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Haniwa: Constructing a Sacred Place for the Afterlife

Ashlyn Rawls
Pepperdine University

Clarissa Aliberti
Pepperdine University

Rylee Baisden
Pepperdine University

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Haniwa: Constructing a Sacred Place for the Afterlife



Ashlyn Rawls, Clarissa Aliberti, Rylee Baisden - Pepperdine University

Introduction

As a sacred space, people acknowledge and respect their spiritual connection and evoke feeling while having a sense of safety. We believe that tombs are key examples of a sacred space and in Japanese tombs, Haniwa figures were found in the elite tombs in the Yayoi period to serve the function of respect for the deceased. Haniwa are an example of what respect of Confucianism. Confucianism is an ethical or philosophical system that pertains to the way that people relate to each other and provide for the afterlife. Of course Confucianism and Daoism both originated in China. This is because Daoism is to provided for the dead as well. Although Confucianism and Daoism both came from China and both influenced the Japanese tomb, they also met with the indigenous Shinto traditions. And by focusing on confucianism principles we can understand the significance of haniwa in constructing a place for the afterlife. We found a connection between sacred space and Japanese Haniwa art because the haniwa art symbolizes the respect for your elders and that you want their afterlife to be worthy.

Abstract

Haniwa are small, hollow terracotta statues that were placed on aristocratic graves during the *Kofun* period of Japan, which translates as “old tomb.” These unique figures were rather simple at the beginning of their creation, but over time they became increasingly complex taking the forms of people, animals, and other objects. These fascinating funerary objects serve a greater purpose than just ordinary tomb decorations. The haniwa tie into the Confucianist tradition of being made to be used and to protect the spirits of the dead. Influenced by Confucian tradition, in which “filial piety” is recognized as a high level of virtue that includes showing respect towards the living and deceased, haniwa were used to protect individuals in the afterlife by housing their souls. The tradition of placing haniwa on top of graves became discontinued when Buddhist influence was introduced to Japan. This key point is crucial because Buddhists believe in reincarnation, which therefore does not require protection for deceased souls.

Methods

The research presented will fill the gap in research of the relationship between Japanese haniwa and Japanese Confucianism. The haniwa and confucianism have not been connected when discussing the importance of sacred space and the afterlife.

- In our research, we consulted Payson library. We found several pictures of the actual haniwa figures in the oversized books of Payson library as well as descriptive texts concerning the haniwas themselves.
- We consulted LACMA’s permanent exhibition catalogs to further research the purpose of haniwa regarding religious practices.
- We used scholarly articles and museum websites to find background information on Confucianism and haniwa. We were unable to find specific sources that discussed a connection between Confucianism, sacred space, and the purpose of constructing the haniwa, so individual research on each topic helped us bridge the gap of research that we were unable to find.
- Online sources, class lectures from Professor Chiem, and previous knowledge of Confucianism provided insight to the actual specific views of the afterlife and Confucianist rituals.
- The haniwa images that we are focusing on as our visual data are photos from LACMA’s exhibit and photos found from books or online sources. Each image provides excellent evidence that aligns with confucianism beliefs.
- Our research will be posted on a poster and a powerpoint to provide insight on the topic which connects haniwa and confucianism.

Figures



Male and Female Dancing Haniwa, Kofun period



Haniwa House, Miyazaki Prefecture, Kofun period



Dancing Men, Kofun period



Haniwa Warrior, Gunma Prefecture, Kofun period



Horse Haniwa, Gunma Prefecture, Kofun period

Exhibition List

1. *Male and Female Dancing Haniwa Figure*, Kofun period 248-646, 248 CE - 646 CE, Terra cotta, Tokyo National Museum.
2. *Haniwa House*, Saitobaru, Koyo-gun, Miyazaki Prefecture, Terra cotta, 60 x 65 cm, Tokyo National Museum.
3. *Dancing Men*, Kofun period, Terra cotta, 30.48-60.96 cm, Japan.
4. *Haniwa Warrior*, Gunma Prefecture, Kofun period, Terra cotta clay, 125 cm, Aikawa Archaeological Museum.
5. *Horse Haniwa*, Gunma Prefecture, Kofun period, 6th century, Terra cotta, Tokyo National Museum.
6. *Haniwa Horse*, 6th century A.D., Earthenware Terra cotta, 121.29 x 116.21 x 41.28 cm, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
7. *Haniwa Head of a Girl*, Terra cotta, Mr.Gakunan Matsubara, Tokyo.
8. *Haniwa Farmer*, Gunma Prefecture, Kofun period, Terra cotta clay, 92.5 cm, Tokyo National Museum.
9. *Haniwa Shield*, Nara Prefecture, Kofun period, 6th century B.C.E, Terra cotta clay, 149 cm, Tokyo National Museum.
10. *Figure of a Man*, Archaic period, 4th-6th century, Terra cotta, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
11. *Haniwa Monkey*, Ibaraki Prefecture, Kofun period, 6th century, Terra cotta, 27.3 cm, Private Collection, Tokyo.

Conclusion

As a result of our research, we found a connection between sacred space, Confucianism, and Japanese haniwa. While researching haniwa, Confucianism was not connected with this subject therefore we looked at the relationship between the two. We would like to find out why scholars have not put them together. If we continued our research we could actually go to the tombs and ask a curator of the tomb or archaeologists who have been at the sites about the background and his/her insight. From there we could create a scholarly proposal and ultimately connect sacred space and Confucianism to haniwa figures. It is a practical purpose for the people because Confucianism is a large religion and the relationship between the respect of the afterlife (Confucianism) to haniwa should have some sort of correlation.

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