

Wugong and State Rites

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Abstract

Incense burners had long been used on altars with other devotional objects. In particular, the *wugong*, which comprised the censer, two candlesticks and vases, emerged as a standard altar set during the Ming and Qing periods. Despite its popularity, its use in state rites seems to be measured and regulated. Curiously, the *wugong* was only tangentially related to the rites reformation during the Qianlong reign that witnessed the change in ritual vessel forms, and the *wugong* was not featured in the *Huangchao liqi tushi*. Nevertheless, the use of *wugong* in state rites offers clues to how people may have perceived the altar set as well as the rites. The discussion of the *wugong* demonstrates how the material culture of Chinese rituals was invigorated without overt ideological or theoretical change.

Keywords: *wugong*, ritual vessels, altar vessels, Grand Sacrifices, Middle Sacrifices, Common Sacrifices