemnation, especially among the perpetrators of Confucian ethics and culture.

Many who believed in proper burial and preservation of the body opposed the practice of body burning as they opposed cremation. However, it should also be acknowledged that room for alternative discussion existed even within the Confucian rhetoric that promoted the upholding of faithfulness over the preservation of life. We are reminded of the famous saying by Mencius:

I like life, and I also like righteousness. If I cannot keep the two together, I will let life go, and choose righteousness. I like life indeed, but there is that which I like more than life, and therefore, I will not seek to possess it by any improper ways. I dislike death indeed, but there is that which I dislike more than death, and therefore there are occasions when I will not avoid danger.⁴³

Even though sacrificing one's life for the sake of righteousness did not necessarily entail the destruction of the body, it cannot be denied that many throughout Chinese history turned to suicidal burning for that very reason. Though the relevance might be slight, references to the burning of the body is also found in the Daoist tradition. According to the *Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳, Chisongzi 赤松子, a Rain Master at the time of Shennong 神農, entered into fire and burned himself, ascending and descending with the wind and rain.⁴⁴ The story illustrates the voluntary burning of the body which did not result in death, and a similar message was later echoed by Zhuangzi 莊子 (369–286 B.C.E.), who remarked that the True Man of Old could enter the fire without getting burned.⁴⁵ Whether as a demonstration of strong moral values or of mystic power, these accounts denote the existence of a certain degree of the positive understanding of body burning within traditional Chinese ethical and religious beliefs, suggesting that the act of burning the body did not face downright rejection, nor was it regarded as a completely barbaric and foreign custom.

Another type of positive body burning is found within the Buddhist tradition. What James A. Benn identified as “auto-cremation,” in his excellent study on Buddhist self-immolation in China, was none other than suicidal burning in a religious context. Cases of auto-cremation have been well-documented, because they were public events—even spectacles—drawing huge crowds and large sums of donations.⁴⁶ The participants, after a period of careful preparation, ended their lives by setting themselves on fire—often sitting on a pile of logs—while reciting the *Lotus Sutra*, which provided the textual foundation for the practice. Accounts of auto-cremation include stories of miracles that followed the event: heaven responded affirmatively by sending a multi-collared cloud of smoke and pleasing fragrance. The relics from auto-cremation were also seen as embodying

⁴³ James Legge, *The Works of Mencius* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), p. 411.

⁴⁴ Liu Xiang 劉向 (c. 77 B.C.E.–C.E. 6), *Liexian zhuan* (SKQS), *juan* 1, p. 1a.

⁴⁵ Chen Guying 陳鼓應, ed., *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi* 莊子今注今譯 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1990), p. 169.

⁴⁶ James A. Benn, *Burning for the Buddha: Self-Immolation in Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), p. 35.

extraordinary powers that bestowed blessings and protection. What is worth special attention is the fact that this custom was a particularly Sinitic Buddhist development, appearing as early as in late fourth-century China,⁴⁷ once again affirming a distinctly Chinese connection to the practice of positive body burning.

Positive Body Burning and Cremation

When investigating the instances of body burning in the Five Dynasties, one clearly notices the relatedness of positive burning and cremation. To begin with, the distinction between cremation and positive body burning was often vague, as evidently displayed in the cremation of the Later Tang emperor Zhuangzong. The *Jiu Wudaishi* records that the emperor died from an accidental arrow wound during the fight against the rebellion army. After his death, everyone around him fled for their lives, but Shan Youlian 善友斂 stayed, spread musical instruments over the body of the dead emperor, lit a fire, and burned him. Hence, when the head of the rebellion force entered the capital Luoyang 洛陽, he was only able to find the ashes and remaining bones of the emperor.⁴⁸ Zhuangzong's cremation closely resembles protective body burning. Even though his body was burned by a third person after his death, the reason behind it differed little from suicidal burning. Shan Youlian's decision to cremate the body was based on his fear that the body of the emperor might be disgraced once discovered by the rebellion force; his action clearly was a protective measure done for the emperor. The connection between suicidal burning and cremation is also hinted at in the story of Queen Mother Li of the Later Jin. When the news of the enemy's arrival reached them, she and the emperor wished to end their lives by burning, but their plan was opposed by officials. Although both kept their lives, they were exiled to the enemy land and later regretted not having ended their lives earlier.⁴⁹ On her deathbed, the queen mother stated her wish to be cremated in order to make up for her violated dignity.

Another similarity between positive body burning and cremation is found in that both were used as the means to preserve and not destroy the crucial bond between people, and between the person and the land. Herein the practicality of cremation is highlighted. The tumultuous Five Dynasties saw much bloodshed, and the atrocity beyond measure is captured in historical accounts. Expressions such as "corpses covering the ground and wilderness," "corpses filling mountains and valleys," and "exposed bones like grass covering the distance of one thousand li" describe the frightful reality and violence of the time.⁵⁰ On one occasion, food became extremely scarce, so that people even took human corpses for food and cooked them by burning human excrement.⁵¹ At times like this, the proper burial of the dead became a difficult and even lavish undertaking that not many

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 11. For cases of auto-cremation in tenth-century China, see *ibid.*, pp. 223–26.

⁴⁸ *Jiu Wudaishi*, *juan* 34, pp. 14a–b.

⁴⁹ *Xin Wudaishi*, *juan* 17, pp. 2a and 7a.

⁵⁰ *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 267, p. 38a; *juan* 276, p. 14a; *juan* 220, p. 10b; and *juan* 284, p. 31a.

⁵¹ *Xin Wudaishi*, *juan* 40, p. 4a.

could afford. Despite these challenges, however, prompted by the belief that the failure to provide proper burial meant the ultimate act of disrespect for the deceased, many made efforts to bury their dead. Even the body which had been thrown into the water was later retrieved to be buried.⁵² But still, many began to prefer cremation to the long-standing custom of burial, for pragmatic reasons. The socio-political circumstances of the Five Dynasties required people to be constantly on the move, and consequently many died away from home and even on the road. Burying one's own family member in a foreign place, a place of passing, was deemed undesirable. Leaving the grave unattended or haphazardly choosing a burial site was not any better than cremating the body and carrying the ashes. On top of that, the great number of casualties caused by ongoing war, starvation, and epidemic made cremation an even more realistic and practical choice.

In this unique historical context, an important development emerged: that is, in the case of death away from home, cremation was carried out so the remains could be kept for proper burial later on. We see the beginning of this practice as early as in the late Tang. When Gu Yanlang 顧彥朗 (*fl. c. 888*), a military governor in the late Tang, was faced with death in the battlefield, he requested to be cremated and have his remains sent home.⁵³ Cremation in such cases functioned as a means to reconnect the deceased with family and the place of origin; in other words, it was used to strengthen and reaffirm the traditional bonds that were regarded highly in the Confucian and Daoist traditions. If cremation was largely believed to fulfil the role of negative or destructive body burning in people's minds, it perhaps would not have been adopted as a proper and prevalent way of handling the dead. On the contrary, the key to its acceptance and success among the Chinese lies in its contribution to sustaining and reinforcing the values cherished by the Chinese, especially in a confusing and volatile time like the Five Dynasties.

Textual Analysis

The *Xin Wudaishi* includes two detailed accounts of cremation: the cremation of the Later Jin dynasty's Queen Mother Li and of Concubine Dowager An.

In the third month of the next year, the queen mother fell from illness, and there was no medicine to cure it. Often she wept facing up to the sky, and gazing into the distance towards the south and angrily pointing with her fingers, she cursed Du Chongwei and Li Shouzhen and said, "Those who caused my death were ignorant, so this came to pass. If they had wisdom, I would not forgive them even in the netherworld!" In the eighth month, her illness became very serious. She said to the emperor, "When I am dead, burn my remains and send the ashes to Fanyang Buddhist Monastery 范陽佛寺, lest you make me become a ghost in the enemy's land." Thereafter she died. The emperor, empress, court attendants, eunuchs, and

⁵² *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan 270*, p. 18b.

⁵³ *Taiping guangji*, *juan 158*, pp. 3b–4b.

⁵⁴ *Xin Wudaishi*, *juan 17*, pp. 6a–b.

eastern and western servants all let down their hair, bared their feet, and carried the coffin to the land given to them. There they cremated her remains, dug the ground, and buried the ashes.⁵⁴

Concubine Dowager An lost her eyesight in her late years. She followed Emperor Chudi 出帝 (r. 942–946) [her son] on his journey of banishment to the north. They travelled from Liaoyang 遼陽 to Jian 建 district, and she died on the way. When her death was impending, she said to the emperor, “You must cremate me to ashes and scatter them in the wind towards the south so that my remaining soul may be enabled to return to the Middle Kingdom.” Shortly after, she died. In the sand land, neither grass nor tree could be found. Therefore, they demolished a servant’s vehicle and burned it [to cremate her body]. They carried her ashes and bones to Jian district. Queen Mother Li also died, and they buried their remains next to each other.⁵⁵

Both accounts provide an insightful look into the practice of cremation in the Five Dynasties. Most importantly, they reveal cremation’s connection to all four of the major influences we examined earlier. The link to northern ethnic culture is visible in the fact that both women were from the Later Jin, a Shatuo-Turk empire, which practised cremation as an indigenous custom. It is, however, difficult to assess the degree of the effect that the nomadic authority had on popularizing cremation amongst the Chinese, as the Shatuo-Turks only made up a very small percentage (less than two per cent) of the total Later Jin population.⁵⁶

The role of Buddhism is also made clear in Queen Mother Li’s wish to have her ashes sent to Fanyang Buddhist Monastery. It was not unusual in the Tang that a woman, instead of being buried next to her husband, would choose to be buried next to the Buddhist clergy she respected because of her religious belief.⁵⁷ The queen mother’s desire to have her remains stored in the Buddhist monastery was perhaps not much different from this Tang practice, except that instead of burial cremation was chosen. Most likely, she had a strong personal attachment to the monastery and its Buddhist clergies. It should be remembered that the Shatuo-Turks also developed their own form of Buddhism, one that was combined with their national cult. In practice, some noticeable differences from Sinitic Buddhism were there as well; the cult of relics, which was crucial in Chinese Buddhism, was rejected by the Shatuo-Turks.⁵⁸ What this tells us is that even the Buddhist link to cremation was much more complex, involving multiple forms of the religion.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 6b–7a.

⁵⁶ Wolfram Eberhard, *Conquerors and Rulers: Social Forces in Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 1952), pp. 90–91.

⁵⁷ The women who chose burial adjacent to Buddhist clergy argued that co-burial of husband and wife was not an ancient custom, therefore not an essential requirement. Duan Tali 段塔麗, *Tangdai funü diwei yanjiu* 唐代婦女地位研究 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2000), p. 241.

⁵⁸ Eberhard, *Conquerors and Rulers*, p. 94.

These two instances of cremation also reflect the influence of positive body burning. In both cases, cremation was used as an active means to reconnect the dead with their homeland; the primary function of these two cremations was reconciliation, as in the case of positive body burning. Last, in these two cases the practical benefit of cremation is highlighted. Both An and Li died in a foreign land in their exile, after the defeat of Later Jin by the Khitans. Particularly for An, who died on the road, cremation was the most sensible option. Even with the lack of material means, so that the grieving party had to destroy a travelling-car to conduct the cremation, it was still a much better choice than carrying the corpse on the rest of the journey or burying it on the road without having anyone to attend to the grave.

More significantly, the two accounts convey valuable information pertaining to the view of the body as held by the willing participants of cremation. The Chinese viewed the body as a channel through which relationships among family, place, and the spiritual world were instigated and sustained. It is true that many Confucian intellectuals before and after the Five Dynasties regarded cremation as a challenge against or even renunciation of the traditional Confucian understanding of the body. Yet was this really what the participants of cremation had in mind, the repudiation of the role that the body served in the Confucian and Daoist culture? Careful examination of the cremations of Li and An proves to us this was not so. More specifically, their cremations demonstrate an unmistakable affirmation of traditional Confucian and Daoist understandings of the body, reflected in their strong conviction in the unyielding connection between the body and place, and the body and family.

First of all, both women believed that there was an inevitable connection between their body and its resting place. They knew clearly that once their body was buried in the foreign land, even worse in the territory of their enemy, that they would spend eternity there. Refusing to be perpetually bound to the land of their adversaries, which according to *fengshui* 風水 would not only bring restless torment to the deceased but also a curse upon the descendants, they expressed their wish to be cremated. Li clearly indicated that her desired place of rest was Fanyang Buddhist Monastery, located in present-day Beijing. At the time of her death, she was in the Jian district of Khitan territory, near present-day Chaoyang City 朝陽市 in Liaoning 遼寧 province.⁵⁹ Li plainly stated that if her body remained in the Jian district, this would make her become a restless wandering ghost in the foreign land. The account reveals her belief in the dependence of the soul on the body; that the soul was bound to where the body stayed. An requested that her body be cremated and the ashes strewn in the wind towards the south so that her soul would be enabled to return to the Middle Kingdom, once again illustrating the belief in the soul's intrinsic link to the cremated body. The transformation of her body into ashes added a new and vital capacity to her body: the cremated body restored her mobility. Her ashes could drift in the air and her soul, being inseparable from the body, could travel along

⁵⁹ Tan Qixiang 譚其驥, ed., *Zhongguo lishi dituji: Song Liao Jin shiqi* 中國歷史地圖集：宋遼金時期 (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian 三聯書店, 1992), pp. 5 and 8.

to the Middle Kingdom.⁶⁰ It should also be acknowledged that the Buddhist concept of the soul played an important role in establishing the connection between the cremated body and place. In the stories of both women, we see the sign of the Buddhist belief in the soul's relative ascendancy over the body, the soul as the true and enduring locus of the person, and the body as its transient abode. Their desire to free the soul at the expense of the body reveals that what was truly worth saving was the soul.

Second, the two accounts demonstrate that cremation did not abolish the body's connection to family: the cremated body retained its connection to family. Although specific instructions were given, we learn that the death wishes of the two women were not fully carried out. While both were cremated as they wished, that was only half of what they specified in their wills. After all, Li's remains were not taken to the monastery, nor were An's ashes scattered towards the south. Instead, their cremated remains were interred in the Jian district, where the rest of the defunct Later Jin royal family came to stay. Evidently the emperor knew the consequences of burying their remains in the foreign land; his action could cause the eternal distress and anguish of his mother and queen mother. Why then did he resolve to bury them there instead of fulfilling their death wishes? It is here that we see a more complex manifestation of the social function of the cremated body of the deceased: their cremated bodies were regarded not only as a personal possession, but also as a mediator of social relationships. Perhaps sending the ashes to Beijing was not feasible considering their status as political captives in the Khitan territory, but the scattering of ashes was not an unviable task. Nevertheless, the remains of both women were interred because, despite their requests, as a filial son, the emperor could not bear the physical separation from the remains, let alone dispersing the remains in the air. Most likely, it was the social and moral obligation that withheld him from realizing the wishes of the dead. Their cremated bodies had to be kept in order that the living could pay proper respects to and maintain relationships with the deceased. Indeed, the combined practice of cremation and interment shows that the former was not viewed as an alternative to the latter, but rather as a practical and necessary part of the latter; that is, when the conditions were not met for proper interment, cremation was done to transform the body of the deceased to a more easily transportable form until a suitable burial site was found. This was precisely the case for Concubine Dowager An, who died on the way to the Khitan land, and through the burial of her cremated body the connection between the body and family was preserved. The placing of the cremated ashes in the coffin prior

⁶⁰ That the cremated body maintained its connection to the land has also been shown in the Five Dynasties *Tang sancai* 唐三彩 earthenware coffins made in the shape of a house containing cremated ashes. Even though only a limited number of archaeological findings are available, due to the brief length of the period and the nature of cremation, these examples of cremation coffins demonstrate the continuation of the Daoist envisioning of a coffin as a house, despite the replacement of the whole body with the cremated body. Shen and Li's article examines the cremation coffin from the Five Dynasties period excavated near Le Mountain in Sichuan province. See Shen Zhongchang 沈仲常 and Li Xianwen 李顯文, "Sichuan Leshan chutu de Wudai taoguan" 四川樂山出土的五代陶棺, *Wenwu* 文物, 1983, no. 2, p. 53.

to interment also illustrates the evolution of cremation from a practice driven principally by pragmatic reasons to a mature expression of cultural and religious belief; that is, even though a coffin was available for burial, cremation was preferred because of the cultural and religious advantages it offered.

An's story, in particular, gives an account of the growing Han Chinese participation in cremation. According to the *Xin Wudaishi*, she was from Daibei 代北 and nothing was known about her maiden family. She became a concubine of Shi Jingru 石敬儒 (*fl. c.* 914) and gave birth to Shi Chonggui 石重貴, who, after the death of his father, was adopted by his uncle, Emperor Gaozu 高祖 (Shi Jingtang) of Later Jin, and later succeeded his throne as Emperor Chudi.⁶¹ Unlike Queen Mother Li, who, as a daughter of Emperor Mingzong 明宗 (Li Siyuan 李嗣源, 867–933) of Later Tang, shared the blood of the Shatuo-Turk race, An was Han Chinese, denoted from the fact that her identity was marked by her place of origin and not by her ethnicity. A northern part of the Dai district of the Later Jin dynasty, about 150 km north of present-day Taiyuan 太原 in Shanxi 山西 province, Daibei was an area predominantly occupied by the Han Chinese.⁶² Her ethnicity is brought to light in her death wish, in which she revealed her desire to return to the Middle Kingdom, traditionally regarded as the domain of the Han Chinese. A further clarification of her Han origin is found in the *Zizhi tongjian*, which records another version of her death will: "You must cremate my remains and scatter the ashes towards the south, so that my soul and body may return to Han."⁶³ An's open profession of her longing to return to Han through the means of cremation suggests that cremation in the Five Dynasties moved beyond its former role as a custom reserved to the northern tribes and became a practice openly accepted by the Han Chinese. Unlike Li, whose faith in Buddhism was one of the major driving forces behind her preference of cremation over burial, An's cremation does not reveal any explicit connection to the religion. Although An could have been a believer of Buddhism, her death wish indicates it was her yearning for her motherland, rather than her religious faith, that motivated her to choose cremation over burial.

As the beginning stage of widespread cremation in China, the Five Dynasties played a seminal role in shaping its subsequent development. The primary significance of cremation in the Five Dynasties lies in its creation of the alternative representation of the body—the *cremated body*—through which traditional relationships could be affirmed and sustained. The cremated body acted as a substitute for the whole body, representing the deceased just as much as the intact body did. Cremation was practised with the intention of keeping, and not doing away with, the body. The added advantage of portability enabled cremation to effectively deal with distant death, which was prevalent in this time of political unrest, by providing a way to preserve the body's connection to place and family. On the whole, owing to its close connection with positive body burning and its ability to accommodate and work flexibly with the Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist

⁶¹ *Xin Wudaishi*, juan 17, p. 6b.

⁶² For more information on the location of Daibei, refer to *Zhongguo lishi dituji: Song Liao Jin shiqi*, p. 86.

⁶³ *Zizhi tongjian*, juan 288, p. 24a.

concepts of the body and the afterlife, by the end of the Five Dynasties period, cremation had developed into a widely accepted and practiced custom among the Han Chinese.

Cremation in the Song

The end of the fifty-three-year long political turbulence did not put an end to cremation; instead, it continued to thrive in the stable and prosperous socioeconomic milieu of the Song. This was mainly due to the growth of positive attitudes towards cremation—the development carried on from the Five Dynasties—and the rapid urbanization and the resulting overpopulation of major cities, which made traditional burial within a city a costly undertaking. In the Song practice of cremation, the cremated ashes were interred and tended in much the same way as the uncremated body. When dealing with distant death, many preferred cremation to burial at a remote place because the former allowed for the easy transportation of the remains. This practice became so noticeably frequent and wide-ranging that even emperors and officials who openly oppressed cremation had to allow cremation in cases of distant death.

The popularity of cremation in the Song also benefited from the growing predilection for having the graves of family members in close proximity. The majority of the people in the Song believed that the graves of their parents and grandparents must be close enough to visit, and for this reason, most cremations done in the Song time were followed by the interment of the remains and the offering of regular sacrifices to the dead.⁶⁴ The essential nature of the grave is clearly seen in the stories of the construction of empty graves. The *Menglianglu* 夢梁錄, a record of social life in the Southern Song city Hangzhou 杭州, includes a story of a man whose mother's cremated ashes were scattered when he was still young. Later, grieving the fact that she did not have a grave, he carved a wooden statue of her, dressed the statue in grave clothes, placed it in a coffin, and buried it. From then on he made regular sacrifices to her at the grave.⁶⁵ Stories like this demonstrate that the scattering of ashes was not considered an appropriate way of handling the remains of the dead, and in the absence of cremated remains symbolic graves were built to provide a fixed resting place for the dead and a site of remembrance for the living. At the same time, it should also be noted that the scattering of cremated ashes was frequently performed in order to induce the feared negative outcome specifically—that is, the destruction of the corporeal basis of the person, which also meant the annihilation of his or her soul. Cremated ashes were strewn to undermine the physicality of the ghost, especially when the person had an embittered past or revengeful spirit.⁶⁶ This practice resembled destructive body burning in its essence, as both were carried out to bring eternal torment to and even complete extinction of a person by incinerating the body and dispersing the remains in the air.

⁶⁴ Ebrey, "Cremation in Sung China," p. 417.

⁶⁵ Wu Zimu 吳自牧 (*fl. c. 1270*), *Menglianglu* (Xi'an 西安: San-Qin chubanshe 三秦出版社, 2004), pp. 230–31.

⁶⁶ Ebrey, "Cremation in Sung China," p. 418.

Much has already been researched and written on the subject of Song cremation, particularly the government's attempts to curtail the practice, which came to be viewed as a threat to traditional Confucian values. The Song government's various measures to suppress the growth of cremation—including, the outlawing of cremation of the Han Chinese and the introduction of public cemeteries for the poor—need not be discussed here.

An important development in the Song that spurred the growth of cremation was the active involvement of Buddhist institutions in the cremation business. Crematories were set up in many Buddhist monasteries, offering institutional assistance and systematizing the practice of cremation. Besides conducting cremation, Buddhist clergies also guided the services and sacrifices to the dead. Compared to the traditional Confucian funerals based on clearly defined rules and codes of conduct, cremation created more room for freer and unconventional expressions of filial piety, offering new possibilities of articulating one's devotion to his or her parents beyond governmental regulations.⁶⁷ This became more and more prominent as the Song entered into a time of economic prosperity. People with newly acquired affluence chose cremation and a Buddhist funeral instead of burial and a Confucian ritual, because the former suggested no limits to what one could do. Consequently, the message of filial piety became intensified in the Buddhist funeral services. Sacrifices were made, sutras were read and copied, meals were offered to the clergies, and donations were given to the monastery, all for the sake of accumulating and transferring good merits for the deceased. Transferred merits were believed to help the dead to avoid punishments for the evils done in the previous life and to be reborn as humans, or even to be freed from the continuous cycle of rebirth in the next life.⁶⁸ In addition, the blending of Confucian and Buddhist funerary rites took place, including the Buddhist observance of the Confucian custom of "the memorial of the end of weeping," which was done on the hundredth day after death.⁶⁹

The Buddhist institutionalization of cremation in the Song led some to credit Buddhist expansion as the sole cause behind the development of cremation. De Groot, for instance, argued that the fortunes of Buddhist institutions had a direct impact on the rise and fall of cremation in China.⁷⁰ This view, however, oversimplifies the complex cultural phenomenon by attributing its cause to only one source. As Ebrey has pointed out, many Song examples of cremation do not display clear ties to Buddhism. This discovery perplexed many, including Ebrey, who identified Buddhism as the main driving force behind cremation.⁷¹ But, as this study has shown, the absence of a visible Buddhist

⁶⁷ Xu Jijun, "Lun Songdai huozang de shengxing ji qi yuanyin," p. 76.

⁶⁸ Miriam Levering, in "Ta-hui and Lay Buddhists: Ch'an Sermons on Death," discusses the role of Buddhist monks in conducting funeral services in detail. See David W. Chappell, ed., *Buddhist and Taoist Practice in Medieval Chinese Society* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987), p. 191.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ De Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vol. 3, p. 1391.

⁷¹ Ebrey, "Cremation in Sung China," p. 414–15.

connection is not surprising and certainly not strange, because cremation in China was an intricate cultural development with multiple origins. For cremation to gain broad acceptance, it had to attend to the values honoured in the Confucian and Daoist traditions, and this, in fact, is what we see in the Song: cremation practiced as a sign of filial piety.

The domestication of cremation in China was made possible through the meaningful reinterpretation of the act of incinerating the dead body in ways that augmented traditional values and served people's practical needs. And, as I have tried to show in this paper, the close relationship between cremation and body burning reveals that the burning of the dead body was not an entirely foreign custom, but one that was deeply rooted in the shared culture of the Han Chinese. Moreover, cremation's connection to retaliatory and suicidal burning brings to light the often overlooked political dimension in the question; that is, in as much as it was a personal and familial decision, it was also a highly political act. Although different in nature, even in our time with the PRC's attempt to make cremation compulsory for all citizens, we can see that cremation in China remains a politically driven phenomenon, certainly more than just an expression of religious and cultural beliefs.⁷²

⁷² Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. 230–31.

五代時期火葬與焚體

(中文提要)

韓希妍

在中國歷史上，漢人是怎樣對待火葬這一種喪葬習俗？本文主要探討五代（907–960）這段特定時期中，火葬在中國漢人社會中如何發展。五代時期相當短暫，學者對這期間的火葬習俗，往往忽視不理，或者僅片言隻字帶過。但是從火葬發展的初始階段（唐朝）到成熟階段（宋朝）中，這五代五十三年是不可或缺的過渡階段。五代時期火葬的發展和演變充分顯示出火葬在漢族中國人中逐步普遍化的過程。另外，本文也探討焚體——包括報復性的焚屍、防止疾病傳播的焚屍、以及自焚等——與火葬的關係。在中國火葬研究中，這種焚屍不被視為真正意義上的火葬，因而不受重視。本文認為，這些焚體形式在中國歷史上，特別是在五代時期的火葬習俗發展中，起到了基礎性的影響和重要的作用。若我們把火葬置於更廣泛的焚體範疇禮儀來研究，就可以發現火葬和焚體之間既微妙而又複雜的關係，影響到中國漢人長期以來對火葬這種喪葬習俗的理解與接受情形。

關鍵詞：火葬 焚體 五代時期 身體

Keywords: cremation, body burning, Five Dynasties period, the body