

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Reforming the Dead: The Intersection of Socialist Merit  
and Agnatic Descent in a Chinese Funeral Home

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Anthropology

by

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2008

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## ***Acknowledgements***

This project could not have been accomplished without the support from the following people. First and foremost, this project could not have been completed without the assistance of my dissertation committee Yunxiang Yan (Chair), Nancy E. Levine, Mariko Tamanoi, and Joseph Esherick. To you all I am eternally grateful for passing on your wisdom and knowledge of anthropology and China. Ann Walters, my graduate advisor and friend was also an integral part of my graduate experience. I am grateful to the founders and administrators of the Fulbright-Hayes program that funded the fieldwork portion of this study. In China, I owe a great debt of gratitude to my good friends and directors of the Northwest Socioeconomic Development Research Center including Shi Yaojiang, John Kennedy and Bai Yongxiu who were instrumental in helping me with research design and the logistics of doing research in China. I also want to thank my good friends Wang Shenglong and Zheng Hong who bent over backwards to make me feel at home during my fieldwork stay in Xian. I am eternally grateful to Liu Jianwu and the entire Liu family who opened their home and their hearts to me during the rural portion of this research. All photographs are the work of the author. Also important to this project were several good friends who unwittingly became an ad-hoc support group during the writing stage of the dissertation; they are David Pizarra, Jim Malone, Claude Knobler, and Jeff Henry (Semper Fi). It is also very important to acknowledge the enduring support of my family Carl T. Jackson, Margaret Jackson, Forrest Jackson, and Laura Pottorff. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my ever-cheerful and patient wife, Allie Jackson and my two wonderful children Travis and Charlotte.

urbanites' submission to state authority. On the contrary, their persistence and adoption in the post-reform era suggests that the ritual divide remains because both of these ritual forms remain efficacious in doing the work of death.

This study will show that the ritual divide is in fact evidence not of separation and disruption, but a flexible ritual system responsive to the social context in which they are performed. In so doing, this study will present a different model for understanding Chinese death rites and use this model as an angle of entry in the consideration of the changing relationship between the state and its subjects in today's China.

The method used is comparative; drawing from data from 15 months of discontinuous fieldwork between 2003-2005 and a formal survey of 53 funerals in Xian's San Zhao Crematorium and Cemetery Facility in the city and rural suburbs of Xian, Shaanxi Province, The People's Republic of China.

## ***Introduction: The Socialist Experiment and the Ritual Divide***

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has long struggled to reform bereavement practices related to ancestor worship in favor of a secular and rationalized treatment of the dead. In a radical break from tradition, the CCP has instituted a program of funeral reform mandating rapid cremation, simple memorial services, and interment in public cemeteries. Funeral reform is not only concerned with the disposal of remains, but also with efforts to promote social transformation to an ideal vision of socialist modernity. At present, the Chinese state's reforms continue to have a profound effect on the ritual actions of Chinese citizens. In this study I will be concerned with exploring the impact of these reforms on Chinese death practices and their social significance.

In spite of the influence of funeral reform on the treatment of the Chinese dead, socialist death rites receive comparatively less scholarly attention than traditional death rites. Contemporary studies on Chinese ritual or religious life tend to focus on the revival or re-invention of traditional ritual forms as if overcoming a dark past or as a part of the process of healing wounds from the Maoist period. (Jing 1995; Jing 1996; Madsen 1984; Yang 1994; Mueggler 1998). However, the fact remains that increasing numbers of Chinese<sup>1</sup> are utilizing the socialist death rites. Although compliance is required, it would seem that the death rites developed under funeral reform must have some emotional resonance with the people who practice them; for as Christel Lane in his study of socialist ritual observed, "ritual can only succeed if it responds to some degree to the emotional

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<sup>1</sup> The Bureau of Civil Administration (*Mingzheng Bu*) estimates that nationwide, compliance to funeral reform policies are nearing 50%. Cremation (Anonymous 1985, Anonymous 1997)



Figure 1: Map of China with Shaanxi Province highlighted<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Courtesy of the Shaanxi Provincial Government, <http://www.shaanxi.gov.cn/>

day and never left. For the most part, senior administrators ignored me, mourners pitied me, employees tolerated me and many personnel eventually came to believe that I worked there as well, as I arrived each day prior to opening and left only after all funerals for the day had been concluded. Because of a de-centralized management system which limited inter-work unit communication, each separate work unit (the crematoria, the columbarium and the cemetery) assumed that I had permission to be there from the other and welcomed my inquiries. My presence was also unopposed because for one, San Zhao is a public facility and two, in accordance with local custom in this area, it is inappropriate to inquire about the reason for one's appearance at a funeral. A guest is a guest and generally cannot be denied entry. In addition, hierarchical distinctions related to death pollution between the various sets of workers and administrators previously mentioned also reduced inter-work unit communication, so I was generally allowed to wander at will. However, my presence in the areas where the dead were being received, stored and processed were more limited than I would have preferred. Workers in these areas would entertain my presence, but after a brief period of time politely, but firmly, suggested that it would be best for me to stay in the formal waiting areas and rooms where the funerals are performed. Overall, during my stay I was treated well. There was of course many who were suspicious of my intentions. Many feared I was the dreaded investigative reporter eager to write a human rights expose and therefore did everything they could to show me that they were running a tight ship. I left the facility with the distinct impression that although the work was difficult and generally regarded with a

healthy dose of suspicion by the public, the employees of this facility took pride in their work and believed that what they were doing was necessary and good.

## **Methods**

This project has utilized a mixed-method approach including archival research, open-ended and semi-structured interviews, and first-hand observation of rural and urban death practices. The first stage of the project entailed unstructured observation, open-ended interviews, and archival research to better understand the history and intent of the CCP's funeral reforms in the Shaanxi region. Archival research on legal texts and newspaper articles related to funeral reform at the national and provincial level was conducted at the Shaanxi Provincial Regional Library. The next phase of research was focused on developing an in-depth understanding the institutional treatment of the dead in sites of both high and low regulation. This was accomplished by physically following the path of the post-mortem body from moment of death to final resting place by conducting short-term observations within the specific locations and institutional environments responsible for death work. Ethnographic interviews were conducted with employees of Xian's Bureau of Registration, which is responsible for overseeing the daily operations of Xian's crematorium and public cemetery and among owners of shops which sell ritual items and provide services for conducting funerals and grave rites. Interviews were also conducted among residents within the city of Xian as well as in surrounding suburbs and rural areas. The third stage of the project involved a formal "directed observation" survey of funerary and mortuary rites and ceremonies conducted at the San Zhao Crematorium and Cemetery facilities.

The unit of analysis used for this study is simply a death event or funeral. A focus on social and cultural norms is maintained throughout this study due to both the nature of the research questions and methodological constraints. Due to requests from the facility's administrators and UCLA's Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) requirements I was discouraged from interviewing individuals during the process of settling their dead; and I don't think I would have felt comfortable doing so even if there were no restrictions on research method used.<sup>6</sup> As a foreigner in a locale commonly avoided at all costs by the living, I was clearly an outsider and a potential distraction. Therefore, my desire to not disturb these highly emotional proceedings left me primarily in the position of observer. In a very Geertzian fashion, I was often relegated to the position of being an anthropologist literally "looking over the shoulders" of my research subjects (Geertz 1957, Geertz 1973).

In the interest of establishing a rigorous methodology given the above mentioned research constraints, during the final phase of my research, a "directed observation" survey (Bernard 1995, Bernard 1998) was conducted using local research assistants. The purpose of this survey was to gather in-depth data on a large number of funerals for the purpose of extensive comparisons between like funerals. Data gathered included, but was not limited to, demographic data on the deceased, measures of attendance (including the number of family members, friends, relatives and guests), markers of ritual investment (including presentation of gifts, duration, number of speakers), eulogy content and

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<sup>6</sup> Although I was not allowed to approach mourners at the site numerous interviews were conducted among mourners who approached me of their own accord and offered to help me with my research or from individuals who had experienced a death event six or more months prior to the interview. The data from these interviews is used throughout this study to support research findings.

extensive event-specific ethnographic detail. In addition, when granted permission, memorial services were recorded and eulogies collected. Whenever possible, these data were supplemented with follow-up or exit interviews from participants who approached the research team and volunteered to give an interview either at that moment or at a later date.

The directed observation survey was conducted by this researcher and two research assistants. In total, the study resulted in detailed observations of 53 memorial services, 44 cremation rituals and 50 interment ceremonies. Utilizing local researchers had several advantages in increasing data quality. For one, being local Chinese, the research assistants did not distract from the proceedings. In addition, their greater command of the local dialect and cultural familiarity with the proceedings allowed them to get much closer to the actual proceedings. Upon completion, the survey data was coded and analyzed using frequency counts and basic descriptive statistical analysis for exploratory confirmation of research-driven hypotheses. In addition to the formal survey, numerous qualitative interviews were conducted throughout the 13 month period of my research among participants and mourners at various stages of the funerary process. Their ideas and experiences were vital to this project and provide both first-hand and anecdotal support for the conclusions put forward in this study.

## **Terminology**

In this essay I have utilized the term “death rites” to describe all ceremonial and ritual activity directed toward the deceased from moment of death to final interment. Death rites are then further divided into “funeral rites” (*bin*) and “grave rites” (*zang*) in

adherence to the local taxonomy used by residents in the research area. Funeral rites are further broken down into specific ceremonies and rituals which include a memorial service (*zhuidao hui or gaobie yishi*), cremation ritual (*jingdiao yishi*), interment ceremony (*guhui anfang or guhui anzang*) where the remains of the deceased was formally deposited into the facility's columbarium or cemetery, and finally extended graveside ceremonies during the formal three-year mourning period.

In this study the term “ritual” generally refers to a transformative event and the term “ceremony” refers to a celebratory event in which a transformation does not take place. The words traditional and non-reform are used in reference to funerals that retain a focus on ancestor worship and display Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist characteristics and are generally found in rural areas. The words simple and reformed are used to denote the CCP's socialist funeral system introduced through the policies of funeral reform currently found in urban China.

## **Dissertation Overview**

Chapter one will discuss the history of funeral reform and the origins of the urban/rural divide. This section will also include information on Chinese death practices and their relationship to the state. The history and significance of funeral reform as enacted by the Chinese Communist Party will be discussed in order to lay the foundation for understanding the context within which this study is based. A discussion of previous approaches to the study of Chinese death ritual and the theoretical approach used in this study will also be provided in the chapter.

Chapter two will provide a detailed ethnographic description of the death rites as performed at the San Zhao crematoria and interment facility. The data presented in the chapter is concerned with highlighting the growing presence of the state in the physical processing and ritual treatment of the deceased. The chapter will describe the two-fold approach of funeral reform policies, which center on: 1.) the promotion of socialist ideals and individual merit through the performance of the memorial service, and; 2.) the suppression of “superstitious” practices through attenuating and disciplining those aspects of ritual expression related to principles of agnatic descent. The chapter is primarily for the reader’s reference and in-depth analyses have been left for the chapters that follow.

Chapter three will explore the relationship between funerary rites and determination of the social worth of the deceased. Interested in processes common to both urban and rural death rites and Chinese death rites in general. The chapter develops the notion of death rites as strategic, biographical performances in which the social worth of the deceased is publicly assessed. In the chapter will be considerations of how a tension produced by the reality of imminent judgment by the public of one’s merits and contributions affects individual strategies to affect preferred ritual outcomes. Also to be included in the chapter will be an analysis of the relationship between the demographics of the deceased and funeral outcomes as they relate to notions of personhood as expressed in contemporary death ritual.

Moving from a consideration of common processes to ritual variation, chapter four will compare rural and urban funerary ritual from a variety of perspectives including

the physical treatment of the remains and the elementary ritual structure. Through an investigation into the dynamics of differential ritual investment this study will illuminate the fundamental points of difference in the approach to death rites between urban folk and their rural counterparts. The notion of a dual-track system of citizenship differentiating those who must rely and those who cannot rely on the state for support – which is in effect a rural and urban divide – and its effect on death ritual outcomes will also be discussed in the chapter.

Chapter five will focus on the state's use of power to modify the placement and movement of bodies within the ceremonial space for the purpose of creating hierarchies of dominance and submission. The chapter will also address the significance of seemingly insurmountable contradictions between socialist merit and agnatic descent as they emerge in both funerary and mortuary practices. Finally, the chapter will relate the state's strategic use of ritual for the purpose of making claims to national unity and territorial claims.

The sixth and final chapter will place the arguments presented in this study in the context of broader theoretical debate concerning principles of orthopraxy vs. orthodoxy as drivers of ritual standardization in Chinese death rites and discuss the implications of this model for understanding the relationship between reformed death ritual contemporary conceptions of Chineseness.



## **Chapter 1: Ancestor Worship, the CCP and Funeral Reform**

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has long sought to standardize death rites according to socialist ideals, emphasizing secular commemoration of individual contributions to the party and nation. However, in spite of the CCP's attempts at ritual standardization, a persistent ritual divide has emerged between urban residents who have largely adopted the new rites and rural residents who have not.

### **The Problem: The Urban/Rural Ritual Divide**

This researcher's first exposure to the ritual divide occurred in the summer of 2002 during a pilot study in central Shaanxi. On this particular day a local contact from Xian's Northwest University and I noticed a group of men digging a large hole near the side of a small access road. Upon investigation we found that this was a burial site being prepared for an elderly villager who had recently passed away. First impressions suggested that the site was one quite typical of northwest China and this area in general. At the bottom of the deep hole was a cement tomb constructed as a miniaturized style of the subterranean dwellings once common to this region (*yaodong*). The tomb had two separate sections, one for the recently deceased and another for his still living spouse. The interior of each space was decorated with an elaborate painting with calligraphy and was spacious enough to hold the large wooden caskets preferred in this area. The village work crew explained that this was a traditional rural tomb structure reflecting the

residents' preferences for inhumation<sup>7</sup> (*tuzang*) with all the qualities required for the proper performance of death rites related to ancestor worship. In general, this tomb reflected a style of death rites well documented in ethnographic literature on northern Chinese death rites<sup>8</sup> and appeared to be nothing out of the ordinary. However, these first impressions were soon proven incorrect. We were told that although the tomb was constructed according to the specifications of traditional burial, in fact only a small urn containing the ashes of the deceased would eventually be placed in the tomb. The reason for this was that this particular village had recently become subject to funeral reform regulations which required the cremation of the deceased.

At this point in the discussion one of the crew who identified himself only as a cousin of the deceased complained that this policy was unpopular in rural areas for it levied an additional burden on already hard-pressed village families seeking to settle their dead. He complained:

这个费用太高了。我们负担不起。因为我们得办两次葬礼，一次在火葬厂，一次在我们村子里面。

*Translation: This (funeral reform) is too expensive. We can't afford it because we (now) have to hold two funerals, once at the crematorium and a second one in our village.*

At issue for the villager was not only the disruption of traditional burial customs, but also the added expense and trouble of arranging the cremation and performing a two funerals. When asked why they didn't simply follow the state funeral and forgo the

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<sup>7</sup> Here, "inhumation" refers to the practice of burying an encoffined body in earth with careful attention paid to maintaining bodily integrity. This is contrasted with the practice of cremation later mandated by funeral reform policy.

<sup>8</sup> For an in-depth discussion on northern death rites see Naquin (Naquin 1988).

traditional funeral, I was met with the response that this was simply out of the question (*bu keneng*). The cousin went on to explain that although the burden of performing two funerals is heavy, failure to perform a village funeral would be a great loss of reputation (face) for their family. He said that a loss of face would have serious implications not only for the family's status, but could also affect their chances of receiving assistance in times of hardship. Clearly, this man was arguing that the process of sending the soul of the deceased to the next world had very real implications in the present one. An individual and his or her family's status is a form of insurance against future hardship, so the added cost of two funerals made sense in the social context of the village community. For in this case and others, the insistence on holding the traditional funeral of their respective rural community was far less expensive than the potential social and economic cost of not performing the rural funeral.

Later, during my first visit to the San Zhao crematoria facility and future field site, I also witnessed funeral and burial ceremonies that conformed to the mandates of the CCP's funeral reform policies. Located 20 kilometers outside of the city of Xian and primarily serving the growing urban population of this provincial capital, this sprawling location contained facilities for the performance of all funerary and mortuary activities, which included storage, funerals, cremation and final interment. In this facility, attitudes toward the CCP's funeral reform policies were quite different from that of the rural areas. Contrary to expectations, urban folk were much less bothered by the government's intrusion into the performance of death rites. The funerals were well attended, there appeared to be no particular reticence to cremate, nor any overwhelming desire expressed

to inter their dead in areas other than a local cemetery. Informants consistently reported that cremation was more practical and having the dead interred in the public facilities or local cemetery allowed them to keep the dead closer to them allowing them more opportunity to remain ritually and emotionally connected with their dead in the years to come. Even among urban residents who originally hailed from rural areas, few if any seriously entertained the possibility of moving their dead back to their natal village for either the performance of a traditional funeral or for interment.

What struck me about these two cases was the clear divergence in approaches to the treatment of the dead in a region whose residents self-identify as being culturally, linguistically and ethnically homogenous. A number of questions immediately arise. What, then, are the origins of this ritual divide and how to explain its persistence in the contemporary period? And what is the social significance of these two ritual forms for those who practice them? Should these ritual forms be considered as separate or part of a more flexible, unified ritual system? What can the existence of these two ritual forms tell us about social relations in today's China?

The official view in China posits that rural "backwardness" – an irrational attachment to feudal tradition and superstition – constitutes the main reason behind the failure to adopt the new death rites. This "backward peasant theory" is commonly proposed by both local officials and informants.<sup>9</sup> According to this view, peasants' irrational attachment to tradition and superstition keeps them in ignorance; and only through education and legal reform will peasants achieve the correct class consciousness

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion on the political creation of the Chinese 'peasant' and peasant attitudes towards the label 'backward peasant', see Cohen (Cohen 1994: 151-170) and Kipnis (Kipnis 1995: 110-135).

and desired ritual conformity (Cohen 1994: 155). In contrast, scholarship points to the CCP's funeral reforms as the principle cause of the ritual divide (Watson 1988: 7; Whyte 1988: 303-07) pointing to the high degree of ritual standardization in the late imperial era and the return of traditional ritual forms in the post-economic reform era as evidence of the state's culpability in the persistence of this divide.

In my view, both of these explanations are ultimately unsatisfactory in explaining the persistence of the ritual divide. The reticence to adopt a single ritual form has little to do with peasant irrationality or unquestioned adherence to party policy. While rural residents do stubbornly adhere to tradition, it is unlikely that their adherence is due solely to irrational superstition or sentimental attachments to a feudal past. Similarly, if the CCP's funeral reform policy is solely responsible for the introduction of the new form of death rites, this fact alone does not explain its ready adoption by China's urban population. Finally, if the above theories are valid, it would be expected that both the old and new ritual forms, out of synchronization with emotional, social and political realities, would lack the emotional and ritual efficacy necessary for the successful performance of death rites.

In reality, both ritual forms persist, not because of tenacious adherence to tradition or heavy handed enforcement, but because they remain ritually effective methods for settling the dead. Rural death rites are not outdated artifacts of the feudal era, just as urban death rites are not simply the product of barren government propaganda. However, regardless of the contemporary efficacy of both these ritual forms, we are still left without an adequate explanation of how a relatively homogenous group of people

(ethnically, linguistically, culturally, religiously) in central Shaanxi can have two seemingly distinct sets of death rites for settling their dead.

As a stepping-off point in the consideration of the problem of the rural/urban ritual divide, this chapter will first provide background information concerning the origins and history of funeral reform from the late imperial period to the present, including the development of the socialist memorial ceremony and an assessment of the success of funeral reform. Second, the chapter will consider the theoretical implications funeral reform has posed for scholars who have studied Chinese death rites. Of particular interest is the debate between James Watson, Evelyn Rawski, and Maritn Whyte (Rawski and Watson 1988) on the factors that lead to the high degree of ritual standardization in the late Qing dynasty and the question of the relationship between ritual standardization and greater notions of Chineseness. Third, the chapter will present an overview of the theoretical approach to be used in this study. While there are many different ways to approach the study of ritual, a focus on ritual action or what these rituals do has been chosen for its applicability in exploring the importance of ritual context, the physical movement of the body through time and space, and individual strategies used to affect preferred ritual outcomes for the creation of either inclusive or exclusive communities. Particular emphasis is placed on the exercise of power in the creation of hierarchical relationships of domination and subordination between state and subject.

## **Historical Background**

Historically, it is difficult to overstate the importance of the dead in Chinese society. Much more than a mere cult of the dead, ancestor worship has long been an

integral part of Chinese ritual life. Based on an intergenerational form of reciprocity, ancestors were cared for through elaborate rituals and ceremonies for the expression of benevolent affect relationships (Hsu 1949, Li 1992) and for ensuring that the deceased were properly treated in death which guaranteed harmony and prosperity for future generations (Freedman 1966). In addition, ancestor worship was also deeply enmeshed in imperial China's social and political organization and was an institution integral to the running of the state (Kutcher 1999).

In terms of cosmological beliefs, ancestor worship combined elements from the three primary belief systems that made up what is referred to as Chinese popular religion, namely Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism (Feuchtwang 1974, Feuchtwang 2001, Freedman 1966, Wolf, Martin, and Joint Committee on Contemporary China. Subcommittee on Research on Chinese Society 1974). This cosmology was often expressed in rituals that emphasized the importance of agnatic descent (Watson 1975). By emphasizing the jural authority of the ancestors and senior generations, ancestor worship displayed the primacy of the agnatic lineage authority in its claims over persons and property (Ahern 1973, Freedman 1966, Potter 1970, Watson 1986). In ancestor worship gender, age, and generational hierarchies are ritually enacted and reinforced through elaborate public display. As such, the rituals and the principles of social organization that they display provide a powerful otherworldly explanation for the social inequities and contradictions present in this world. Unlike African forms of ancestor worship that operated in lieu of formal political institutions, Chinese ancestor worship was deeply integrated with the imperial state (Freedman 1958, Freedman 1966, Kutcher

1999, Rawski 1988, Watson 1985). As rituals designed for public consumption, competitive expressions of filial devotion were common, resulting in elaborate performances and the erection of monuments displaying the living's commitment to their ancestors (Kutcher 1999).

In my own research area of Guanzhong, examples of this commitment to elaborate investment in the dead were readily observable. The village of Beiling, where the first phase of fieldwork for this project was conducted, is sits between several important tombs from the imperial past. One prominent example is Qianling, which is the monument to the empress Wu Zetian of the Tang Dynasty. This massive burial mound took thousands of workers years to complete and remains one of the most visible and enduring landmarks of the area. And of course there is the tomb of Qin Shihuang's Terracotta Warriors (Bingma Yong), the ultimate example of the extravagant investment in China's imperial dead. Even burial structures for lesser officials, lineages and families commonly included large landed corporate estates replete with ancestral halls and temples (Ahern 1973, Potter 1970).

At times, the extensiveness of investment in death rites negatively affected the functioning of the state. Mourning periods for even minor officials could extend up to 24 months during which time the bereaved were unable to fulfill administrative duties. Because of the excessiveness of these practices and their negative impact on the state, ancestor worship and the rituals that surround it have long been the focus of reform (Kutcher 1999). Issues concerning the appropriate length of mourning for officials, the Buddhist practice of cremation, and funerary or mortuary extravagance were a frequent



topic of concern among imperial era reformers (Ebrey and Watson 1986, Kutcher 1999). For example, the neo-Confucian reformer Zhu Xi (1130 to 1200 AD) sought to modify the mourning process so as to avoid the excesses of ancestor worship and its negative influence on imperial governance (Naquin 1988: 63-64). It is important to note that such reform efforts during the imperial era were primarily directed at perceived excesses and did not directly challenge the practice of ancestor worship as a belief system. By contrast, the CCP's funeral reforms not only challenged ritual excess, but also the very institution of ancestor worship itself.

CCP funeral reform sought to modify the structure of traditional funeral practices by emphasizing the deceased's individual contribution to the state and society rather than his or her status in a kinship hierarchy. The goal was to obstruct elites' genealogical claims to wealth and property accompanied by elaborate construction of ancestral halls, temples. As such, the CCP's interest in reforming ancestor worship was both political and economic. On one hand, funeral reform was political because it was directed at weakening kinship group solidarity and depriving landlords of property. On the other hand, it was also economic because it was directed at conserving arable land, making way for urban expansion, reducing burdensome funeral expenditures and making better use of limited manufacturing resources (Whyte 1988).

The CCP opposed ancestor worship in large part because it promoted loyalty to the lineage rather than the nascent socialist state. In addition, traditional forms of death ritual reinforced social inequalities such as male preference in birth, patriarchal kinship ideology, and unequal ownership of the means of production (Watson 1988a, Whyte

## The Development of the Memorial Service

The idea of a simple memorial service was first proposed by Chairman Mao Zedong in commemorating the death of Zhang Sude, a worker killed in a brick factory kiln accident in 1944. In the following quote from his famous speech “Serve the People” (*Wei Renmin Fuwu*) Mao proposed a radical change in the treatment of the dead:

*All men must die, but death can vary in its significance. The ancient Chinese writer Sima Qian said, "Though death befalls all men alike, it may be weightier than Mount Tai or lighter than a feather." To die for the people is weightier than Mount Tai, but to work for the fascists and die for the exploiters and oppressors is lighter than a feather. Comrade Zhang Sude died for the people, and his death is indeed weightier than Mount Tai.*

*From now on, when anyone in our ranks who has done some useful work dies, be he soldier or cook, we should give him a funeral and hold a memorial service in his honor. This should become the rule. And it should be introduced among the people as well. When someone dies in a village, let a memorial meeting be held. In this way we express our mourning for the dead and unite all the people.*

*[Excerpts from the speech “Serve the People” delivered by Mao Zedong at a memorial meeting for Comrade Zhang Side on September 8, 1944.]*

In this brief statement, Mao laid the groundwork for one of the most significant changes to death ritual in the post imperial era, highlighting several key CCP ideas concerning the proper ideological orientation of funeral reform. An important change was the notion that how one lives, and not their social position at time of death, should determine the weight given to the individual’s commemoration in death. Death rites should commemorate the deceased according to their merits and contributions in life. For Mao, it was not who you are in death, but what you were in life that counted, suggesting a radical ideological shift from the traditional worship of long-dead ancestors to the commemoration of the recently-passed individual. The dead should be treated according

to the sum of their individual merits and contributions to the state and society, not according to their position in a kinship hierarchy. In addition, the new death rites were seen as a way of creating greater political unity. By making death practices inclusive and celebratory of the individual's contribution to the nation rather than expressing exclusionary membership in a kinship-based community, the CCP sought to promote social equality and political unity.

### The CCP and Cremation

In line with the CCP's ideological stance on the treatment of the dead, cremation was promoted as an alternative to inhumation. Although the practice of cremation in China was not new, the ideological orientation of funeral reform was a radical departure from interment practices of the imperial era. Historically, cremation in China was observed according to Buddhist belief, but the practice never became particularly widespread. Earlier discussions concerning the appropriateness of cremation centered on cosmological differences between Buddhism and Confucianism and the proper treatment of the post-mortem body. However, for the CCP, cremation became a method of repudiating all previous belief systems. Cremation was now seen as a secular and pragmatic alternative to "superstitious" Confucian beliefs concerning body integrity and large tomb construction. In CCP practice, the body becomes the property, not the family, the lineage and certainly not the gods, but of the state.

## Funeral Reform and Interment Practices

Interment practices were also an important aspect of CCP funeral reform. In seeking to alter the approach to death ritual it was important that the most visible symbol of the ancestors – the burial mounds – be modified to fit the CCP's ideological beliefs. In place of the mounds, the dead were now to be interred in public cemeteries with standardized plot sizes and construction. Cemetery architecture emphasized equality through uniform placement and construction and the avoidance of distinctions based on gender, age, kinship or wealth. However, important differences did persist even in socialist cemetery architecture based upon socialist definition of what determines a contribution to the state. Special areas and architectural forms were set apart for the commemoration of revolutionary heroes, decorated soldiers, cadres and government leaders.

As the above discussion suggests, the work of funeral reform was deeply political because it sought to modify the very way that the Chinese people thought about death and ultimately the value of individual life. The political goal of funeral reform was social and political unification. Reformed death rites were designed to celebrate individual merit rather than social difference, secularity rather than religiosity, the nation rather than the lineage, and finally the socialist heroes of the present rather than the ancestors of the feudal past.

Ultimately, however, the CCP's efforts at funeral reform have been much more than an attempt to change political and economic relations. As Martin Whyte has astutely observed, "Communist revolutions are something out of the ordinary because they

However, placement discipline is starting to erode, as families increasingly place their dead

Ritual specialists are often hired to select the location according to geomantic principles. However, their selection is conveniently limited to “private plot land” (*ziliudi*) granted for private family use after decollectivization and more recently under the “household responsibility system” (*jiating chengbao zerenzhi*). In my experience, in Beijing families avoid burying their dead in non-transferable land or land used for principle crop production.

While the rural placement of the dead and certain institutions such as the “Councils for Weddings and Funerals” (*hongbai xishi lishi hui*) continue to emphasize the government’s efforts at reform, there has been a steady weakening of government oversight over death-related activities. Elaborate funerals and interment in private plots are increasingly common, suggesting less oversight and greater ritual investment in the treatment of the dead. And interestingly, as the government oversight recedes, there is increasing uniformity in rural areas highlighting the persistent divergence between rural residents and their urban counterparts.

While it is clear that the state’s efforts to reform ancestor worship have had a significant impact on the treatment of the dead, its success in creating a single, standardized template used by all Chinese citizens remains unclear. Indeed, it is increasingly clear that in spite of the government’s attempts at ritual standardization, significant variation persists, vexing both government officials and researchers seeking to understand the dynamics of Chinese death rites.

## **The Study of Chinese Death Rites in Anthropology**

The relationship between death ritual and cultural reproduction has long been central issue in the study of Chinese death rites; an issue perhaps most clearly articulated in Watson and Rawski's edited volume Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China (Rawski and Watson 1988). The volume's contributors address the question of how Chinese death ritual came to be standardized in the late Qing dynasty and its significance in building and maintaining a cultural consensus concerning the notion of "Chineseness". For these theorists, the question of ritual standardization centers around two key issues. One is the question of whether correct belief (orthodoxy) or correct practice (orthopraxy) has been the cause of the high degree of death ritual standardization in late imperial China. In the book, James Watson argues for the primacy of orthopraxy as the driver of ritual standardization which over time reinforced cultural notions of Chineseness. Watson argues that it was not necessarily what people believed, but what they did that was important in maintaining ritual standardization and cultural integrity. For Watson, knowing what a particular ritual means or adhering to a strong belief in its efficacy is less important than making sure that the ritual is performed correctly.

Further, according to Watson, most observers and participants in Chinese funerals are not ritual specialists, but still know whether the ritual is enacted properly or not. The public nature of Chinese funerals also plays into the emphasis on proper practice because at each funeral there is essentially an active gallery of observers who provide continuous commentary on the extent to which the funeral adheres to local custom. The perceived extent to which the funeral meets expected social obligations serves to enforce cultural

continuity by positively sanctioning adherence to local norms and negatively sanctioning deviations from it. Through an emphasis on correct practice, funerary ritual maintains its elementary structure over time and functions to maintain and recreate “Chineseness”.

Watson’s approach builds upon previous anthropological approaches to the study of death, particularly those of the Africanist studies in political anthropology.<sup>11</sup> However, in contrast to Watson’s emphasis on correct practice, Evelyn Rawski argues that a top-down dissemination of correct belief and ritual knowledge through an extensive, historical textual tradition is more likely the cause of ritual standardization. According to Rawski, “The continuous transmission of ritual texts, promoted by the centralized state, was ... an important factor in the uniformity of death ritual.” (Rawski 1988: 31-32)

Rawski argues that theories which neglect the purposeful manipulation, creation and dissemination of a textual tradition to guide ritual action inadequately explain the role of political leaders and ritual specialists in influencing rituals to meet specific political objectives. As Rawski notes: “The Chinese state played an enormous role in shaping belief systems” (Rawski 1988: 29). For Rawski, even illiterate peasants were affected by the top-down dissemination of ritual texts. While Rawski rejects Watson’s dismissal of text in Chinese funerals, she does not undervalue the importance of proper

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<sup>11</sup> The study of Chinese death rites has long centered on the role they play in promoting formation and maintenance of cultural unity. In the Africanist vein of anthropological inquiry, the practice of ancestor worship has been considered as a sort of “cultural cement” allowing for the confluence of cultural values with social organization. Of particular interest has been the relationship of ancestor worship to the state. Unlike the Africanist studies which saw the descent-based lineages as forms of political organization that existed in lieu of a functioning state, in China the state was intimately involved in the ritual process. This unique facet of China’s ritual and political system has posed a distinct problem for theorists: Was the emergence and continuity of ancestor worship and its attendant lineages a result of bottom-up cultural practices being formalized into statehood, or was it the result of a top-down process of state ideals being inflected into the ritual process? For a discussion on this issue see Allen Chun’s article “The Lineage-village Complex in Southeastern China” (Chun 1996)

Approaches such as those of Oxfeld, Kipnis and Yan represent a distinctive divergence from earlier studies on Chinese social and ritual life as they embrace psychological anthropology's focus on the individual as the unit of analysis. This focus follows Arthur and Joan Kleinman's call for new ethnographies of moral experience where the focus is on "the intersubjective medium of social transactions in local moral worlds" (Kleinman and Kleinman 1991: 277).

These psychological approaches have methodological implications as well. For example, embracing a person-centered ethnographical approach (Hollan and Levy 1998), Yan calls for research designs in which the individual (not corporate entities, like the family) becomes the preferred unit of analysis. In this way, individuals' moral experiences are discovered by a process of "repeated fieldwork in one field site and longitudinal studies of the same local world." (Yan 2003: 11) Yan goes on to argue for an approach in which "The focus is on individual experience and agency rather than social structure or cultural norms." (Yan 2003: 11)

These psychological approaches provide useful insights into the thoughts and emotions of individual respondents as they experience ritual moments. They are also significant because they sidestep the problematic overemphasis on proper procedure in Watson's work by acknowledging that both elements – the necessity to perform rites correctly and the belief that it is important to perform them – are always present in ritual activity. The following description by Oxfeld makes this point nicely:

*Villagers often proclaim that proper procedure and the "show" of funerals are motivated by a strong desire for status in the community, but this status accrues to the mourners precisely because these elaborate displays are viewed as demonstrations of filial devotion. Mourners are not merely doing the "right"*



*thing in the "right" way. They are also remembering the kindness of those who it will never be possible to repay. (Oxfeld 2004: 964)*

Important here is the astute observation that at times, the concern for proper procedure is subsumed by the individual's desire to perform the rites. In Oxfeld's model, which speaks to the Confucian distinction between correct practice and emotional engagement (*xin or xing*), the individual's desire to fulfill ritual obligations leads the individual to adhere to proper procedure. While correct practice is an important expression of filiality, it is subsumed by one's desire to perform death rites. In other words, what is really important is only that one displays the correct emotional engagement; as long as one adheres to the belief that the dead must be attended to, deviations from customary practice are acceptable.

However, problems also arise when focusing solely on the individual. Although psychologically-oriented studies provide an enhanced understanding of the motives behind a specific individual's ritual actions, it is difficult to know the extent to which the individual's beliefs are representative of the greater population. For example, in the case above, we cannot be sure that all people are equally affected by the sense of filial obligation as expressed in Oxfeld's notion of "remembrance of moral debt". Not knowing if all people share an equal compulsion is a serious problem of measurement because in communities with a high degree of social and economic stratification (such as villages and urban centers) or in ritual events involving a large number of attendees, one must not assume that all people believe in or feel equally the compulsion to adhere to moral pressure or guilt. For example, in my own research I found that it was often the wealthiest or those who had the least amount of reliance on the social networks of the

village that would be more likely to deviate from accepted norms. Individuals who were more reliant on local social networks were more observant and also more invested in getting others to do the same, through critical remarks on their ritual performance. Oxfeld also alludes to this phenomenon when mentioning that while the young woman from the city was not criticized for deviating from local norms, her uncle, who was a part of the village community, remained adamantly opposed to foregoing customary practice.

Clearly, not all people attend funerals for the same reason. Some participate out of a personal desire while others participate out of a sense of obligation; more likely, most take part because of some combination of both of these elements. Therefore, while giving primacy to individual experience is may appear plausible, it is difficult to know the extent to which different individuals at the same ceremony share the same sentiments. A further problem in psychologically-oriented studies is identifying the complex interplay of social relations and the expression of power that are frequently present in ritual events. Although the focus on the individual has made a fundamental contribution in understanding the importance of individual experience and agency, this focus comes at the cost of obtaining a larger, more inclusive picture of social relations that affect mourners' ritual actions. Therefore, in this study, there is less of a focus on ritual meaning as it relates to individual experience and more of a focus on what the ritual does in a broader social and historical context. This approach borrows heavily from the theoretical focus of practice theorists who see ritual as less about direct expressions of authority, and more about how ritual acts as a vehicle for the construction of relationships of authority and submission. As Catherine Bell notes: "Practice theory makes it possible

to focus more directly on what people do and how they do it; it involves less preliminary commitment to some overarching notion of ritual in general." (Bell 1997: 82)

By focusing on ritual action rather than solely on ritual meaning, practice approaches seek to follow Bourdieu's call to avoid an over-reliance on "structure" or "historical processes" focusing instead on the acts themselves (Bourdieu 1977: 72-95) This approach is useful in this study because it gives the consideration of ritual situational and strategic qualities better reflecting the ways that ritual is embedded within a specific social and political context. Also relevant to this study is the practice approach's concern for the "primacy of the body moving about within a specially constructed space, simultaneously defining (imposing) and experiencing (receiving) the values ordering the environment." (Bell 1997: 82) For as it will become clear in this study, one of the principle acts of the CCP's funeral reforms is a radical reconfiguration of ceremonial spaces and death-related architecture for the specific purpose of modifying the way individual think about death. Finally, the practice approach is useful in that it also allow for a greater consideration of agency by incorporating a focus the strategic ways that individuals create, reproduce and transform their lives through ritual within structured spaces (Comaroff 1985: 96) It is my hope that this approach will allow for a way to overcome Watson and Rawski's theoretical impasse. For Watson and Rawski's drive to identify either orthopraxy or orthodoxy as a mutually exclusive driver of ritual action fails to address the profound complexity of of Chinese death ritual.

In my view, rather than seeking to isolate either correct belief (orthodoxy) or correct practice (orthopraxy) as the driver for ritual behavior, it is more productive to

investigate how orthodox and orthopraxic elements operate in tandem at specific ritual or ceremonial moments and for what purpose. By making a death event, rather than the individual, the principle unit of analysis it quickly becomes evident that both orthodox and orthopraxic elements are always present in ritual events. However, it is not necessarily the case that these ritual elements are equally expressed when settling the dead. During my research, I found that by observing the movement and placement of participant's bodies as they move through the ceremonial space, it became clear that at certain times correct belief were intentionally given greater ritual weight than correct practice and vice-a-versa. It is my belief that the alternating emphasis on correct belief or practice during a single ritual event suggests the presence of a complex interplay of strategy and power deployed by both the state and its subjects for specific purposes. Therefore, a theoretical approach in this study will seek to provide a deeper understanding of how the socialist ritual fits within the broader context of Chinese death rites particularly as it relates to strategies for defining individual legacy, the importance of context in the rural/urban ritual divide and the state's efforts to create and legitimate its authority by modifying traditional social hierarchies. Finally, this study will seek to address the Watson, Rawski, and Whyte's question that in light of the radical changes to ritual structure in the modern era, what makes a Chinese death ritual Chinese? Each of these three areas of interest are briefly introduced below.

#### Funerals and the Determination of the Deceased's Social Worth

As my analysis will show, Chinese death rites are not just an elementary structure or a textual template to be followed without variation, but instead strategic performances,

biographical in nature, which publicly assess the deceased in light of his or her contributions and position within a network of social relations (a family, village, work unit, nation or a combination of some or all of these relationships). Thinking of Chinese death rites as strategic performances avoids the problems inherent in Watson and Rawski's "either/or" approach, allowing for an analysis in which two seemingly parallel ritual forms (one rural and one urban) meet at a common point. From such a perspective, the death ritual becomes a strategic ritual performance in which the social worth of the deceased and even the fate of the soul undergo the collective assessment of a critical public. I refer to this process of assessment as the public determination of the deceased's "social worth." A number of issues will be considered. Why for example, is establishing the social worth of the deceased important in Chinese funerals? What is accomplished by such an effort? What is at stake for the living in settling the deceased? In other words, what do these rituals do?

In viewing Chinese funerals as performances, it is crucial to see these ceremonies as public events subject to public critique. Chinese funerals are public matters of face. Funeral success relies on the extent of the public's participation and their approval of the performance. Moreover, how the performance is received has a significant impact on one's status within the community. Therefore, the focus of Chinese funerals is not merely meeting the emotional needs of the bereaved or satisfying the obligations of a moral universe, but also achieving the required public recognition considered necessary for the successful completion of the rites. If done well, the performance will both increase the

family's reputation and also permanently define the social worth of the deceased in a positive light. However, as we will see, positive outcomes are not always assured.

As Watson and Rawski emphasize, it is of course important that death rites be performed according to a certain standard. However, what that standard should be and how it is defined is not always agreed upon and also varies according to cultural and historical context. Different individuals and parties often have varied ideas of what is, or is not an appropriate performance. It seems, the consensus on what determines orthopraxy has broken down. There is a commonality of purpose (viz., to safely bury the dead), but often disagreement as to how this is best accomplished. And although the typical performance is highly structured, there remains ample room for personal expression, improvisation, and at times, even resistance to existing narratives. Disagreements occur and contradictions between various attending groups may arise, making the settling of the dead a volatile and potentially dangerous activity. Consequently, death ritual in modern China is subjected to constant scrutiny, not only by participants, but also by state authorities tasked with enforcing funeral reform laws. Indeed, I argue, that it is this element of public scrutiny that is a defining element in the performance of death rites.

#### Funeral Variation and the Rural/Urban Ritual Divide

While the public assessment of the deceased's social worth represents a common element in the Chinese death ritual, there is also important variations in performance of the rites. For example, all families at San Zhao must perform a memorial service, a cremation ritual and an interment ceremony, but not all do so in the same fashion.

Different participants invest in the same ritual moment(s) to a different degree, a phenomenon which I refer to as “differential ritual investment”.

Interestingly, the differential investment in specific ritual moments is highly patterned and clearly illuminates the urban/rural divide in the performance of death rites. In the process of meeting their respective social and ritual obligations, rural funerals tend to place greater emphasis upon the elements of the ritual process that emphasize the deceased’s position and contributions to a community based on agnatic descent, while urban funerals place greater emphasis on ritual moments that celebrate the deceased’s contribution to the state. Therefore, while both the rural and urban death rites share an identical ritual process, outcomes differ, illuminating the urban/rural ritual divide. This is important because it suggests that the performance of death rites is strategic and responsive to the social, economic and political context in which it is performed. A careful investigation of death rites at my field site, clearly suggests that contemporary Chinese ritual practice does not reveal the existence of two separate systems of death rites – one urban, one rural – but instead the presence of a single, highly flexible ritual system responsive to prevailing social and economic contexts.

#### Reconciling Social Worth and Ritual Variation in Chinese Death Rites

To summarize, unlike previous scholars who seek to differentiate either orthodoxy or orthopraxy as a driver of ritual standardization, I argue that these elements are always present, but expressed to different degrees depending upon the objective of the rite or ceremony. Further, I will show how the state’s death ritual operates to create an inclusive community (the nation) through emphasizing correct belief (orthodoxy) and



simultaneously de-emphasizing descent-based social hierarchies and inequalities. By contrast, rural death rites emphasize ritual elements that define the participants as members of an exclusive kin-based community based on correct practice (orthopraxy), while at the same time de-emphasizing ritual moments that depart from this focus. This study will show that the differential expression of orthopraxic vs. orthodoxic ritual elements is present throughout the performance of Chinese death rites, and reflects the projection of state power in constructing relationships of domination and submission between the individual and the state. This state's strategic acquisition and reordering of death ritual occurs not only in the rites of the ordinary dead, but also in the death rites performed by state actors. For example, the contradictory case of the state's performance of rites during the "Tomb Sweeping Holiday" (*Qingming Jie*) at the renovated temple of Huangdi Ling where members of the CCP publicly worship a legendary ancestor.

It is my position that understanding Chinese ritual flexibility can be best accomplished by examining the principles of orthodoxy and orthopraxy not as drivers for ritual standardization and cultural reproduction, but as theoretical approaches to understand how Chinese death rites are employed and for what purpose. As this study will show, a careful analysis of how and when orthodoxic or orthopraxic ritual elements are expressed can tell us much about the mechanics of ritual action upon which rural and urban differences are expressed and also the motivations of the people who express them. In addition, by avoiding the either/or formulation of orthodoxy and orthopraxy utilized by Watson and Rawski, it is possible to see these seemingly disparate ritual forms as both responsive to social and historical context and recognizably Chinese.



## **Chapter 2: Ethnographic Description of Death Rites at San Zhao**

This chapter will provide an ethnographic description of the process for settling the dead in the urban setting of Xian and San Zhao. The goal of the chapter is primarily to provide background data as reference points for the analyses that follow. The descriptions in the chapter will be those related to changes in the physical treatment of the remains and the structuring of the ritual process around three key ritual moments in the performance of a typical funeral in this area: the memorial service, the cremation ritual and interment ceremony. The data presented in the chapter has been selected for its relevance to the growing presence of the state in the processing of the deceased including the two-fold approach of funeral reform policies, which are: 1.) the promotion of socialist ideals and individual merit through the performance of the memorial service, and; 2.) the suppression of “superstitious” practices through attenuating and disciplining those aspects of ritual expression related to principles of agnatic descent, such as the treatment (physical and ritual) of the post-mortem body.

### **Pre-death Rites and Activities**

#### Sending away the deceased (*songzhong*)

When a person is near death, family members are expected to return to accompany the dying through the last moments of life. In the past, this aspect of the funerary process was extremely important not only for meeting emotional needs of the dying and their relatives. This was also traditionally the time when the dying would settle

affairs of the house including succession and inheritance. Final instructions were given to those responsible for managing the household after the person expired.

In current times, the issue of succession and inheritance is rarely an issue as in most cases the children have already established themselves and assumed responsibility for their parents' household. This is more of a time for bringing the family together for one last time to pay respects and visit the dying. Urban informants did not mention specific rituals for this stage in the funerary process, mentioning only that it was important to accompany the dying and assist in various household duties until their passing. For some families this period also included preparing death clothing, purchasing a plot of land for burial, selecting a gravestone style and content, one's own eulogy, etc. These preparations are not seen in bad taste; however care is taken not to have the name of the deceased carved on the tombstone, for example, as a superstition against creating an omen that might actually hasten the death.<sup>12</sup>

If the death is expected, or the dying intends to be interred with his or her spouse or family member who has already passed on, it may be the case that many preparations will have already been completed. However, if the death is sudden or unexpected funerary and mortuary preparations will be dealt with immediately following death. Due to the emergence of a fairly well organized death industry, most preparations can be made fairly quickly. The major hurdle for those who haven't had the time to adequately prepare is securing a burial site. Selecting a burial site is often the most difficult due to

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<sup>12</sup> Sometimes the names of the living are already engraved in tombstones, particularly if the stone is designed to contain the name of more than one person. Stones are usually cut only once, so a living relative's name may appear on a stone. In this case a red piece of tape or paint covers the name of the living to prevent the appearance of a bad omen.

informants, the most common method for announcing the death is for friends and relatives to pass on the news through the phone or personal discussions.<sup>14</sup>

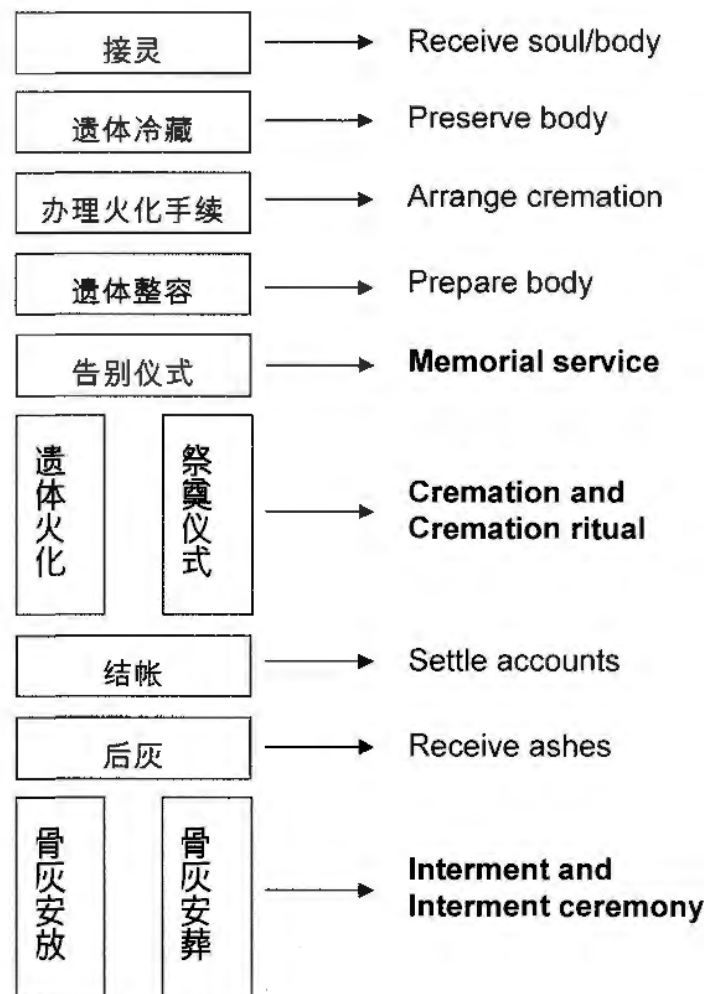
The chart below shows the process for settling the dead at San Zhao.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> An exception to this is when the deceased is a well-known public figure or the conditions surrounding a death are tragic or exceptional in some way. In these cases, the death and the date and time of the funeral may be announced in a local newspaper. Often, these reports contain a written eulogy establishing their significance of their passing to greater society or the state apparatus. Other than for these high-level funerals, death announcements and obituaries are not a common sight in local papers.

<sup>15</sup> The San Zhao administration provides this chart for family members' reference.

**Figure 3: Funerary and mortuary process posted at San Zhao crematorium and interment facility (English translations added by researcher)**



Receiving the Body/Soul (*jie ling*)

The body is delivered to the crematorium by van specifically designed for transporting the dead. Transportation is usually arranged by the crematorium's branch offices (*huohuachang banshichu*) located just outside of most city or regional hospitals. The crematorium receives the body through a unobtrusive gate away from the funeral

halls. If requested, a simple ceremony can be performed marking the beginning of the “watching over the soul” (*shouling*) period which occurs prior to the memorial service.

#### Refrigerating and storing the corpse (*yiti bingcang*)

Once the body has been delivered to the crematorium the family arranges for the dead to be placed in a coffin sized refrigeration unit until the day of the funeral and cremation. While most families are content with leaving the dead and returning home until the day of the funeral, some families observe the period of “guarding the soul” (*shouling*) and accompany the dead until the day of the funeral. There are often simple rooms fitted with a refrigerated cart in which the dead can be openly displayed and the bereaved can accompany the corpse during this period. At the crematorium where I did my work there were specially constructed rooms for specifically designed for this purpose complete with comfortable chairs, simple flower arrangements, and an open face plexi-glass refrigerated cart for the deceased.

#### Arranging the cremation procedure (*banli huohua shou xu*)

This stage is simply the administrative portion where the bereaved finalize preparations for the funerary and mortuary process including reserving time and date of memorial service, funeral hall, body preparation, cremation, and method of final interment.

Preparing and making up the corpse (*yiti zhengrong*)

Preparing the body for the memorial service and cremation occurs after the body has been delivered to the crematorium. The primary tasks performed are the washing of the body, dressing the body, and making up the face of the deceased in preparation for the memorial service.

Washing the body: San Zhao employees, not the family, perform the customary washing of the body using special equipment designed specifically for this purpose. At the crematorium where I worked the dead are loaded onto a stainless steel platform which is covered by a cylindrical housing that contains numerous high-pressure water jets positioned in such a way to ensure that all portions of the body are thoroughly cleansed. The washing unit has a self-contained tank to hold the water which is changed each time. According to informants, the water is never re-used to avoid the appearance of contamination between different bodies of the dead. Afterwards the body is set to dry and sometimes lightly patted down with a cloth. After the body has been washed it is then sent to a separate area to be dressed.

Dressing the body: The dressing of the corpse is also an important part of the funeral preparations. The act of dressing the dead is now predominately performed by San Zhao employees, however, families who request to do this themselves are allowed to do so. In adherence to tradition it is common that several layers of death clothing are placed on the body. One's death clothing is

commonly prepared prior to death, but this is not always so. Unlike clothing worn by mourners death clothing is often bright and colorful with several layers of clothing making up a set of clothing. Up to seven layers of death clothing (*shouyi*) can be worn, but in my research, three to five layers were the most common arrangement. In the area where I worked there were three styles of dress available. The most common, for both males and females, was an imperial style typified by the large silk shirts and trousers worn in the style of Qing officials. A hat in the style from this era was also commonly worn. The second most popular style was a “cadre” style. Here, the dead were dressed in dark blue Mao suits with hats in the style of communist party officials common in the post-revolutionary period. The last style, worn by males only, was a “Western” style in which the dead are dressed in a typical business suit. This last style was the least prevalent in the funerals that I observed. Interestingly, it did appear in Christian funerals as they often make a point of rejecting any funerary custom that relates to the practice of ancestor worship. In Christian funerals it is common for the deceased to wear a white silk shawl or simple covering over the body with a small red cross embroidered or sewn on to the covering.

Making up the face of the deceased: Once the body has been washed and dressed is taken to a different room where make-up specialists apply makeup to the face of the deceased. Particular attention is paid to the skin color and eyes. A light-brown foundation is first generously applied to the entire face and neck. Next, a reddish blush is generously applied to the cheeks. Finally, eyeshade is applied.

The goal of the make-up is to hide the evidence of death and make the dead seem more natural or life-like in appearance because, unlike pre-reform funerals, the deceased are now openly viewed during the memorial service. In pre-reform funerals I have been told that while makeup was sometimes applied, there is little effort to develop specific techniques for preserving a life-like face for the ritual process. In non-reformed funerals the deceased are only viewed by the bereaved during the vigil and the “entering the casket” ceremony. After, the dead are placed in the casket, it is not re-opened. However, in reform funerals the deceased are viewed not only by close family members in the beginning of the ritual process, but also by all guests during the memorial service. According to informants, open viewing is important for ensuring the correct identification of the deceased. However, in addition to this pragmatic aspect, it also seems likely that open viewing reflects a weakening of traditional Chinese concepts regarding death pollution. The fear of the dead in traditional Chinese funerals has been interpreted as a reflection of greater social structures regarding the the jural authority of the senior generation over the junior [Watson, 1982 #626: PAGE??]. To me, open viewing then, reflects a weakening of traditional generational hierarchies.

Donning mourning Clothing (*shouyi*) or Donning the mourning band (*daixiao*)

In reform funerals it is common for family members to wear dark, preferably black clothes with a simple black band on the upper arm. The black band can be either plain or at times is inscribed with the character for filial piety (*daixiao*) signifying that the bearer is in a state of mourning. The gender of the deceased determines which arm the



band is worn on. The band is worn on the left if male and the right if female (*nanzuo nuyou*).

If the family maintains a village connection or is a relatively late arrival to the city family members may don elements of the traditional white mourning clothing. However, it is generally the practice that this clothing is donned only periodically during the ritual or ceremonial process. There is a lot of variation in this clothing style as certain families don the entire outfit with robe, hemp belt, headband and hood, while other families wear only a portion of the entire outfit. What appears to be of greatest import is the headband which is commonly worn by all close family members. The headband was worn with tails hanging down the back of the bereaved until the end of the cremation ritual at which time the tails of the headband were carefully tucked into the rest of the band. According to informants the tying up of the tails signified the end of the cremation ritual and sending off of the deceased. This appears to coincide with the sending off rituals of non-reform funerals (*chubin*).

Also, in some cases, families that retain a village or rural connection, a small red square of bright red cloth is worn on the lower portion of the black armband. According to informants this red band is similar to the red sash worn by the unmarried women of the lowest position in the generational hierarchy in non-reform funerals. Other families placed this red square on young men as well as young women. Some informants mentioned that the red dot could be used to denote unmarried youth, or to designate that this child was particularly close to and cared for the deceased. In this case, the red square designated a higher degree of filial piety and intimacy with the deceased.

The general rule for all participants whether following the reform (brown or black) or non-reform (white) was that bright colors, such as reds, blues, purples, etc... should be avoided. Guests tend to be representatives from companies or work units and their dress tends to be western, business casual. They are often in dark or earth tone suits with slacks or skirts being the order of the day. The clothing chosen by those who hold no special connection with the deceased or the family tend to be the most casual. It appears that guests often wear clothing that they would ordinarily wear to work or a business meeting. If the guests represent a branch of the military or police they will wear a dress uniform.

## **The Memorial Service**

### Preparing the funeral hall

On the morning of the ceremony the first order of business is to prepare the funeral hall for the upcoming ceremony. This is accomplished by first loading appropriate slide show pictures of the deceased and placing the name of the individual on the computer controlled, electronic board above the entrance of the hall. The general format of the labeling on the electronic billboard is:

沉痛悼念(DECEASED NAME)同志”。 [Researcher's translation: "With deep feelings of grief, we mourn for comrade (Deceased Name)"]

Also, during this period pictures of the deceased are given to the funeral assistants who place them in a simple slideshow. In general, there are usually anywhere from 3 to 5 photos showing the deceased in various times of his or her life spanning from young adulthood to advanced age. Of particular importance are pictures that show the

deceased's participation in institutions such as the military, political leadership, educational pursuits, work units, etc. The preferred photo style in both reform and non-reform funerals is a simple portrait showing only the head and shoulders.

Second, all colorful paper wreaths (*huaquan*) symbolizing a gift and expressive of condolences to the bereaved are carefully placed around the entrance of the hall by friends or relatives. These gifts can be freely purchased in the small shops that surround hospitals and the cemetery. They are usually purchased by work unit or company representatives, friends and relatives as a symbolic gesture in offering their condolences. On each wreath two strips of paper are attached with a simple couplet eulogizing the dead. If fresh flowers have been given they are usually placed inside the hall next to the deceased or in some cases near the entrance to the funeral hall along with the other decorations.<sup>16</sup>

The purpose of displaying the decorative arrangements outside the funeral hall is twofold. First, it is important to acknowledge those individuals and institutions that provided such gifts. Second, it is important to display these decorative arrangements as the number received is the most obvious measure of public participation.

After these simple decorative arrangements are in place, the deceased is wheeled into the room on a metal cart and placed underneath a plexi-glass casing. The

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<sup>16</sup> An exception to this is Christian burials where the offering of these decorative arrangements is discouraged. In Christian funerals only fresh flower arrangements are allowed and even then, they are usually placed inside the hall and not publicly displayed. The reason for this is a general prohibition on any form of superstition or ritual that is tied to any other belief system. Because these decorative arrangements are later ritually burnt as an offering to the deceased, the act of burning and offering objects to comfort the soul of the deceased as it makes its journey through hell contradicts Christian beliefs regarding the soul. For Christians there is only one God and one soul. Any ritual observance which acknowledges the existence of other cosmological deities or agents is therefore to be avoided.

deceased is rolled into the room feet first according to local custom in this area.<sup>17</sup>

The feet-first placement of the body is important because it serves as a focal point for the distribution of the mourners throughout the ceremonial space. (The significance of the body's placement in the ceremonial space will be covered in depth later in the study.)

#### Welcoming the guests (*huanyin binke*)

Once the deceased has been placed in the funeral hall and all other arrangements have been made the next stage of the funeral is to welcome guests and other attendees. At this point in the proceedings a close friend or relative who has good handwriting is selected to supervise the accepting of gifts and ensures that the names of the attendees are written in the guest book. In reform funerals generally there is only a simple guest list of attendees and often the individual attendee is responsible for writing his or her own name.<sup>18</sup>

In reform funerals the practice of maintaining a guest list is maintained although in a simplified form. The names of those in attendance are primary and it is rare to see a careful recording of gifts received. In fact, during my research period at the crematorium,

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<sup>17</sup> This is similar to the traditional funeral, but different from the placement of Chairman Mao in his final resting place in the mausoleum in Tianan Men Square as described by Cheater (Cheater 1991) in his discussion on Chairman Mao mausoleum and the use of death as political trickster.

<sup>18</sup> This part of the funeral process in reform funerals is less important than in non-reform funerals where great care is taken to ensure attendance and gift value is recorded accurately. Also, in non-reform funerals the size of the gift also determines the amount of reciprocal gifts given by the family. For example, in the Guanzhong area, attendees presenting a \$200 RMB gift will be given 4 packs of cigarettes and allowed to eat and participate in the funeral ceremonies. Remember that in non-reform funerals, the elaborateness of the funerals is high as well as the expense. Therefore, community involvement and the gift-giving process is important in offsetting the cost as well as allowing a forum for exhibiting the degree of community involvement. Basically, a high degree of community involvement in the funeral process is an indicator of the funerals success and the family's viability which has a direct impact on the family's future status within the social community.

other than the presentation of the floral arrangements, I saw no obvious exchange of gifts prior to the memorial service.<sup>19</sup>

After the guests and attendees have written their names in the guest book they are given a white cloth flower which is attached to the clothing over the left breast. After pinning the flower to their clothing the attendees then enter the funeral hall. The flower is referred to as a (*lanhua*) and has two strips of cloth attached to it with a simple couplet (*ainian*) to signify their grief and state of mourning. The donning of this flower identifies the individual as a recognized guest in the proceedings.<sup>20</sup>

Funeral music (dirge) begins calling the mourners into the hall and announcing the beginning of the memorial service (*aive*)

The beginning of the funeral is announced by the playing of a funeral dirge, the most common in Guanzhong area being a modern brass band martial rendition of a classic opera song which originated in the Tang Dynasty and is commonly referred to as an operatic style related to Qin Opera (*Qinchao geju*).<sup>21</sup> Once the music begins the final

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<sup>19</sup> This does not mean however that no gifts are given in all cases. It is likely that most rural families have extended funeral ceremonies outside of the confines of the crematorium regulated environment where more traditional forms of gift giving and annotation are observed. Some informants reported that families of high officials commonly receive large monetary gifts to such an extent that they may actually bring in more money than they spend. It is not uncommon to hear of corruption scandals surrounding the accepting of gifts by officials for life-cycle events.

<sup>20</sup> Not all attendees wear this flower. The donning of the flower usually signifies that you are known to the family or the deceased or have an official connection to the ceremony. Some attendees who were not directly invited chose to not wear the flower. My research assistants and I did not wear the flowers as participants began to ascertain our relationship to the deceased. As we were not directly involved in the mourning process and were not related to the deceased, we later felt it inappropriate to wear these flowers and removed them from our clothing.

<sup>21</sup> At San Zhao there are four types of musical accompaniment available. These are the crematorium's martial band, recorded music and privately hired non-reform bands with traditional instruments being the most common, but western instruments also available. The non-reform bands are most commonly used by rural families or those urban families which continue to maintain a rural connection. Christian funerals tend to use church choirs. The martial band is the most commonly used followed by the non-reform band, the

attendees enter the hall and once they are settled down all attendees bow their heads in a gesture of respect for the deceased. The funeral dirge is played from between 45 seconds to 1 minute. After, the music stops the funeral director (*zhuchiren*) will formally begin the memorial service. Music is generally played at two other times in the memorial service. Music is played during the period just prior to the beginning of the eulogies when the funeral director calls for a moment of silence to pay respects to the dead. The final time music is played is during the bowing ceremony (*sanjugong yishi*), which also signals the imminent completion of the memorial service.

#### Funeral director begins the ceremony

After the band stops the funeral director calls for a moment of silence after which he (always male in my experience) first recognizes those important guests or individuals and companies (if applicable) who are in attendance and who presented gifts. This process usually is restricted to work units and companies and mentions the company by name with a brief description of the gift(s) or floral wreaths presented.

After the recognition of important guests and gifts has been completed, the funeral director then introduces the deceased. The funeral director makes careful note of the name of the deceased, his or her work unit, the nature of his or her demise, and the exact time of death including the day, hour, and minute. After all introductions have been completed the funeral director then calls those who will be giving eulogies to the podium. .

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tape recordings, and finally the church choirs. In the case of the martial band there are several music styles and songs available including some foreign songs. Auld Lang Sine was a perennial favorite in this area. The most common musical accompaniment was the Qin Chao funeral dirge previously mentioned.

### Committee representative or work unit leader eulogizes the deceased

In most cases, the first person to be called to deliver a eulogy by the director is the guest of highest status attending the funeral, this usually being a work unit or committee association representative (*Weiyuanhui Daibiao*). If the deceased was a member of the communist party or was a member of a state-sponsored work unit, it is likely that the speaker will be a leader of the deceased's work unit or work unit section, a party committee member or a member of the work unit's retirement association (*Gongshe Tuixiuhui Daibiao*). If the deceased had no official work unit, for example the case of a housewife or villager, the representative will come from the village or neighborhood government or party committee. In cases where the deceased had no connection to the state or party will the lead speaker may be a member of the family or from the friends or relatives group of attendees, but this very rare. In most cases, families will go to great lengths to ensure an official or hired funeral director will preside over the ceremony and read a eulogy.

The first eulogy is considered to be the most important. The content of this eulogy is usually one that contains an achievement-oriented biography of the deceased. The biography may have a demographic section similar to that of the funeral director's, but predominantly addresses the deceased's contributions to the nation chronologically from beginning to end, starting from participation in the military, work unit, party, the revolution, liberation or other significant aspect of PR China's development. The common theme in the initial eulogy is the demarcation of the deceased's contribution to the nation and related personal achievements.

The next section of the eulogy focuses on the deceased's contribution to the work unit most recently a part of and may include more detailed comments on the deceased's work habits, describing him or her as a worker, model worker, or revolutionary worker, etc. The final part of the eulogy is commonly dedicated to once again summing up the deceased's contributions to the party and nation by emphasizing how his life was dedicated to upholding the principles of or Chairman Mao, the Communist Party, the Revolution, the theories of Deng Xiaoping, the three representations of Jiang Zemin, and further sacrifices for the country and socialist ideology. Important in these eulogies is an emphasis on individual achievement to the extent that it is directed towards the state. Contributions and sacrifices to the state are given highest praise while one's ancestry or place in a family is given relatively little emphasis.

#### Colleague or close friend eulogizes the deceased

After the first eulogy is given, a second (or rarely a third) eulogy is given by someone who is still designated as either a member of the guests or friends and relatives group. This person is usually someone who had a more interpersonal relationship with the deceased. For example, in a large work unit, this speaker may be a direct supervisor who had intimate knowledge of the deceased's work habits. The speaker may also be a colleague or simply a close friend who worked with or knew the deceased. These eulogies have a personal aspect to them that is missing from the first eulogy.

The content of these eulogies celebrate the personal qualities of the deceased that made him or her a valued member of the work unit community. Praise for the quality of



work, ability to work with others, type and level of personal sacrifices made in seeking to accomplish work oriented goals are often the subject of these eulogies.

While the emphasis of these eulogies is more often than not work-related, it is not uncommon for there to be some mention of the personal relationship between the speaker and the deceased. Affirmations of long-held and valued friendship or mutual respect are not uncommon here.

If there is more than one speaker drawn from this group, then the order is according to position in the social or political hierarchy. A middle manager will speak before a colleague for example. Often the degree of intimacy expressed also falls along this continuum with the more formal coming first and the more informal and intimate expressions coming from the later speakers who had a more personal relationship and knowledge of the deceased.

#### Family representative eulogizes the deceased

While choosing speakers to give eulogies from the friends and relatives group is optional and less common, it is almost always important to have a representative from the deceased's immediate family give a brief commentary or eulogy for the deceased. Although not all families chose to do this, in all the memorial ceremonies that I witnessed the funeral director asked a family representative to send a representative forward to say a few words.

This eulogy is particularly important because this is the last chance for the family to publicly eulogize the deceased. This is important because in some cases the

demographics, nature or time of death, or occupation can mean that there would be little if any formal recognition by state functionaries.

These eulogies are also the most personal and exhibit the highest degree of emotional expression. The content is often directed at emphasizing the deceased's personal qualities as a family member. One's qualities as a parent, caretaker, and member of the house are important here. It is not uncommon for the eulogy to contain direct mention of personal anecdotes related to the raising of children, meeting responsibilities as a wife or husband, and performing the duties of a good son or daughter.

These eulogies are interesting linguistically because they often change from third person to second person and finally from second person to first person. The speaker will often begin his or her eulogy talking about the individual's qualities and then shift to personal anecdotes regarding the individual's relationship with the deceased. Finally, the speaker will often finish by speaking in the first person discussing how they will personally continue on the work of the deceased as it relates to caring for other members of the family, particularly those whom are left in the most vulnerable position by the death. Promises to care for the deceased's surviving children or parents or promises by children to work diligently towards fulfilling the deceased's wishes for them as children will be made. These personal guarantees are by far the most intimate and emotional period of the eulogy section of the ceremony and it is not uncommon for multiple members of the attendees to begin weeping and crying. Up until this point emotional expression from guests and friends and relatives is minimal.

The speaker is usually the eldest male child of the deceased, but if there are no male children than a female will be selected. If the deceased left no children, then a sibling will be chosen. In no cases did I witness a person of the higher generational status give a eulogy to a child. For example, a parent or surviving spouse would not read a eulogy to the deceased.<sup>22</sup> In cases where the death of a young person does occur, some families avoid the problem of the family representative giving a eulogy by arranging for a friend or colleague to speak. In other cases, the family had only the ritual specialist perform the ceremony and did not have any eulogies read.

At the conclusion of the eulogy the speaker will thank those in attendance, particularly official guests and then turn and face the deceased and somberly bow from the waist three times to the deceased and then depart the podium area and return to their original position in the family.

#### Final bowing ritual (*sanjugong yishi*)

At the conclusion of the reading of the eulogies the funeral director signals the conclusion of the memorial service by announcing the beginning of the final bowing ritual. As the music begins for the final time, the attendees begin to circle the deceased counter-clockwise, stopping to individually bow three times from the waist at the left-hand side of the deceased. The bow is directed at the head of the deceased. The attendees form a single file line during this ritual. The order of this ritual is along the same lines as the reading of the eulogies. The groups go in order of status that being guests, relatives

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<sup>22</sup> This is expected in that according to Chinese practice those of a senior generation are not expected to participate in the eulogizing or worshipping of a younger generation. Generally, any family member giving a eulogy must be the most senior cognate after the deceased according to the principles of generational hierarchy. Wives or in-laws rarely perform this function.

and friends, followed last by the family. Within each group the order is also hierarchical, with the most important and highest status individuals going before the rest and on down the line. Once all guests have bowed three times they proceed to express their condolences to the immediate family members of the deceased.

#### Expressing condolences to the bereaved

After bowing the individual attendees proceed counter-clockwise past the deceased to the family, and shaking hands with the immediate family members, express their condolences to the survivors. Afterward the attendees immediately leave the hall and wait outside until the end of the ceremony. At this point some of the higher status guests and leaders will leave the facility altogether as their role in the funeral is now complete. Relatives and friends perform the same action of bowing and expressing their condolences, but unlike many of the guests, they will often remain to assist the family during the cremation ritual which occurs immediately after the memorial service.

#### Paying last respects

After all members of the guests and relatives and friends groups have departed the immediate family then pays its final respects to the deceased along the same fashion as those of the previous attendees. The general pattern is for the family members those most closely related, male, and senior to go first followed by females, younger, and junior participants. However, at this point there is usually a breakdown of the proceedings as an intense burst of emotion erupts filling the hall with cries and wailing of great volume. Children regardless of gender, daughter(s) in-law, and other closely related females will

be those who express (and are expected to express according to the traditional grief division of labor) the greatest display of emotion, often working themselves into a state of utter inconsolable crying or screaming. Those closest to the deceased (eldest male or female children, daughter-in-law, and female cognates) will often collapse from the effort of simultaneously trying to keep the deceased from being wheeled away and from the intensity of their weeping. Getting those overcome with grief out of the hall is often very difficult and the responsibility for taking out the most afflicted of the bereaved often falls onto the shoulders of female relatives (aunts) pre-selected for the task. At the appropriate moment these women will assist the bereaved out of the hall and if this task proves too much for them other relatives and friends who have congregated outside will rush into the hall and retrieve the bereaved by physically carrying them out of the hallway by their waist and underarms. After getting them out of the hall the bereaved are carried to the waiting areas and given time to recover before being led to the next stage of the ritual process, which is the first stage in the performance of the cremation and interment rites.<sup>23</sup>

## **Cremation and the Cremation Ritual**

### Cremation

Once the memorial service is complete, the corpse is immediately wheeled to the back of the crematorium in a restricted area where the ovens for cremating the dead are located.

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<sup>23</sup> The way that grief is expressed, the grief division of labor and the intensity of expression is interesting because it is assumed that there is little overt expression of emotion allowed in socialist funerals. However, in my research site this was not the case. Emotion is expressed and encouraged, but the timing and style of emotional expression takes on a quality that is both similar to and qualitatively different from traditional funerals. This issue will be taken up greater depth in chapter 5.

Frequently, the key male mourners (the oldest or most senior males) will accompany the deceased as they are loaded into the oven. After the oven door is closed a tag identifying the deceased is placed on the oven to ensure the mourner receives the correct ashes after cremation. During the actual cremation no participants are allowed to accompany the deceased. So for the majority of the mourners, the final moment with the deceased is during the final bowing ritual in the memorial service. As such this is the moment of greatest and most violent emotional expression as family members wail loudly and try to physically prevent the removal of the corpse from the hall. As the final family members are assisted or carried out of the memorial hall the body is cremated; a process which takes approximately 40 - 50 minutes.

#### Cremation ritual

In San Zhao, interment rites have been broken down into two separate ritual events which I refer to as the cremation ritual and interment ceremony.<sup>24</sup> The cremation ritual directly follows the conclusion of the memorial service where the body is wheeled out of the ceremonial hall to the area where the cremation occurs. During cremation, family members, relatives, friends and selected guests (rare) form a loose-knit procession and proceed to a designated area in the rear of the facility where further obsequies to the deceased are performed. This area has large pits in the shape of the subterranean dwellings (*yaodong*) common to Guanzhong. The head mourner, usually the eldest child

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<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that the cremation ritual in the urban setting roughly coincides with the memorial service found in the rural setting. The state, by intentionally modifying this moment, has reduced the traditional memorial service from what is usually a three-day affair into a very brief, non-descript transitional ritual in the rear of the facility away from public viewing in which the deceased is sent off to the make the journey through hell to the western paradise.

of the deceased, now returned from loading the deceased into the oven, leads the procession carrying the portrait of the deceased, face out for all to see.

After arriving at the designated area, the family gathers in front of an empty pit. In front of each pit is a specially constructed ritual space with a concrete altar. At this altar, friends and relatives assist the family in preparing ritual offerings, which generally consist of the deceased's portrait as the centerpiece, surrounded by candles, incense, white wine, and simple foodstuffs (fruit, steamed buns, etc.). Once the altar has been prepared, family members gather around the altar and prepare to perform the final obsequies which commonly consist of burning paper money, spilling small glasses of white wine and performing a final bowing ceremony. Variations on this simple ceremony include bowing first to non-family attendees in gratitude before the final bowing ceremony to the deceased. Fireworks are commonly lit at this point signaling the beginning of the ritual.

As the family begins making its offerings to the deceased, friends or relatives begin burning the floral arrangements and the deceased's clothing which the family has brought specifically for the purpose of clothing the dead during their journey in the afterlife. The paper wreaths are highly flammable and usually only require someone with a lighter to ignite. In my observations, the act of lighting the wreaths was not a ritualized moment in itself. Any individual could light the wreaths. In most cases, the remaining coals from the prior funeral were sufficient for ignition. The clothing burned usually contains the deceased's favorite or most frequently worn clothing and winter clothing is included as well. According to informants these offerings provide the deceased with

items for comfort as they pass through the hell on their way to the western paradise.<sup>25</sup>

Once all the wreaths, clothes, and any other ritual offerings have been thrown into the fire the family begins its final obsequies mentioned above.

Once the final offerings have been made, families wearing headbands will tie up the tails of their cloth headbands at the conclusion of this ceremony and reverse the portrait of the deceased indicating that the deceased's soul is no longer with the living and has been successfully sent to the land of the dead. Ritual moment is very important moment for it marks the symbolic transformation of the deceased from an individual recognized by his or her personal attributes to a person recognized by his or her position within a kin-group organized by principles of agnatic descent. The implications of this transformation will be taken up in greater detail later in the essay.

#### Settling the account and receiving the remains

Once the cremation ritual is complete, similar to their arrival, the family forms a loose procession slowly making their way out of the ceremonial area to a large waiting room where mourners can rest until the cremation is complete and then collect the remains. Usually, only immediate family members are allowed into the room. The remaining guests, relatives, and friends who did not leave at the conclusion of the memorial service now leave the facility. While the family is waiting, a family member or

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<sup>25</sup> Unlike non-reformed funerals, it seems the exchange relationship between the living and the dead at San Zhao is more emotional than instrumental. Informants almost universally felt it was important to provide items, particularly the deceased's favorite winter clothing and paper money, to comfort the deceased. However, the notion that the offerings would in turn provide good fortune for the living was not a central issue for informants at this stage of the proceedings. The issue of affect vs. instrumental exchange between the living and dead will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 6.



relative pays any remaining fees related to the memorial service, cremation and cremation ritual. According to San Zhao policy, families cannot pick up their remains until they show a receipt showing that all accounts have been settled.

Once the cremation is complete, one representative, usually the eldest son or senior male, will take a pre-purchased, empty urn into the cremation area, and with the assistance of the oven operator, remove the ashes from the oven and place them into the urn. In general, the same mourner who observed the loading of the deceased also receives the ashes in order to prevent the possibility of a family receiving the wrong ashes. In addition, the identification tag is checked by the operator and the mourner prior to opening the oven. Great care is taken to ensure that all ashes are carefully tamped into the urn for later burial. Tools for performing this procedure include a small flat-bladed shovel, a brush and a rectangular tamping tool. Although these tools are used repeatedly, the oven operator cleans the tools prior to each use. The oven operator generally assists the individual tasked with moving the ashes from the oven into the urn. Because there is usually only a single mourner and the crematorium employee present at this moment, ritual expression is generally non-existent.

Once the ashes have been placed into the urn the immediate family members (son, daughter-in-law, daughters and children) then proceed to the area where burial arrangements are made for the interment ceremony.

## **Interment and the Interment Ceremony**

### Storing or burying the urn

The next stage of the burial process concerns the long-term storage or interment of the deceased. Initially, families place the urn in a columbarium designed to store the deceased until a cemetery plot has been prepared. In the columbarium the urns are placed on a shelf in a small three-sided rectangular room with multiple rows where urns can be stored. The rooms have between 8 and 13 rows. The total number of urns in each room depends on the size of the space purchased. While most are placed behind a simple glass enclosure, families who intend to leave their dead in this building for more than three years can have an engraved headstone mounted in a fashion similar to the style found in the San Zhao graveyard. Long term storage is increasingly popular, but in most cases, the urns will be stored in the columbarium only until cemetery preparations have been completed (1-3 years) at which time the dead are re-interred in a public cemetery.

In this region the columbarium is called the “Room of Peaceful Souls” (*Anling Fang*) and is located within the same complex that houses the crematorium and cemetery. In keeping with the cultural distinction between funerary and burial rites, administratively this facility is combined with the cemetery to form a work unit separate from the crematorium facility. Its primary function is to serve as a holding place for the ashes of the recently cremated until final burial arrangements can be made.

### Interment ceremony

After registering in the columbarium, the family proceeds to an area with numerous concrete tables where they spend their last period of time with their deceased

before interment. This simple ceremony is much more sedate and private than the previous two ceremonies performed earlier in the day. The first step is once again setting up a simple altar with the urn instead of the portrait making up the centerpiece. Various ritual offerings including fruit, steamed buns and white wine are carefully placed around the urn. Candles and incense are then lit. Once the small altar has been prepared some families light firecrackers to signal the beginning of the ceremony. Because most families interring their dead are urban families it is rare to see elaborate non-reform burial ceremonies here. Non-reform burial ceremonies are generally characterized by higher attendance, greater length, donning of formal mourning clothing, often have band accompaniment, a ritual specialist, and continual wailing. In this facility however, this was clearly the exception to the norm. Most families took this time to spend a time with their dead in quiet solitude and reflection. After spending time with the deceased, the length of which appeared to have no particular standard, the bereaved once again burn paper money on their knees in front of the urn. After this was accomplished the ceremony is over and the family makes their way back into the area where their dead will be interred.

This ceremony reflects a much greater intimacy and focus on the deceased and family members than previous ceremonies where the public approval and recognition are important. The overt emotional expression of the public ceremonies was absent, yet it was obvious that the exhausted family members were often still quite emotional and in a deep state of grief. Except for the fireworks, this area is somber, quiet and respectful. Also, this was a time for individual family members to sit very close to the deceased and

talk directly to the deceased. It was common here to see wives and children quietly mouthing words to the deceased. Due to the very intimate and private nature of these interactions, I have little data on the actual content of these conversations with the dead. However, informants reported that it is common for survivors to assure the deceased that they are fine, that they will take care of the business of living and other family members, and sometimes inform them of recent events that are going on around them.

I was told that close family members often came to this area after initial interment checking out the urn for the purpose of spending time with the deceased. Indeed, it was not unusual to see just one or two family members spending quite time in the presence of their dead at times outside of the moment of initial interment. According to informants, reasons for this could be a fixed ceremonial date, an anniversary, or if the member in question had a dream about the individual or had experienced some form of paranormal experience related to their recently deceased relative. I was also told that individuals facing particularly difficult or vexing problems in life often come to the dead for advice.<sup>26</sup>

Ideally, during this 1-3 year period, the dead are attended to regularly according to the numerous dates and holidays designated specifically for the commemoration of the deceased. These days include important periods of time since death, such as the sevens (reading of Buddhist prayers on each seven day period for up to seven weeks – 2<sup>nd</sup> week

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<sup>26</sup> There is evidence of this practice even among leaders of the CCP. The Beijing's Revolutionary Cemetery closes to the public at 5:30pm, but allows officials to visit the tombs of deceased revolutionary leaders for the purpose of discussing political issues with the dead leaders.

excluded), 100 days ceremony, specific holidays such as Buddha's birthday or *Qingming Jie* and yearly anniversaries.<sup>27</sup>

### Final Interment

Ideally, when a person dies or is near death the family makes arrangements to purchase a plot and choose a gravestone style. There is no set schedule for this. If the family has prepared well, the body, once cremated, will be directly interred in the cemetery. If no preparations have been made, the ashes can be held at San Zhao's columbarium for a period of up to three years for a fee. To encourage interment in the San Zhao cemetery, the columbarium increases the rent for storing remains by 20% after three years.

Tombstones at San Zhao are of varying quality and price with the most expensive priced at approximately 25,000 RMB with the least expensive priced at 5-6,000 RMB. According to San Zhao officials, the average family spends about 8-9,000 RMB on a plot.<sup>28</sup>

According to local custom in this area, after one to three years, the deceased are formally interred in a public cemetery where they will reside permanently or until the rent on their plot is no longer paid. The transition from the temporary interment in the columbarium to formal interment in a cemetery plot usually takes place within three

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<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, there are numerous notices within the work unit itself reminding mourners of the specific days and times for these traditional commemorative rites. These rituals themselves are not opposed, but there are regulations which govern the expression and elaborateness of these rituals.

<sup>28</sup> There are both one and two person tombs available at San Zhao. If a two-person stone is cut prior to death the surviving member's name will be in red or covered with black paper. This is done to show that that person is still living and is related to the superstition that it is inauspicious to speak or write the name of a living person as if they were dead.

years and occurs either on the day of death or on the Tomb-sweeping Holiday (*Qingming Jie*) of the corresponding year.

Guanzhong residents consider the first and third anniversaries of death to be the most important. On these anniversaries, the immediate family members and selected affines will get together in front of the deceased tomb (or check out the urn from the columbarium) and perform a simple kneeling ceremony and make ritual offerings to the deceased. It is not until final interment that the formal mourning period is considered to be complete. If a domestic altar to the deceased has been constructed in the home, it will be broken down at the conclusion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year anniversary.<sup>29</sup>

### Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with providing a brief overview of the physical and ritual treatment of the Chinese dead in the Guanzhong region and in the San Zhao funerary and crematoria facility. From this description the following points should be clear to the reader: 1.) the state, through the development of facilities and regulations for the physical and ritual treatment of the deceased, has become the primary vehicle for processing the post-mortem body. As this description shows, the state has become an integral part of the ritual process by developing the memorial service as an arena for the expression of socialist ideals and individual merit. Beyond the promotion of socialist

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<sup>29</sup> While final interment signals the formal completion of the mourning period and mandatory death rites, in practice the living display little public evidence of their mourning status outside of the time spent in the performance of rites. The most common marker of mourning status, outside of the ceremonial context, is the donning of a simple black band on the left or right bicep area. Whether the band is worn on the right or left side depends on the gender of the deceased (male = left / female = right). This maximum length of time one should wear this band is 100 days, however, according to my observation and discussions with informants, it is very rare to actually don the band for this extended length of time.

values, the state has also worked to attenuate ritual actions related to elaborate public expressions of agnatic descent commonly found in traditional ritual forms. The chapter is primarily for the reader's reference and in-depth analyses have been purposely left for the chapters that follow. The next chapter will consider the state's role in modifying a key relationship between the living and the dead and its social consequences.

**Figure 4: The presentation of wreaths prior to the memorial service.**





**Figure 5: A memorial ceremony with immediate family (wearing white headbands) and other relatives.**



**Figure 6: A memorial ceremony with guests in attendance and martial band.**



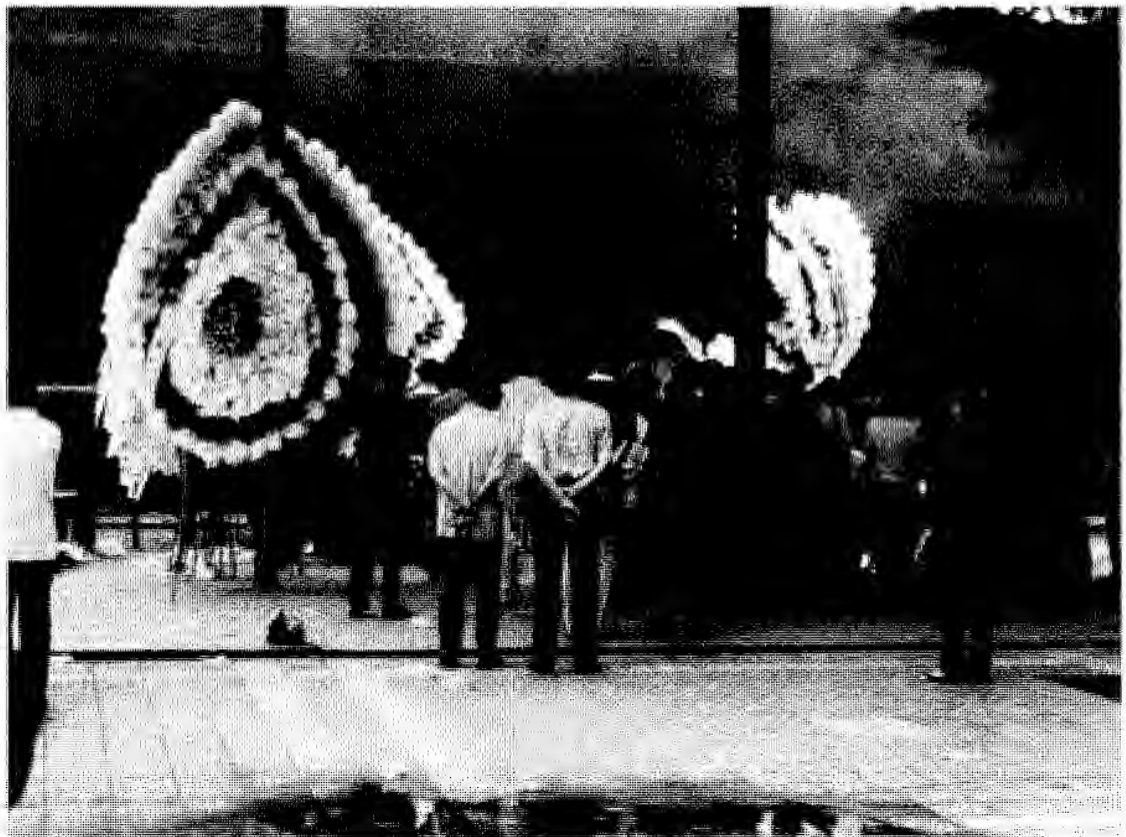
**Figure 7: Guests performing the final bowing ceremony during a memorial ceremony.**



**Figure 8: Relatives and friends pay last respects to the deceased.**



Figure 9: Mourners performing the cremation ritual following the memorial service.



**Figure 10: Immediate family members performing an interment ceremony prior to placing the remains in the columbarium.**



**Figure 12: Family performing a first-year graveside anniversary ceremony.**



### **Chapter 3: Chinese Death Ritual and Social Worth**

As so often occurs during the process of fieldwork, a conversation with a respondent named Mr. Wang on a topic only obliquely related to my research interests turned up a crucial quality of Chinese death rites. In discussing the ritual peculiarities of Mr. Wang's natal village, our conversation shifted to a consideration of the public nature of Chinese death rites and the importance of participant attendance as a measure of funeral success. Then, in an unexpectedly introspective moment, Mr. Wang, revealed that, as a person from a rural area now living in the urban environment of Xian, getting the desired attendance for his own funeral could be in jeopardy. It also appeared that the possibility of his funeral being under-attended was a great concern for him; an anxiety clearly reflected in the following statement:

*For Chinese, having people attend one's funeral is very important. If no one comes, it's really a big loss of face. How will I be remembered after I die? I am far from my hometown... no one from my hometown will attend. I am only a small businessman; I have no work unit, nor am I a party member or military man. This is really a big problem for me...*

Upon reflection, Mr. Wang's simple statement struck me as significant because it highlights certain aspects of Chinese death rites integral to the process of settling the dead. First and foremost, his statement emphasizes the difficulty of ensuring one's legacy in an era characterized by dramatic social change. This concern is evident in Mr. Wang's self-awareness that as a rural person in an urban environment with few tangible connections to his natal village, a work unit, or the state, his own death might pass unrecognized by the living. Second, his statement emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between the



However, in spite of the fact that participants' roles are culturally proscribed and are expressed in similar fashion, all are not treated equally in death by the living. The extent to which the deceased met or failed to meet certain social expectations in life is reflected in the degree of ritual investment by the mourners. Funerary rites publicly recognize in death the deceased's merits and contributions in life. For example, a deceased person held in high regard by the community will have a qualitatively different funeral turnout than one held in lower esteem. As Mr. Wang's earlier statement attests, social sanctions (loss of face) will occur when individuals and their families are unable to demonstrate tangible connections to the community in which they reside. The elaborateness of the funeral and the extent to which people choose to attend and participate – whether it be kin-groups, work unit representatives or state officials – says a great deal about the deceased's life and his or her relative importance to the community.

Therefore, the performance of death rites not only entails a symbolic restatement of one's social role, but also a public assessment of how the individual fulfilled the obligations that came with that role. As Jack Goody has observed, "Funerals are inevitably occasions for summing up an individual's social personality, by a restatement not only of the roles he has filled, but also of the general way in which he has conducted himself during his lifetime." (Goody 1959: 135)<sup>30</sup> This concept is one originally

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<sup>30</sup> The connection between the restatement of one's role and the general way they conducted themselves in life makes a distinction between the recognition of the social role one occupies and their success in fulfilling the obligations of that role in his or her lifetime. This notion is similar to Linton's (Linton 1936: 113ff) notion of "ascribed" and "achieved" roles in which he makes the argument that one's role in a given social community is often assigned to them according to demographic attributes beyond their immediate control. For example, generation, gender, and age are attributes which make up an ascribed role, such as a senior matriarch. However, the extent to which that individual is perceived to have been successful at fulfilling the obligations attached to that role is an achieved status. Not all individuals fulfill the attendant

articulated by Radcliffe-Brown who states: “By the social personality of the individual I mean the sum of those qualities by which he is able to affect the society. It is, in other words, what gives him his social value.” (Radcliffe-Brown 1964: 284) It is this notion of social value that I feel is an important point for understanding the role between individual worth and ritual performances in Chinese death ritual.

#### Chinese Funerals as Strategic Performances

In any Chinese funeral, there are complex issues of power and inequality that make the recognition of the deceased’s merits and contributions an inherently political process. The significance of Mr. Wang’s expressed concern that his own funeral attendance would be negatively affected if unable to demonstrate tangible connections to his natal village or the state. His concern suggests the existence of a distinct tension in the performance of Chinese death rites between *the desire to be well-remembered* and *the necessity of public recognition for that to happen*. All Chinese hope that they and/or their dead will be well-remembered in death, but not all are granted this aspiration. The recognition of this peril motivates individuals to take action directed toward influencing death ritual outcomes. The extent to which the deceased’s social position and personal achievements are publicly recognized during the memorial service has a direct impact on how the individual will be remembered by the living in perpetuity. In this sense Chinese funerals represent a complex restatement of the deceased’s value to the community that claims their membership. I refer to this phenomenon in this study as the determination of

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obligations that come with an ascribed social status equally well, and just as important, not all individuals’ achievements and/or failures equally recognized or given equal weight.

the deceased's *social worth* – namely the sum of the deceased's publicly recognized merits and contributions to the community which claims their membership.

My notion of social worth is similar to studies that seek to understand the relationship between the individual characteristics and corresponding ritual investment by the living. Notable studies on social value include Vanderlyn and Phillip's consideration of funeral expenditures as an indicator of bereaved sentiment for the deceased (Vanderlyn and Phillips 1970:405), Camila Wedgewood's study on the fate of the soul and body in relation to their perceived social value (Wedgewood 1927: 378), and A.R. Radcliffe's study on the Tallehensi where he comments that: "There is, then, a close correspondence between the manner of burial and the social value of the person buried" (Radcliffe-Brown 1964: 287) Another such study is Sudnow's (Sudnow 1967) study of the characteristics of a patient that influenced doctors' treatment decisions. In each of these three studies the key assumption is that the degree of investment (expenditure, ritual elaborateness, or treatment decisions) is an important indicator of the living's sentiment for the individual in question. Following these studies, in this section I am interested in identifying the characteristics of the deceased that lead to greater or lesser ritual investment by the living in reformed funerals. By looking at drivers of ritual investment I will show that Chinese funerals are not merely passive restatements of an individual's social worth, but a strategic performance filled with risk. The living do not invest equally in all funerals. Some people obtain greater recognition in death than others. Being aware of this predicament, individuals (both the dying and survivors) often seek to influence funeral outcomes and hence, final judgment on the deceased. An individual can influence

funerary outcomes by either preparing for his or her own death long before their actual demise or alternatively, by seeking to influence a funeral outcome of another person in order to bestow upon themselves, some other group or public entity a tangible benefit.

In Chinese funerals, the public assessment of one's social worth is a defining moment in the life-cycle of the individual. This concept is perhaps best encapsulated by the Chinese idiom: 盖棺定论 (*gaiguan dinglun*). *Gaiguan dinglun* has two inter-related meanings relevant to the discussion at hand. First, the idiom literally means that the final judgment of one's personal achievements and contributions in life can only occur once their coffin has been sealed. Any evaluation made prior to that moment can change. Second, once the coffin has been sealed and final judgment rendered, there can be no further discussion or change in status. In common vernacular usage, the idiom refers to a situation or problem that can no longer be changed or re-opened. In the case of Chinese death ritual it relates to the importance of the funeral as a pivotal moment in the determination of one's legacy and the fate of one's soul. Literally and figuratively, once the coffin is sealed and public judgment has been made there can no longer be any possibility of affecting a different outcome. Both meanings apply in understanding the Chinese funeral as a climactic final moment that defines the social worth of the deceased individual in perpetuity. Final judgment cannot be made until one's coffin is nailed shut; and once nailed shut, no further evaluation is possible.

The process of publicly establishing one's social worth prior to "closing the coffin" gives Chinese funerals a very "this-worldly" focus. In describing Chinese funerals as this-worldly, I do not mean to suggest that these ceremonies lack "other-worldly" or

cosmological symbolism. This-worldly points to the fact that in Chinese funerals, because the fate of the soul is dependent on the living, there is as much focus upon formally establishing the social worth of the deceased in this world as on insuring their transcendence to the next. In Chinese funerals, the fate of the soul is dependent not only on a final reckoning with the gods, but also upon a final reckoning with the living, to such an extent that the quality of one's afterlife depends on the generosity of the living.<sup>31</sup> Simply put, the living play a crucial role in deciding the fate of the soul; and this fact certainly matters to individuals, like Mr. Wang, who will one day be reliant upon the living for their continued support in death.

### **Representative Case Studies**

Taking Mr. Wang's simple statement as a starting point, I discovered that the tension he described, concerning the desire to be well-remembered versus the necessity of public recognition for that to happen, permeates the process of settling the dead. In addition to individuals like Mr. Wang, members of family members, kin-groups, and professional or civic organizations are also invested in this dynamic process. The reason for their investment is because there are very real consequences for ritual failure.

At the highest level of abstraction, the most obvious consequence of a failed funeral is cosmological. A failed funeral can result in the soul of the deceased not being properly settled, risking not only its transition to the afterlife, but also risking the welfare of the living. One need only recall the numerous superstitions in Chinese cosmology

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<sup>31</sup> For discussions on the relationship between the living and the dead in China see (Ahern 1973), Cohen (Cohen 1988), Freedman (Freedman 1958), Fechtwang (Feuchtwang 1974), Harrell (Harrell 1982) and Hsu (Hsu 1949).

regarding ghosts of the unsettled dead wreaking havoc on the living to get some feeling of the far reaching consequences of ritual failure.<sup>32</sup> In addition to the cosmological consequences of ritual failure there are also more tangible, this-worldly consequences resulting from failed ritual. The cases that follow illustrate how the tension surrounding the public recognition of social worth often motivates individuals to take actions geared toward achieving preferred ritual outcomes.

### The Individual and the Determination of Social Worth

Funeral success matters as much to the individual facing death as to the community. As Mr. Wang's statement so poignantly suggests, in some cases individuals begin contemplating their possible treatment in death long before their actual demise. Indeed, my research suggests that it is not unusual for individuals to be actively involved in preparing and attempting to influence their own treatment in death. Such preparations may include choosing a plot, preparing one's coffin, selecting the clothing that one wishes to be buried in, and preparing written eulogies.

Case #1: The Elderly Villager: During my stay in the village of Beiling, I met an elderly man who was making extensive preparations for his own funeral. Pulling me into his courtyard he proudly showed me his coffin. It was an elaborate coffin made of carved wood with several layers of paint already applied. He mentioned that he had just finished putting a new layer of paint on the coffin and would continue to do so each year until his death. In addition, he noted that he had

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<sup>32</sup> See Chao (Chao 1999), Cohen (Cohen 1988), and Harrell (Harrell 1979)

already had a ritual specialist select his plot according to geomantic specifications. He explained that plot location was important to ensure good fortune in death not only for himself, but for his descendants as well. He also mentioned that he was in the process of purchasing cloth for what would later become his burial clothing (*shouyi*). What particularly struck me as interesting in this case was the enthusiasm with which the elderly villager discussed what would to most people be considered morbid tasks. He was particularly proud of his coffin, which he had made with his own hands. He stressed that his efforts were geared towards ensuring that he would be well treated in death. The villager went on to explain that, although his family would be responsible for performing the death rites, he felt it was important to influence the process as much as possible.

Case #2 The Aging Soldier: In another case, I spoke with a young woman who described of her father's pre-death preparations. At the point in his life when the father believed he was nearing death, he began actively preparing for his funeral ceremony. In particular, he wanted to be sure that the eulogies read at the funeral would reflect positively upon himself as a person and his accomplishments. He had gone so far as to contact several members of his family, friends and work associates (he was a military man) to request that they begin writing down what they intended to say at his funeral long before his death. Relating the story of her father's preparations with an air of resignation, the daughter reported that beyond urging his chosen eulogists to prepare their remarks, he had gone even further seeking to check what they had written and to offer suggestion on what he wanted

said. She recalled that her father had instructed her that when the time came, she should be sure to mention the fact that he had not simply been a military man, but that he had participated in both the revolution and liberation of China during the struggle to resist the Japanese occupation – actions considered very prestigious in modern China. With a resigned laugh, she remembered that her father frequently pestered her to get started on the funeral preparations before it was too late as he was almost 100 years old (the man eventually passed away at 101 years of age).

As these two cases suggest, death preparations can at times be quite extensive and strategic in nature. Whether it is choosing one's future plot, preparing the coffin, selecting death clothing or preparing written eulogies, in each case the ultimate goal is to positively affect one's own treatment in death. These preparations are fascinating because they acknowledge the belief that one's treatment in death by the living in this world has a direct connection with the fate of the deceased's soul, or as in the case of the aging soldier, the nature of his remembrance in death.

While in the above cases the arrangements provided a sense of comfort and solace to the dying and were presumably even endearing experiences for family members, there are times when making death arrangements can become a very real source of concern, such as in the case of Mr. Wang. As a rural businessman in an urban environment with no tangible connections to party or nation, he is acutely aware that own death might pass unobserved by his peers, creating the possibility that his memory and soul would be relegated to ignominious extinction.



### Families and the Determination of Social Worth

Determining the social worth of the deceased is also important for family members, as evidenced by the large family investment of time, energy and money in the process of settling the dead. Generally speaking, this investment is intended to insure a well-attended and elaborate funeral in order that their dead are publicly recognized for their merits and contributions.

Case #3 The Late Guest: In one such case I observed a funeral in which the family was deeply concerned about the possibility that few people would attend their father's funeral because the deceased had been retired for many years at the time of his death. According to the family, they feared that because few of the current employees in his old work unit would know of him, the funeral would be poorly attended. On the day of the funeral in the moments leading up to the beginning of the memorial service, family members were making frantic efforts to get the apparently disinterested work unit guests into the funeral hall. The family's concern was that the section of the funeral hall where guests are located would have few, if any work unit members. Consequently, up until the very last minute before the ceremony, family members were busy seeking out wayward work unit guests. Beyond looking for wayward guests, the family was particularly anxious because the work unit leader who was to read the principle eulogy could not be found. He arrived late. Almost sick with worry, the deceased's daughter was so concerned that she ran to the parking lot outside the funeral complex in hopes of

finding him. Almost in tears, when she finally located him, she pleaded with him to hurry as the funeral was about to begin. The leader refused to be rushed and ended up entering the hall a few minutes late. But because of his importance in the proceedings, the funeral did not start until he arrived.

In a follow-up discussion with the daughter after the funeral, the daughter explained that the reason for her anxiety about the arrival of the work unit leader prior to the service was because he was considered the most important guest at the funeral, since he represented her father's work unit who customarily gives the official eulogy. The woman went on to explain that poor work unit attendance and the leader's absence would have meant a tremendous loss of face for the family. It was clear to me that the emotional impact of this public loss of status in front of the deceased's peers would have been almost unbearable, and hence the family's deep concern and desperate actions to ensure proper attendance. What was also interesting was that because the deceased had long since retired from the work unit, the majority of the unit's representatives had no personal relationship or emotional connection with the deceased. Their participation was more a professional choice than a personal one, in that many attended at the request of work unit leaders and not due to their personal relationship with the deceased or his surviving family members.

As this woman's testimony emphasizes, social situations which give or take away "face" are not merely abstract psychological phenomena. While getting the appropriate attendance and participation can confer face for the family, failure to do so can have very real spiritual and emotional ramifications for family members who bear not only the

private burden of grief, but also deal with the social consequences of losing face in front of their peers. As Yan has observed “One’s social status and position in village society is displayed vividly by the attendance of guests, as well as by the financial and moral support exhibited by these guests during the rituals. According to local custom, at any ritual the more guests who attend and the longer they stay, the more prestige and ‘face’ the host gains.” (Yan 1996: 19) Clearly, funerals are important because they influence not only the legacy of the deceased, but also the current status of individual family members within their respective community.

While the issue for the daughter in the case above was primarily an issue of personal bereavement and social status, it is often the case that the process of determining the deceased’s social worth is related to a family’s economic status because getting public recognition of the deceased’s contribution by state officials can be a crucial step in obtaining post-mortem compensation from the state.

#### The Political and Economic Ramifications of Determining Social Worth

Public recognition of the deceased’s merits and contributions is also important because civic organizations, such as the work unit, frequently play an important role in allocating post-mortem compensation to survivors. As the following cases will show, determining the social worth of the deceased is particularly important when disagreements arise over compensation to the living. In such cases, at issue are not only matters of family face, but also their struggle to obtain resources from the state to meet their everyday needs.

Case #5 The Demanding Heir: A man whose father was an esteemed professor at Shaanxi Communications College (*Shaanxi Jiaotong Daxue*) demanded that he be given a position as a professor at the school as well, arguing that because of his father's contributions to the university, the work unit was responsible for assisting the professor's surviving family members. Initially, the university's administrators sought to downplay his father's accomplishments in a desire to avoid the problem of having to compensate the family and the son in particular. However, the son persisted by expounding on the contributions his father had made to the university during his tenure. After a contentious battle between the deceased's son and the university's administrators on how to define his father's contributions to the school, a compromise was struck in which the heir was given a position as a clerk in the university.

The informant who related this story to me explained that the question of the type and amount of compensation and the ensuing conflict arose out of a disagreement over how to assess the deceased's contribution and achievements in life. This case highlights two important points. First, defining the social worth of the deceased can be a process characterized by disagreement and negotiation. Second, strategically promoting the merits and contributions of one's dead can have direct benefits for the survivors in terms of their access to state resources. This struggle over the definition of the deceased's social worth and posthumous compensation is perhaps most clearly seen in cases of posthumous redress related to wrongful death.

### Posthumous Redress and the Determination of Social Worth

In China the social and political ramifications of publicly assessing the deceased's social worth has a substantial historical precedence. For example, during the Cultural Revolution, being the relative of a deceased individual classified as anti-revolutionary or from the wrong class could have disastrous consequences for survivors' social and economic well-being (Baker 1979, Freedman 1966, Gallin 1966, Harrell 1982, Pasternak 1972, Watson 1985, Yang 1965). The struggle to redefine one's status posthumously was a phenomenon perhaps most common in the years following the Cultural Revolution. In this period, families who had relatives that died while classified as a member of an unsuitable class or revolutionary status sought to alter their status posthumously; this phenomenon is commonly referred to as *pingfan*.

There are numerous and well-known cases of families seeking to rehabilitate and redefine the status of the dead, such as Lawrence Dittmer's work concerning the rehabilitation of Liu Xiaoqing (Dittmer 1981). Disagreements between family members and state representatives on the appropriate degree of recognition of one's merits arise with some frequency. Therefore, those who have something at stake in the ritual process (such as individual survivors, families, friends, work unit representatives and even state functionaries) put forward a substantial amount of effort in the process of deciding the fate of the dead. Moreover, this is not just a theoretical issue. In my numerous discussions with informants, it was clearly evident that all were keenly aware of the consequences of a failed funeral and the need to take action to assure favorable outcomes.

It is also important to note that because posthumous redress is extremely difficult to pull off, it is important to settle any disagreements prior to the funeral. . Once the coffin is covered and a final determination has been arrived at, the assessment is very difficult to change. Families will therefore go to great lengths to ensure that their dead will be well-remembered prior to proceeding with funeral. The struggle then, is always to assure a favorable final judgment prior to interment. This is particularly important in cases of wrongful death.

In cases of wrongful death, families seeking either to change a prior judgment or to affect a better outcome often find themselves in an antagonistic confrontation with work unit leaders and/or the civic institutions of the state. In such cases, there will be no funeral nor will the dead be buried until the case has been settled to the family's satisfaction. If there is disagreement over the cause of death, families will refuse to cremate or bury the deceased until the case has been resolved to their satisfaction. In my numerous discussions with morgue employees I found that this kind of disagreement was not uncommon.

Case #6 The Old Woman: In one morgue I was shown a body that had been awaiting burial for over fifteen years. According to the morgue director, the deceased woman was a pedestrian who had been killed in an automotive accident and the case remained under appeal. The case boiled down to deciding the issue of who was at fault, which in turn would dictate the form of compensation for the woman's family. According to my informant, the family wanted the driver of the automobile to pay monetary compensation as well as funeral expenses. The

woman's family was adamant that the driver was at fault, while the driver remained steadfast in his refusal to admit fault. The family sued, and to this date the case remains in appeal. Because the case has yet to be decided to the family's satisfaction, they have refused to hold a funeral or cremate the deceased. The body remains in storage and seems likely to continue in that state for years to come.

Case #7 The Bank Employee: Another case involved an interment ceremony I attended for a young man who had died from a fall out of a window at the bank where he worked. The employees who witnessed or knew of the incident felt that the death was accidental, and therefore work-related. The employer however, maintained that the young man's death was an intentional act of suicide and therefore the bank shared no responsibility for his death. Management insisted that the death was not work-related and therefore no obligatory claims for compensation, financial or otherwise, was merited.

Because of the disagreement over the classification of death, the deceased was not buried for over one year while an arbitrating body decided the case. According to informants at the interment ceremony, because the arbitrating body decided that the death had indeed been an accident and hence work-related, the bank was forced to pay compensation to the family and pay for the deceased's burial expenses. The individual was buried soon after the judgment.

In these two cases, the question of fault in the automotive accident or the difference between a work-related accidental death and suicide was of great importance to the parties involved. Here, the idiom *gaiguan dinglun* perhaps refers to its secondary usage, namely that once the coffin is nailed shut it cannot be re-opened. For as these cases show there is a point in of no return where nothing more can be said or done to change the final assessment of the deceased's social worth. In terms of death ritual, this means that once the body is cremated or buried and the coffin has been symbolically sealed, further evaluation of the deceased's life as lived is extremely difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, families will delay for years if necessary to get the preferred judgment for their deceased. As the above cases of wrongful death show, post-mortem redress in current times is not limited to righting political wrongs, but also related to issues of the deceased's economic and/or emotional worth. Struggles such as those discussed above often hinge upon establishing the nature of death and/or establishing responsibility for death in order to determine how compensation is to be paid to the survivors. Obviously, the final assessment of the deceased's social worth can have a direct effect on post-mortem compensation granted to living heirs.

Several conclusions may be offered concerning the determination of social worth. First, as the above examples suggest, the restatement of the deceased's life as lived is a critical moment in which the deceased's merits and contributions to society are publicly determined. Second, because of the number of actors involved in the process of determining an individual's social worth, it is evident that this process may reveal tensions between the various parties who wish to affect the ritual outcome. Third,



resolving the tension surrounding the determination of social worth requires strategic action by all involved in settling the dead. Finally, taken in aggregate, the tremendous effort expended to ensure that the dead are well-remembered provides an interesting angle of entry for understanding the social construction of personhood as represented in Chinese death rites.

### **Concepts of Personhood in Socialist Death Ritual**

Unlike the attitudes towards death described above, in Western funerals, individuals do not have to earn rights of personhood; they are considered inalienable; conferred on the individual at birth to continue until death. According to this understanding, one is born a person and dies a person, regardless of his or her social position and achievements or lack thereof, in life. The commemoration of the deceased is considered important by all, but cosmologically speaking, the fate of the soul is not dependent upon the actions of the living, but on the judgment of God. However, this is not the case in Chinese funerals.

In Chinese funerary rites (as compared to mortuary/grave rites), how one is remembered in the secular world has primacy over their fate in the afterlife.<sup>33</sup> Informants in my study reported that they were less concerned with the fate of their soul in the afterlife than they were with how the living memorialize and treat them in death. This attitude sharply differs from the funerals I have attended in the United States where the soul of the deceased must make its final reckoning alone with God and where the living

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<sup>33</sup> Traditionally, in Chinese grave rites the deceased can become a symbol of the agnatic line to be used instrumentally by the living leading Rubie Watson to comment that "Grave rites are focus on the living rather than the dead. Funeral rites, in contrast, are preoccupied with the deceased. (Watson 1988b: 205)

than females; 2.) older deceased individuals received less ritual investment, and 3) certain occupations seemed to receive more elaborate and larger funerals than others. In seeking to develop a greater understanding of this variation and discover the drivers of ritual variation in the reformed context I gathered demographic data on the deceased and compared it to the resulting degree of ritual investment.

Demographic data compiled on the deceased included the age at death, gender and socio-economic status (education, occupation and government-related affiliations or activities). This information was then compared with the subsequent *ritual investment* at the deceased's respective funerals. By the term "ritual investment" I simply mean the measurable characteristics of the funeral, which together give an indication of scale when compared to other funerals. The variables I included as indicators of investment were attendance (family members and guests), the number of gifts presented, the duration of the ceremony, and the number of speakers. The variables are defined in greater detail below.<sup>35</sup>

Attendance: This variable simply refers to the number of people who attended the funeral. The number was broken down into family, (family males, family females, and family children) and guests (guests total, guests male, guests female, and guests child - under 18). The underlying assumption is that the greater the number of attendees, the greater the perceived importance of the funeral and the deceased. In the tables that follow, the variable attendance has been further broken down

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<sup>35</sup> The information and analysis used in this section is drawn from data collected on a total of 53 memorial services, 44 cremation rituals and 50 interment ceremonies.

into three categories: total attendance, non-family attendance and family attendance.

Gift Presentations (Wreaths): The gifts commonly presented in memorial ceremonies are the large paper wreaths mentioned in chapter 2. These offerings are primarily symbolic and represent gifts presented by guests.<sup>36</sup> Individuals can offer wreaths, but commonly, the presented wreaths represent a social, political, or economic group. A group of friends, a distant relative's family, a political office, or a company are all examples of social groups that come together to present gifts in the form of the wreath. The assumption is that the higher the number of gifts presented, the higher the degree of investment.

Funeral Duration: Another variable considered when defining degree of investment was the total time of the memorial service. The assumption here is that a longer funeral indicates higher investment.

Speaker Totals: This variable refers to the number of speakers (including the ritual specialist), who either presented a formal eulogy at the ceremony or expressed condolences to the deceased from the podium. Ideally, a ritual specialist, a work unit leader, a work-unit colleague and a family representative should speak or read eulogies at the funeral. However, there was considerable variation in this variable. Simple funerals often had no speakers, merely a funeral

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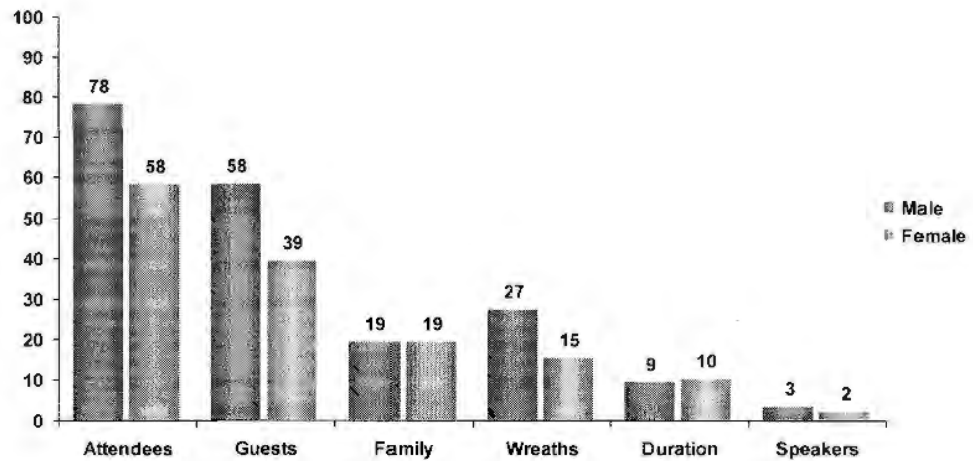
<sup>36</sup> In some cases, these gifts are accompanied by a monetary donation. However, unlike rural funerals, this practice was officially discouraged and if given, the amount was generally not openly recorded.

director who initiated the proceedings, summarized the deceased's personal information, and signaled the end of the ceremony and the bowing ritual. Other ceremonies were more elaborate, utilizing multiple speakers. The assumption is that the greater the number of speakers, the higher the degree of ritual investment.

Data on the Demographics of the Deceased and Ritual Investment:

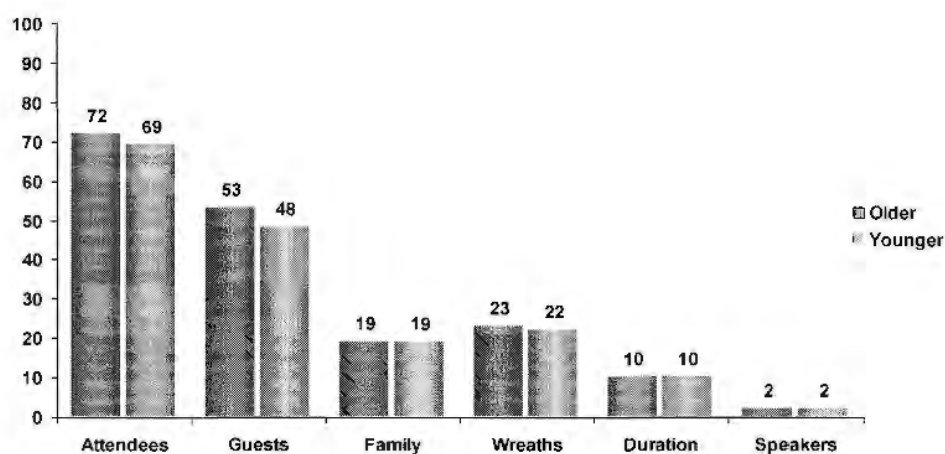
The tables that follow summarize the results of my investigation. First, males received higher ceremonial investment than females. Second, age was not a driver of ritual investment. Third, individuals with higher status occupations received higher ceremonial investment than those with lower status occupations.

**Figure 16: Deceased Demographics and Ritual Investment – Male and Female Comparison**  
 (N=53; males = 32, females = 21)



Discussion: Males received higher ritual investment than females in my sample. Males had higher rates of attendance, particularly higher rates of guest attendance. On the other hand, family turnout was equal for both males and females. Males also tended to have more wreath presentations and received one more eulogy than females. The difference in duration of funerals for males and females was only one minute, so this variable proved not to be a good indicator of ritual investment.

**Figure 17: Age and Ritual Investment**  
(N=53, Older, n=40; Younger, n=13)

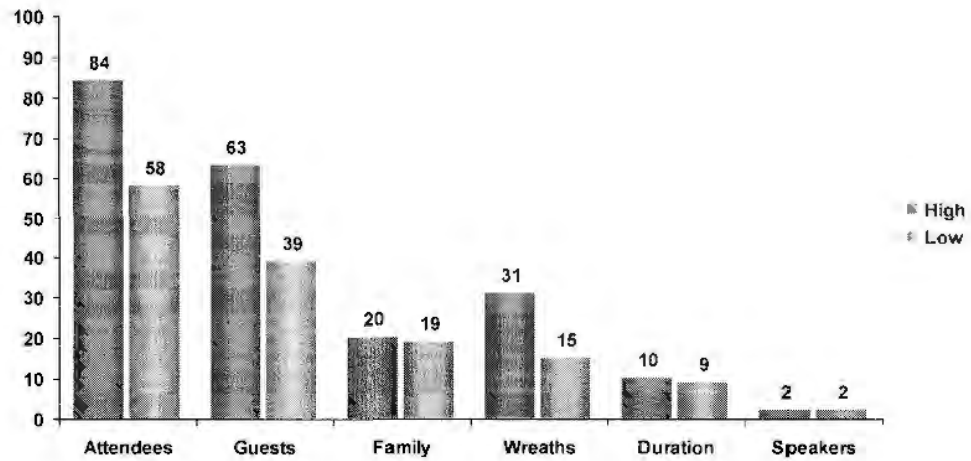


Discussion: Age was not a driver of ritual investment in this sample. While individuals of 73 years or older<sup>37</sup> did receive slightly higher investment in total number of attendees, guests and wreaths, the difference was not significant. All other variables remained the same.

<sup>37</sup> The median age of 72, used to divide younger ( $\leq 72$ ) from older individuals ( $> 72$ ), was arrived at using a combination of the median age at death in my sample and also World Health Organization (WHO) statistics which puts life expectancy at birth in China at 71.8 years (World Health Report 2007)

**Figure 18: Occupation and Ritual Investment**

(N=53; High Status Occupations, n=25; Low status occupations, n=28)



Discussion: Individuals who had higher status occupations did receive greater ritual investment in the sample, measured by attendees, guests and wreaths presented.

Results of Exploratory Analyses:

In sum, the data in my sample suggests that in reformed funerals: 1.) men receive higher ceremonial investment than females; 2.) age does not affect ritual investment, and;

3.) high status occupations attain higher ceremonial investment than lower status occupations.

However, my initial exploratory analyses failed to determine the degree to which the two factors – gender or occupation – were driving ritual investment. Therefore, in seeking to differentiate between the two variables of gender and occupation and their relation to corresponding ritual investment I conducted further testing using crosstabs and a non-parametric rank-sum test. The crosstab results are presented below.

**Figure 19: Crosstabs – Occupational Status and Gender**

Occupational Status (CISCO)		Deceased Sex		Total
		Female	Male	
Low	Frequency	17	11	28
	Column %	80.95	34.38	52.83
High	Frequency	4	21	25
	Column %	19.05	65.63	47.17
Total	Frequency	21	32	53
	Column %	100.00	100.00	100.00

Pearson chi2(1) = 11.0382 Pr = 0.001



Discussion: In the context of this study, table 3.4 shows that the majority (81%) of females fell into lower status occupations, while the majority of males tended to be overly represented in higher status occupations (66%). A Chi square analysis of the relationship between sex and occupational status appears to be significant. However, because of a limited population and sampling limitations, the significance of this relationship can be used only for exploratory (not inferential) analysis. In spite of these limitations, further testing using a non-parametric rank-sum test (below) commonly used for small data sets also supports the conclusion that there is a significant correlation between occupational status and corresponding ritual investment.

**Figure 20: Two-sample Wilcoxon Rank-sum (Mann-Whitney) Test of Correlation between Occupational Status and Gender**

Occupation	Observations	Rank sum	Expected
Female	21	410.5	567
Male	32	1,020.5	864
Combined	53	1,431	1,431

Unadjusted variance 3,024.00

Adjusted for ties - 762.46

Adjusted for variance 2,261.54

Ho: Occupational (male == female) = Occupational (male == male)

$$z = -3.291$$

$$\text{Prob} > |z| = 0.0010$$

Discussion: The above table further supports the hypothesis that men tend to have higher representation in high status occupations than women. The rank-sum test suggests a significant correlation between the demographic attributes of gender and occupation. While not yet conclusive, to me these results suggested that in the reformed context of Xian San Zhao, occupational status, not gender, was likely the primary driver of ritual investment.

Further data supports the supposition that occupational status is the driver of ritual investment. When looking at the levels of guest attendance at women's funerals only, I found that in cases where the guest attendance was above the median score for all female funerals (40 guests or more), 8 of these 11 women had occupations in a work unit and/or a history of military service. And of the three remaining women with higher guest counts, one was a tragic death of an urban woman and another was a village matriarch 100 years of age. In my experience, it was not uncommon in the urban context for guest turnout to high in the case of tragic deaths. In addition, similar to what I had witnessed in rural China, village long-lived village matriarchs are given quite elaborate funerals.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, in the cases of the women in my sample who had total guest counts below the median score, 8 of 11 had no occupation listed or mentioned during their funeral. In

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<sup>38</sup> Females in rural areas tend to have funerals more on a par with their male counterparts. However, higher investment for women in rural funerals does not indicate that rural females necessarily enjoy a higher status in life, but rather reflects the emphasis on one's position in a greater kinship network. For example, senior matriarchs who have produced male heirs will generally have funerals comparable to their male spouses. The explanation is that the public aspects of the rural funeral celebrate the agnatic family and not the woman's individuality. The individual attributes celebrated in rural funerals tend to be those that have strengthened the agnatic line. In rural funerals one's position in and contribution to a familial social network is given priority over their gender.

recognition in death through excelling in political and economic pursuits which are seen as patriotic in nature. Only those individuals who not only accept, but actively participate in the national agenda have the potential for public recognition in death.

### Conclusion

In the above discussion, I have argued that a focal point of Chinese funerals is a process whereby the social worth of the deceased is publicly determined, forming the basis from which the relationship between individuals and their communities are established in perpetuity. Several important conclusions emerge from this chapter. First, in Chinese funerals there is a relationship between public participation and funeral success. Second, Chinese funerals are biographical in the sense that they tell us something about the deceased and how they lived their lives. Third Chinese funerals are strategic because the final determination of social worth has “this-worldly” implications for the living, causing individuals and survivors to take action directed at influencing ritual outcomes. The path to being well-remembered, the path to personal inscription, the path to immortality, the connection from this world to the next are all dependent on the complex relationship between living and the dead.

Finally, it appears that the process of determining the social worth of the deceased depends upon the context in which the assessment is performed. By context-dependent I mean that the deceased’s personal attributes valued and celebrated in one community or historical moment may differ significantly in another. This is particularly evident when considering the urban/rural ritual divide in contemporary China. The judgment of what constitutes one’s social worth in a rural environment is radically different from what

## ***Chapter 4: Differential Investment and the Ritual Divide***

In the previous chapter I argued that Chinese funerals are oriented around a common process whereby the social worth of the deceased is publicly determined. While the process of determining the deceased's social worth is a ritual process common to both urban and rural death rites, ritual outcomes differ between these two contexts. The publicly recognized attributes that define one's social worth in the rural village of Beiling differ from those recognized in San Zhao. In this chapter, I will shift my focus to the influence of social context upon ritual variation, particularly as it relates to the contemporary urban/rural divide. The chapter will analyze the performance of Chinese death rites from a variety of angles, moving from a macro discussion of the ritual process to an analysis of the differences between various funeral types (rural non-reformed, rural reformed and urban reformed), the major groups of participants in a given ceremony and finally to the relationships between individual participants within participating groups. In so doing, it will become clear that the ritual divide and other expressions of ritual variation are not necessarily evidence of separate ritual systems at conflict with each other, but instead different expressions of a single ritual system responsive to the problems related to the fate of the soul, the emotional needs of the living, and the greater social and political community. I will show that seemingly insurmountable contradictions in contemporary Chinese death rites make sense in view the multi-faceted tasks that these ritual forms perform.

## Defining Urban and Rural Ritual Variation

As the description in chapter 2 of the treatment of the dead in San Zhao attests, settling the dead in the present regulatory environment, increasingly depends on official institutions specifically dedicated to the performance of death work. In the city of Xian and surrounding suburbs hospitals, morgues, funeral assistance centers, funeral homes/crematoria, and licensed cemeteries are now the central institutions responsible for processing the deceased. Indeed, the physical treatment of the remains is one of the most readily observable differences between urban and rural death rites. The physical treatment of the remains in reformed funerals is characterized by the use of a morgue, cremation, and interment in a public cemetery, whereas rural funerals are characterized by death at home, inhumation, and burial on private land. The table below summarizes this divergence.

**Figure 22: Differences in the Physical Treatment of the Remains**

	<b>Rural (non-reformed)</b>	<b>Urban (reformed)</b>
<b>Location of Deceased:</b>	Home	Hospital Morgue
<b>Disposal method:</b>	Inhumation	Cremation
<b>Interment style:</b>	Private land	Public cemetery

In urban areas in particular, after death the post-mortem body almost immediately comes under the care of the state. The state's concern for the post-mortem body is a radical divergence from tradition in which family members cared for the deceased

through rituals expressing their filiality. In current times the state-sponsored funeral industry is the primary caretaker of the deceased.

In addition to changes in the location where the deceased is attended to, cremation is another significant divergence from tradition. While the CCP's insistence on cremation is at least partially directed toward a more efficient form of disposal, it is also a very strong political statement against the long-held preference for maintaining the body integrity of one's dead.

Caring for the body and ensuring bodily integrity has long been viewed as a measure of filial piety to one's parent(s); and there is an extreme reticence to desecrate the dead. Indeed, the desecration of the post-mortem body has long been considered one of the greatest offenses one can do to the dead. Because this divergence is so dramatic, I suspected there would be significant resistance to this aspect of funeral reform by family members. However, in Xian it appears that few people actively resist cremation. One important reason for this is the legal requirement that a certificate of cremation be provided to the work unit or village leadership, prior to burying the dead. Failure to provide a certificate of cremation can result in fines or denying the family the right to bury the dead in the village. While there are rumors of non-compliance, such as families smuggling corpses out of the city for later burial in the countryside, these are the rare exception to the rule.

However, while open resistance is rare, there is ample evidence that suggests many people are uncomfortable with cremation. For example, family members go to great lengths to ensure San Zhao's employees treat the dead respectfully. Many people do

not entirely trust the facilities bureaucrats and are concerned about employee negligence. Several informants had heard of mistakes occurring where the wrong person is placed in the funeral hall or where ashes are given to the wrong family, causing great emotional distress among the mourners.

In response to people's wariness of the facility and its employees, the San Zhao administrators have allowed a greater degree of transparency which includes openly displaying the deceased – face uncovered – during the memorial service. The family is also allowed to designate one individual, usually the eldest child or senior male, to personally ensure that the body is loaded into the oven. Once the cremation is complete, this same individual also personally removes the ashes from the oven into a pre-purchased urn with assistance from a San Zhao employee. Extreme care is taken to ensure every piece of ash is carefully swept and tamped into the urn using tools carefully cleaned by the oven operator.<sup>39</sup> After the ashes are carefully tamped into the urn, the family then ceremoniously escorts the remains to the columbarium for initial interment. San Zhao administrators argue that allowing the family to have greater control over the process minimizes the psychological impact of cremation.

While most informants preferred inhumation over cremation, many recognized that cremation allowed for more flexibility in dealing with the dead during the lengthy interment process. Informants noted that because the ashes are portable, they can be

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<sup>39</sup> Families are also very concerned with the quality of the cremation. Families are rumored to pay the oven operator extra money to ensure a "clean burn" (*ganjing de huohua*) where all bones are completely turned to ash. Families are also concerned with the order of cremation. To avoid contamination, families try to have their dead cremated first, working on the assumption that later cremations will have mixed ashes from previous cremations. The notion of "first road" (*yilu*), "second road" (*erlu*) and "third road" (*sanlu*) are terms used by mourners to describe the preferred cremation order with the first road being the most pure and third road the least.

checked out at any time when visiting the dead. Furthermore, I was told that the flexibility of having the ashes in the columbarium for up to three years allowed for more frequent and more intimate visits with the deceased during mourning. Some respondents felt that cremation was “cleaner” than inhumation, and therefore, they were more comfortable handling the remains.

Informants also mentioned reduced chances of death pollution as an advantage of cremation. Most informants still have a strong abhorrence to being exposed to the polluting influence of the dead; and having the remains in ash form reduces much of that anxiety. Individual attitudes towards death pollution appear to be similar to those in traditional funerals of this area where the polluting influence of the corpse comes not from the *yang* nature of the bones, but from the *yin* nature of the flesh (Watson 1982: 112-115). This attitude is reflected in the historical practice of secondary burial where the bones are cleaned of any remaining flesh and reburied.<sup>40</sup> At San Zhao, once the flesh is separated from the bones, or in this case burned away, the bones become a focal point for the expression of descent focused ritual<sup>41</sup> (Watson 1988b: 205). Many informants reported having frequent contact with the deceased during the months and years immediately following the funeral by checking out the urn from the columbarium. Finally,

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<sup>40</sup> For discussions on death pollution and secondary burial see Watson’s 1982 article on Of Flesh and Bones: Management of Death Pollution in Cantonese Society (Watson 1982:155-186) and Death and the Regeneration of Life by Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (Bloch and Parry 1982)

<sup>41</sup> The San Zhao cemetery also has polished bones from traditional secondary burials that have been re-interred due to forced relocation and/or urbanization. In such cases, the bones are placed in a large kettle (*gang*) and then re-interred.



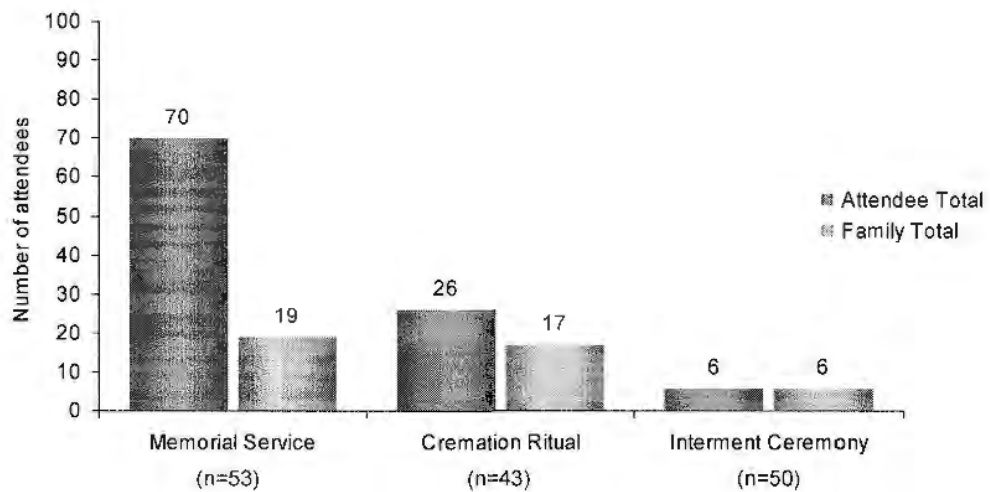
people running about looking for the correct funeral hall, people moving from the funeral hall to the interment areas, all the while the next group of mourners and guests hover around the entrances eager to begin the preparation of the funeral halls for the upcoming ceremony. Groups of people in various states of preparation, dress and emotional state are all inter-mingled as they make the rapid journey from the memorial service hall to the cremation ritual area and then to the waiting room where they will receive the ashes of their dead. Initial impressions suggested that in this facility at least the state had truly achieved a high degree of ritual standardization. However, as time went on and the number of observations increased, I began to ascertain that although the ritual process was for the most part identical, there existed a significant amount of highly patterned variation.

#### Differential Ritual Investment

The first form of variation in ritual outcomes I observed was that certain families tended to place greater importance on specific ritual moments of the ritual process than others. Significantly, upon further investigation, I found that difference in ritual investment as families moved through the process of settling their dead clearly illuminated the urban and rural divide; a phenomenon that I refer to as “differential ritual investment.” By differential ritual investment, I am referring to a phenomenon whereby participants invest in certain ceremonial and ritual events to a greater degree than others; and in clearly patterned (predictable) ways. Two types of differential investment are discussed here – ritual process differentiation and inter-ceremonial differentiation.

Ritual Process Differentiation: The first form of variation I observed – referred to in this study “ritual process variation” – was that during the process of settling the dead, participants invest in certain ritual moments to a greater extent than others. The table below gives an illustration of ritual process differentiation by comparing attendance during the funerary ceremony (memorial service) with the burial ceremonies (cremation ritual and interment ceremony ceremonies).

**Figure 24: Ritual Process Differentiation**  
 (Reformed Funeral Attendee and Family Mean Totals at San Zhao for the Memorial Services, Cremation Rituals and Interment Ceremonies)



As this table shows, during the period of my research, certain ritual moments in the ritual process received higher rates of participation than others. The memorial service

third anniversaries of death families hold three-day ceremonies which closely resemble the original funeral ceremony. In the four ceremonies that I observed and one that I participated in the average attendance was between 50 to 150 persons. This number includes family members, guests, friends and relatives. These data suggest that in the rural context, inter-ceremonial differentiation is less pronounced and typified by a more equally distributed investment across all ceremonial occasions that emphasize agnatic descent.

In urban/reformed ceremonies, however, the opposite is true. The highest attendance in reformed ceremonies occurs during the memorial service. Attendance in the cremation ritual and interment rites drops dramatically as only relatives and friends accompany the family to the cremation ritual. During the interment only the nuclear family remains. In addition, extended burial rites at graveside receive dramatically lower attendance in urban death rites.

Finally, the most striking divergence in the performance of death rites by rural and urban residents lies in the relative importance given to the memorial service. While in San Zhao both rural and urban residents must perform this ceremony, for rural residents this is the part of the ceremony that receives the least amount of ritual investment. In rural funerals the immediate family and related affines make up the majority of the participant and few official guests attend. In San Zhao, attendance is even more restricted because rural families will often select the smallest memorial service hall available leaving the many guests waiting outside, unable to participate. Rural memorial

services are also typified by the use of hired San Zhao funeral directors and lower rates of participation from government officials.

Additional data from this study further supports the above assertions. For example, of the 13 memorial services held in the smallest halls at San Zhao, 12 were rural families (the remaining case was a Christian funeral). Of these 13 memorial services, in 10 of the cases, the family hired a San Zhao funeral director to conduct the service as they had no work-unit association to provide one. Finally, 7 of these 13 funerals had 2 speakers or less; and of these 13 funerals, in only 4 was the key speaker a work unit leader. In the remaining cases, the key speaker was a family representative. As data for these 13 cases suggest, rural memorial services are characterized by extensive use of San Zhao funeral directors and fewer speakers with minimal eulogy content; and of the speakers who did give eulogies, the majority was drawn from the family and not the work unit.

In contrast, urban residents generally choose the size of the hall according to the number of expected guests and all guests including family, relatives, friends and official guests are expected and encouraged to attend. Numerous and extensive eulogies are prepared and read. All guests participate in some way according to their respective social position and relationship to the deceased. It is this ceremony that receives the highest overall investment and is the focal point of urban process of settling the dead.

In my data from San Zhao, for families that held their funeral service in the largest hall, the deceased and participants were overwhelmingly urban professionals represented by a work unit. The one village funeral that did take place in a largest hall was characterized by lower attendance, no funeral director (only friend and son spoke),

and was of greater age (75 years old). Of the memorial services held in the largest hall 9 of 13 had a work-unit leader give the key eulogy. In addition, 7 of these 13 memorial services had 3 or more speakers. Finally, among the speakers who gave eulogies, 5 of 13 were officials and 5 of 13 were technical or business professionals.

Grave rites in the reformed context also show a reduced investment. In my observations at San Zhao, it was very clear that extended grave rites at San Zhao follow the pattern of investment found in the initial interment ceremonies. Grave rites are usually only conducted only on the first three anniversaries of death, or on during the annual Tomb Sweeping and Spring Festivals. Many families report coming to visit if they had dreams or other paranormal experiences related to the deceased. Like other interment ceremonies, there is not state or guest investment in these ceremonies. The participants are the deceased's immediate agnatic relations with close affines in attendance. The affairs lack the elaborate orchestration and investment of similar ceremonies found in the non-reformed context. However, the lesser degree of public investment in the cremation ritual and other burial rites in the urban context does not necessarily mean these interment rites are less important. In fact, many times I was told that for family members, these rites are as important, if not more important than the memorial service. However, how the respondents defined the importance relative to other rites varied. Funerary rites were important because they are a defining public moment whereas cremation and interment rites are deemed important because they are moments for more intimate expressions of personal and emotional connections with their dead.

The variation in reported importance given to different ritual moments suggests a change in the attitudes towards death rites in the urban context. At San Zhao, establishing the social worth of the deceased during the memorial ceremony is of primary importance as this moment establishes the deceased's publicly recognized legacy. Whereas in the interment rites that follow, the focus shifts to the survivors. Interment rites celebrate demonstrated relationships between the living and the deceased in respect to demonstrated agnatic relationships similar to those found in the rural context. Interment rites in San Zhao tend to have a much more affective quality and contain less emphasis on expressing the values of jural authority and connections to territory.

What needs to be emphasized here is that although the same ideological and cosmological thread is maintained in both of these funeral types, investment differs. The relationship between the dead and the living remains, but their roles differ. In reformed funerals there appears to be a greater emphasis on the private expression of benevolent affect relations compared to non-reform funerals where a high priority is given to the public expression of jural relations.

In San Zhao and urban grave rites in general, the expression of the affect relationship between the living and the dead is particularly important in the interment ceremony and often continues well into the performance of grave rites. Data from my study showed that reform grave rites are much less formal, infrequent, and tend to occur only on large holidays or originate from paranormal experiences and express greater intimacy and establish benevolent mutually reciprocal relationships between the living and the dead. Non-reformed grave rites on the other hand, follow more standardized and

rigid formulas that emphasize jural over affect relations and are more instrumental because they appear to establish birthright and historical connections to land and territory.

Analysis: The Persistence of the Rural/Urban Ritual Divide at San Zhao

As the above data shows, when comparing specific ceremonial and ritual moments against each other, variation emerged that illuminated the rural/urban ritual divide. Clearly, while both rural and urban families must utilize an similar ritual process within the confines of San Zhao, rural and urban families do not invest in these events to the same degree. The table below summarizes the differences between urban and rural inter-ceremonial investment. For reference traditional rural investment strategies have been included. .

**Figure 26: Inter-Ceremonial Investment**  
Rural (traditional), Rural (reformed), and Urban (reformed)

Type of Rite	Context and Degree of Investment		
	Rural (traditional)	Rural (reformed)	Urban (reformed)
<b>Funerary:</b>			
Diaoyan	high	----	----
Memorial Service	----	low	high
<b>Mortuary:</b>			
Jidian Yishi	high	----	----
Cremation Ritual	----	high	low
Interment Ceremony	----	high	low
<b>Graveside:</b>			
Anniversaries	high	high	low
Extended	high	high	low

Several conclusions can be drawn from this summary table. First, except for the memorial service, rural families' ritual investment tends to be high and more equally distributed throughout the entire process. In addition, the extended family and community remain involved to a greater degree throughout the ritual process. Also, although not shown in the table above, it is not uncommon for rural (reformed) families to perform two memorial services: one performed in the funeral home in the reformed, socialist style and a second in the deceased's natal village (*Diaoyan*) according to tradition and local custom.

In contrast, for urbanites it is the memorial service that receives the highest amount of ritual investment. The cremation ritual and interment ceremony are performed at a greatly attenuated scale. Urban cremation and interment rites immediately following the memorial service exhibit lower community involvement as only the immediate family members, relatives and friends attend. In contrast, rural interment rites tend to be much more extensive and elaborate. Rural interment rites have extensive community involvement throughout the process including extended grave rites that can last up to three years in this area.

As urban death rites progress from the memorial service to the interment rites and extended grave rites, there is a radical divestment in the ritual process. So much so, that by the end of the first day and up until the point three years later when the remains of the deceased are formally interred in a cemetery plot, usually no more than 5-10 individuals remain to perform extended burial rites. The attendees are limited to the deceased's immediate family members, spouses and children. Compared to rural death rites, urban



According to my informants, social networks play an integral part in the lives of urbanites much in the same way that they do in the lives of rural residents. This was particularly evident in an interesting case where in a single day there were two funerals from the same work unit; a local university in the city of Xian. For Mr. Zhou, relating the story who had relations with both of the deceased, deciding which to attend became a difficult dilemma. One funeral was for the father of head of his department and the other was for a friend and well-respected colleague with over 16 years at the university. He later told me that he very much wanted to pay respects to his friend and colleague, but because he was part of a very elite circle of friends upon which his future success depended, he felt obligated to attend the funeral of his department head's father; a man he had never met. In the end, he attended the funeral of the department head's father, instead of his friends. When I asked him about his reasons for his decision he replied:

*In China, one's company or work unit is just like a village. Things are very complicated. In my department, relationships are just as important here as in my hometown. If you don't have good relationships you have no future and I need his help to graduate. That is why I have to go to Professor Bai's father's funeral instead of my friend's funeral.*

It turns out that this funeral was very well attended. I on the other hand, attended the funeral of their friend and upon returning they expressed both their embarrassment at not attending and pleasure that I, a foreigner from their university, had attended. To me, the overall patterns of attendance described above and this story suggest that there is high degree ritual action that cannot be clearly related to pure expressions of grief and affect. Often, attendance and participation choices are driven by the desire to fulfill social obligations related to status and the maintenance of important social relations. In addition,

the choices are context dependent; meaning that for some participants, ritual behavior appears to be strategically adjusted to their immediate social and economic context. Affect is important, but it is evident that there is a degree of instrumental use and calculation in these ritual events as well. Finally, it appears that the most prevalent pattern of ritual variation exists between urban and rural residents.

### The Origins of the Rural/Urban Divide

The strategic nature of ritual behavior between rural and urban residents makes sense when viewed against the backdrop of the historical and political context of urban/rural development in modern China. Through policies designed to control urban growth and hinder the immigration to cities, the state inadvertently created a “two-tiered system of privilege where rural urbanites received greater shares of resource distribution (Whyte and Parish 1984). State policies such as the household registration system (*hukou zhidu*), collectivization, and the work-unit labor allocation system (*fenpei*) were key factors leading to this divide.

As Cohen notes, the CCP’s household registration system “instituted a binary legal and inherited distinction between peasants and non-peasants. Under the hukou system, not only was individual mobility restricted, but one’s identification as either peasant or non-peasant influenced access to key state resources relating to education, medical care, employment, grain allocations and other subsidies.(Chen 2001: 6) The hukou system aggravated rural/urban inequalities creating a situation where people who

coincides with the embracing of capitalist values and avoiding traditional obligations and duties of the past social structure including expressions of filiality (Ikels 2004, Whyte 2004). Under such dramatic social change, how will individuals, like Mr. Wang mentioned in chapter three who left village life for the urban, solve the problem of creating connections to their rural past and urban present in death? It seems likely that the new social spaces created by decollectivization, which allow for greater autonomy and independence in public life may result in more creative forms of legacy-making that fall outside of the traditional duties and obligations of ritual life during collectivization. This question, however, falls outside the scope of this study.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that although families at San Zhao must utilize a very similar ritual structure for settling their dead, actual ritual outcomes at vary in patterned ways. The variation in San Zhao death rites clearly illuminates a persistent urban/rural ritual divide. This is important, because it suggests that different participants approach the performance of death rites in a strategic fashion for specific purposes of making claims on the communities in which they depend upon for economic and social support. It seems likely that the rural/urban divide presently expressed in death ritual is due to the CCP's household registration and work unit economic policies, which created dependencies between individuals and their communities. Collectivization and efforts to hinder urban in-migration lead rural residents to depend on their village communities and urban residents depend on the state, particularly the work unit. Finally, it is clear that the

## ***Chapter 5: State Power and Social Hierarchy***

In urban funerals, the ritual moment that receives the greatest ritual investment is the Memorial service. In my view, the high degree of investment in the memorial service is the defining characteristic which sets apart urban funerals from their rural counterparts. As such, it is of great analytical importance. Whereas much of the regulatory activity concerning the treatment of the dead is focused on meeting pragmatic requirements of disposal, the memorial service's focus is ideological and most clearly illustrates the state's approach to death ritual. Although the memorial service lacks the ritual complexity and exotic nature of traditional funerals, the political nature of the ceremony provides an angle of entry into understanding the ideals of the CCP as it relates not only to the treatment of the dead, but to the relationship of the individual to the state.

In this chapter I will be primarily concerned with the ritualization of unique relationship between the state and the Chinese citizen. By ritualization I am referring to Max and Mary Gluckman's use of the term referring to "the use of secular relationships and roles in rituals. That is to say, in such rituals the actors have selected roles in the rituals according to their roles and secular life" (Gluckman and Gluckman 1977: 230). Here, the state's invention of the memorial service reflects the ritualization of the secular relationship between the individual and the socialist state.

In exploring the state's ritualization of the individual, I will show how the state has created social hierarchies which reflect its ideological agenda through the purposeful modification of the ritual space, eulogy style and cemetery architecture. Of concern is the

state's use of power in creating social hierarchies of dominance and submission. Finally, I will also consider the significance of seemingly insurmountable contradictions that permeate socialist death ritual and their relationship to the state's efforts to use death ritual in making claims about national unity to both the domestic and international communities.

#### The Ritualization of the Relationship Between the Individual and the State:

Before entering into a discussion on the ritual content of the memorial service, it is important to understand why this particular moment in the ritual process became the symbolic arena for the expression of socialist values. Except for the memorial service, the CCP's reforms ideological focus is on suppressing superstitious expression related to feudal-era social hierarchies and economic inequalities. In pursuit of this goal, the CCP appears to be more tolerant of religious "beliefs" than it does "superstitious" practices related to ancestor worship. In general, limited expressions of religious belief are tolerated in death ritual. The CCP has allowed for the provision of facilities' and services designed to serve followers of major religious traditions at many funeral homes. For example, at San Zhao there is a specific funeral hall designed with religious iconography for four of the five officially recognized religions – Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism and Daoism.<sup>45</sup> Religious services are held unobstructed, although the body must still be cremated. In the death rites that follow the memorial service, certain elements of traditional Chinese popular religion, such as ritual expressions related to assisting the

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<sup>45</sup> The Hui, an Islamic minority common to this area, have their own facilities separate from San Zhao.

deceased's journey through hell to the western paradise, remain intact and are no longer as heavily restricted as in the past. It seems that in current times, the state is less concerned with regulating religious beliefs and more concerned with regulating superstitious practices relating to the treatment of the remains. For example, the state places heavy restrictions on the treatment and placement of the remains, particularly as they relate to the geomantic placement for burial. However, this is not the case with the memorial service.

Unlike the regulation designed at suppressing ancestor worship, the memorial service is the arena for the expression of socialist ideals. It is the ritual moment in which the ideals of the state are most clearly articulated. But why was this moment chosen and not others? The answer to this question perhaps lies in understanding the Chinese conception of death as a transformation of the person, rather than death as the end of the person. In his article Death and the Concept of the Person, Maurice Bloch advances the notion of understanding death as a process rather than an event (Bloch 1988: 15). Bloch makes the argument that in the West, we are overly wedded to a notion of "bounded" individuality, where "we assume that people are separate entities, unique bounded units, which form a real unity which transcends all other divisions." (Bloch 1988: 16) This culturally-constructed conception of the individual person as bounded is problematic because it results in perceptions of death as a person extinguishing event (rather than a process) creating a sharp boundary between life and death. Bloch points out that this conception is flawed because in many cultures death is understood to be a transformation or journey. Seeing death as a transformation, suggests an alternative conception of the

person where certain aspects of the person may die, while others live on. Bloch points out the case of the Tallehensi in Southern Somali where funerals are “merely a recognition of that which dies: individuality, and that which survives: patrilineal ties.” (Bloch 1988: 19) For the Tallehensi, death marks, not an end, but a transformation from an individual person to a descent person. (Bloch 1988: 20) This insight is important to this study for two reasons. First, like the Tallehensi, Chinese death ritual (past and present) also makes this distinction between the individual person and the agnatically-defined descent person, and second, the reality of this change in the person makes it very clear to the living that there is a clearly defined transformative moment in the ritual process where individuality ceases to exist.

The answer then, to the question of why the memorial service became the centerpiece for the expression of socialist ideals, lies in understanding this transformation of the deceased from person defined by his or her individuality to a person (or object) defined by his or her position in an agnatically-defined kin-group. As previously mentioned in chapter two, during cremation and the cremation ceremony, the deceased undergoes an important ritual transformation which signifies the soul’s successful transition from world of the living to the world of the dead. This transition is observed by reversing the portrait of the deceased so that it can no longer be viewed. Similar to Bloch’s argument, this ritual moment marks the end of individuality. Therefore, according to the ritual logic of Chinese death ritual, the secular memorial service, with its emphasis on celebrating individual merit, could only occur during the ritual moment

where individuality is celebrated and before the transformation to a descent person takes place.

The memorial service commemorates the individual because it is the individual in this life who carries the socialist message through sacrifice and contribution to the state. Furthermore, because the socialist denial of god(s), they cannot celebrate the descent person. Any socialist expressions occurring after the memorial service would negate the state's secular message by essentially creating a situation where the socialist dead are worshiped in an ancestral fashion. Therefore, the memorial ceremony was logically had to become the central moment for the expression of socialist values and hence, state ritualization. And indeed, this is what we find. The state promotes socialist values and individuality in the memorial service, but only suppresses the expression of agnatic descent in the rituals that follow.

In the analysis that follows, I will analyze the memorial service paying attention to the CCP's reconfiguration of the ceremonial space and its significance for the creation of social hierarchies. The method used for this analysis will be comparative, with a focus on the state's strategies toward the ritualization of the relationship between state and subject for the purposes of creating social hierarchies of dominance and submission. This chapter will analyze the CCP's orchestration of the movement of bodies through the ritual space, particularly as it relates to the symbolic relations between and within the primary participating groups within rural and urban funerals, or what I refer to in this study as the modification of "*inter-group relations*" and "*intra-group*" relations.



### The Social Hierarchy in Chinese Death Ritual

Regardless of context (rural/rural-reformed/urban-reformed) Chinese funerals are highly structured events in which each participant's physical placement, order of appearance and role within the ritual and ceremonial process has social significance. One's placement within the ceremonial space establishes both the individual's group membership and respective status within that group. In Chinese funeral rites, the positioning of individuals within the spatial matrix of the ceremony, which will be referred to here as the "social hierarchy", is traditionally reckoned according to generation, gender and age (Baker 1979, Fei 1947, Hsu 1949, Thornton and Lin 1994, Yang 1965). These factors are determined by one's social distance from the deceased and other participants within the ceremonial context.

Generation: One of the most important organizing principles in Chinese funerals is the designation of individuals according to generation. Called "*beifen*" this principle establishes that senior generations are considered to be of higher status than junior generations. This principle is an integral part of the Chinese kinship system where one's kinship and social position is reckoned according to their respective distance from a common ancestor.

Gender: A second important feature of Chinese funerals is the physical separation between males and females. The timing and order of women's appearance and their physical location within the ceremonial setting is highly proscribed and tends to

denote a lower status position than men. Gendered status is also reflected in the ritual division of labor in death work.<sup>46</sup>

Age: A third feature is age designations which confers higher ritual status on older individuals. Older individuals are placed more forward and central in the ceremonial space than younger individuals. However, because of the primacy of generational status over age, this attribute is perhaps the weakest of the three organizing principles.

These three attributes: generation, gender and age provide the basis for making hierarchical distinctions in ritual and ceremonial contexts. Combined, these three factors create a social hierarchy which symbolically displays the jural authority of senior over junior generations, men over women and the older over the younger. The table below gives a breakdown of the social hierarchy in the ritual and ceremonial setting.

**Figure 27: Social Hierarchy in Chinese Death Ritual**

	<b>Generation</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>
<b>Higher Status</b>	Senior	Male	Older
<b>Lower Status</b>	Junior	Female	Younger

In this taxonomy the individual's social rank in ceremonial events is reckoned according to the extent to which they share the above attributes. This is important

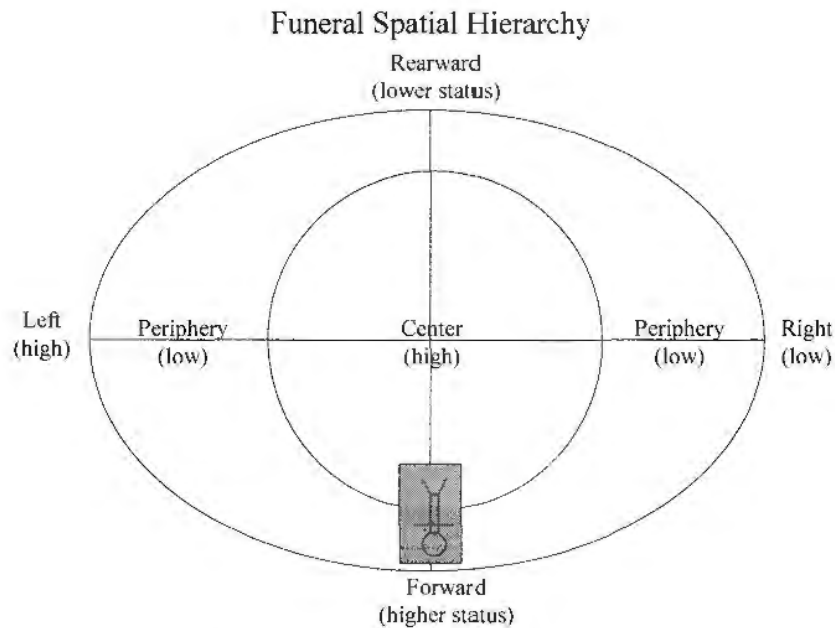
<sup>46</sup> It has been observed that women's death work is often closer and more intimately related to the processing of the post-mortem body due to the belief that men are considered to be at a greater risk of the negative effects of death pollution than women (Bloch and Parry 1982, Watson 1982). Therefore women are often able to maintain a closer proximity (physically and ritually) to the corpse without incurring the negative costs of pollution.

because it serves as a guide for determining one's role and ritual obligations during a funeral or other ceremonial event. In the case of Chinese death rites, the social hierarchy is symbolically enacted by placing individuals within a hierarchically ordered ceremonial space. In this way Chinese funerals create physical spaces with social attributes. In the section that follows I will briefly describe the spatial hierarchy in the funeral setting.

#### The Spatial Hierarchy in Chinese Death Ritual

Similar to the social hierarchy described above, in both urban and rural contexts the deceased is the focal point of the spatial hierarchy and forms the centerpiece around which all ritual activity occurs. Participants are placed within the ceremonial context according to their position in the social hierarchy. The table below gives a visual representation of the spatial layout in both reform and non-reform funeral contexts with hierarchical and distinctions between zones of higher or lower status.

**Figure 28: Spatial Hierarchy (Funeral)**



	Spatial Position		
<b>Higher Status</b>	Left	Forward	Center
<b>Lower Status</b>	Right	Rearward	Periphery

In the spatial hierarchy individuals on the left have a higher status than those on the right, forward and central to the proceeding have a higher ritual status than those who are on the left, rear or peripheral positions. Also important, but not reflected in the diagram below, are further elements of space and time. Individuals who occupy higher planes have higher status than those who occupy low positions (standing vs. kneeling) and individuals who enter the ceremonial or ritual spaces first share greater ritual status than those who enter later (e.g. processions, order of ritual offerings/activity). For explanatory purposes, the physical spaces and their occupants are described as either

being to the right or left, front or rear, high or low, and central or peripheral from the deceased. This description makes the assumption that the observer is standing just behind the deceased and looking outward at the participants.

### The Intersection of Social and Spatial Hierarchies in Non-reformed and Reformed Funerals

In the ceremonial context, the intersections of the social and spatial hierarchies create a physical hierarchy based on each participant's relationship with the deceased. As individuals are sorted according to the principles of the social and spatial hierarchies three clearly defined groups emerge: Guests (*keren*), Relatives and Friends (*qinqi pengyou*) and Family (*jiashu*). An explanation of these three groups demographics are provided below.

Guests: This group consists of senior individuals who are either not a part of the extended family or who are in some way related to the governance of the community. If the deceased was a member of a work unit (*danwei*) co-workers and other colleagues may also be considered a part of this group.

Relatives and Friends: This groups is made up of affines (family members who are more distantly related to the deceased such as the deceased sister's spouse and family). Also included in this group are friends who shared personal relationships not related to the deceased's professional or occupational life.

Family: This group is has all agnatic kin with distinctions made between sons and daughters (married and unmarried) and their spouses. For example a son's spouse would be considered a part of the agnatic line and would be a part of the family. However, a daughter's husband would not be considered a part of the agnatic line and would be given a ritual status placing him in the Friends and Relatives group.

### **Inter-group Relations: Reconfiguring the Ceremonial Space**

In the section above, I have described both the social and spatial hierarchies. In the section that follows I will explore how these two hierarchies and the groupings that they produce are positioned within the ceremonial space. The analysis will compare the positioning of groups within the ceremonial space – or “inter-group relations” – of both rural and urban funerals. The goal of comparing the positioning of groups in relation to each other in these two contexts will be to show how the state's modification of the ceremonial space has produced social hierarchies which promote socialist ideals while simultaneously discouraging the expression of traditional hierarchical distinctions.

#### Inter-group relations in Rural Funerals

In rural funerals the deceased is placed just in front of an altar called an altar or *huadeng* that with the deceased's coffin forms the centerpiece of the ceremony. Ideally, the altar is placed opposite the entryway to the family's courtyard and faces geomantic

south.<sup>47</sup> The area directly in front of the deceased is an open area temporarily occupied by those making ritual offerings to the deceased during the ceremony and is the area where the most significant ritual content occurs. This area is of greater importance than the periphery where non-participating guests and onlookers view the proceedings.

One of the most readily observable divisions between participants is the left/right distinction. According to long-held tradition, individuals and groups of higher status are to the left of the ceremonial focal point.<sup>48</sup> In rural funerals this means that males occupy the left and females occupy the right establishing a gender hierarchy where women participants appear later and occupy physical spaces subordinate to men. This is also true in processions where both genders are participating. Women's ritual position conforms to traditional forms of authority which assigns them a lower status than that of men. In this case being to the right (female) denotes a ritually lower status than left (male).

Another distinction is the positioning of higher status individuals in the forward areas of the ceremonial space. Those who occupy this space are more senior and older participants. In rural funerals senior males and females are always placed nearer to the deceased. Generation continues to be an extremely important organizing principle because it designates not only one's physical position and role within the proceedings, but also dictates who can and cannot participate in the funeral itself.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> A southerly orientation is related to Daoist notions of the cosmological order. Although the ideal is to face magnetic south, creating a ritually appropriate southerly direction is also appropriate for the performance of funerary and burial rites in this area.

<sup>48</sup> This practice is from the imperial era, where in the imperial court, with the emperor as the focal point, the military (*wuguan*) was relegated to the right of the emperor symbolically enacting their lower status compared to that of the civil/scholarly officials (*wenguan*).

<sup>49</sup> In one funeral that I attended it was pointed out to me that the man's wife was not present at the wedding. Thinking that this would be an inexcusable act in the west, I discovered that because the deceased and his

Being on different vertical planes within the ceremonial space also has meaning. Individuals occupying a higher plane (standing) have a ritually higher status than those individuals occupying a lower plane (kneeling). Occupying high and low planes is changes frequently throughout the ritual process. For example, when making ritual offerings to the deceased or when acknowledging offerings from guests, family members kneel, placing them on a lower physical plane. By occupying the lower plane family members symbolically display their ritually subordinate position in comparison to the deceased or guests.<sup>50</sup>

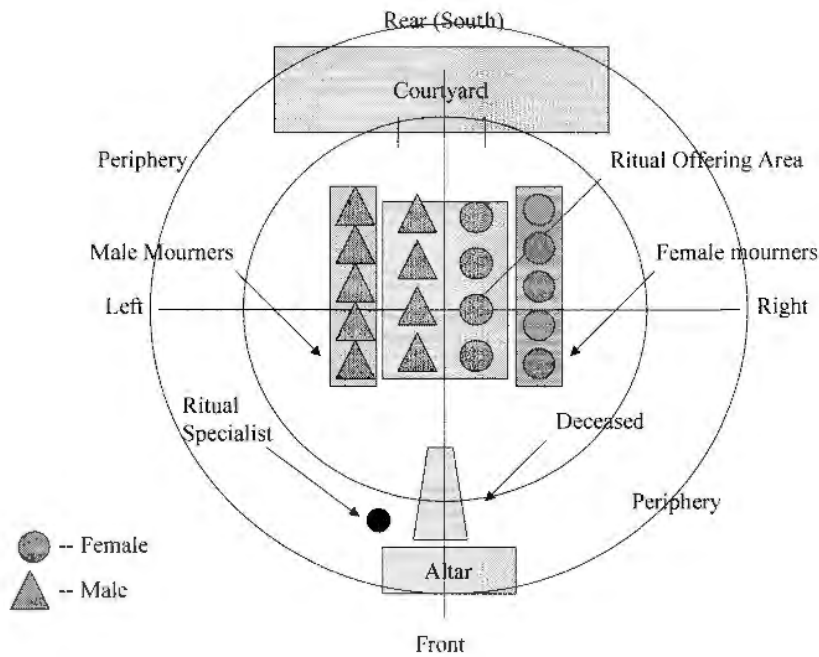
Finally, the order of appearance is also important. As a general rule in a procession, those members who enter the ritual area first are higher status than those who enter last. Females follow males, junior generations follow the senior, and the younger follow the older. The table below gives an example of a typical rural ceremony in the Guanzhong area.

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wife were of the same generational hierarchy it would be inappropriate for her to be a part of the proceedings. This practice is related to the general rule that senior individuals cannot worship junior individuals. Therefore, those of same or higher rank than the deceased should not participate in the funeral except as guests. Ideally, a senior family member should not participate in the funeral of a more junior of the same family and the entire family must ritually serve those senior including the deceased and guests. This is also part of the reason why young deaths are particularly tragic, as there is no one to make the ritual obsequies to the deceased and hence, denying their chance at immortality through becoming an ancestor.<sup>50</sup> Family participants while being the most important physical presence in funerary ritual in reality hold an ambiguous position. As living representatives of the family and ancestral lineage they are of primary importance. Senior family members also occupy spaces both central and forward in the ceremonial area signifying their importance and high status. Their proper observance of death rites in essence ritually invigorates the lineage in the face of the threat that death poses to the family line. However, in relation to the deceased, other participants and important guests, the family is ritually subordinate. Participating members of the family must constantly serve guests be it in actual substance such as in providing food or in a ritual form of making offerings to the deceased or kneeling in the presence of guests.



**Figure 29: Rural Funeral Spatial Layout**



As the above table shows, in rural funerals the family occupies a prominent position throughout the ceremony. The family is centrally located and forward with the most senior and eldest individuals closest to the deceased. This group is further divided into two separate groups by gender with males occupy the higher status left side, while females occupy the lower status right side. When in single-file processions, males lead and females follow.

The friends and relatives group and the guests group are of great ritual importance and although their participation is limited to specific ritual moments, they are given considerable respect by the family. In rural communities the guests group usually consists of representatives from the local such as the village committee (*xiangcun juweihui*) or

market-town committee (*xiangzhen juweihui*), a village leader (*cunzhang*), village secretary (*shuji*) or other cadres. Family members show their respect to this group by kneeling as they make their ritual obsequies in the central area of the ceremonial space. The relatives and friends group is also very important and enjoys ritual treatment similar to that of the guests group. However, their appearance and physical location occurs later and is more peripheral, hence less important than that of the guests group.

The placement of groups in the ceremonial space suggests that in rural funerals, the deceased's family is of greatest symbolic importance throughout the proceedings. While other groups have moments of prominence in the proceedings, the family maintains a dominant position emphasizing the family's strength within the community. The highly differentiated distinctions between generation, gender and age publicly display for all to see, the extent and depth of the family's agnatic relations, particularly as it pertains to the male line. The attributes of the deceased celebrated tend to be those that relate directly to the deceased's contributions in life related to the production and strengthening of the agnatic group through the production heirs. The configuration of individuals and social groups is quite different in urban funerals.

#### Inter-group Relations in Urban Funerals

Inter-group relations in urban funerals are also abundant with symbolic meaning, but vary significantly from their rural counterparts. In forming participating groups, urban funerals also follow the three-fold distinction found in rural funerals between guests, relatives and friends, and family. However, their formation and placement in the ceremonial context exhibits some important similarities and differences.

In urban funerals, guests are also drawn primarily from official circles often including government representatives if the deceased was a party member. However, unlike rural funerals where delegates represent an administrative region such as a village, district, or township committee, in urban funerals these delegates are almost always drawn from the deceased's work unit. Other important guests are work unit leaders and junior managers and co-workers who may have worked directly with the deceased. In addition, other participants of this group often consist of co-workers and colleagues who may or may not know the deceased. Junior members of the work unit's are often under obligation to participate by more senior managers and their participation is at times mostly for show as many may not have any personal relationship with the deceased.

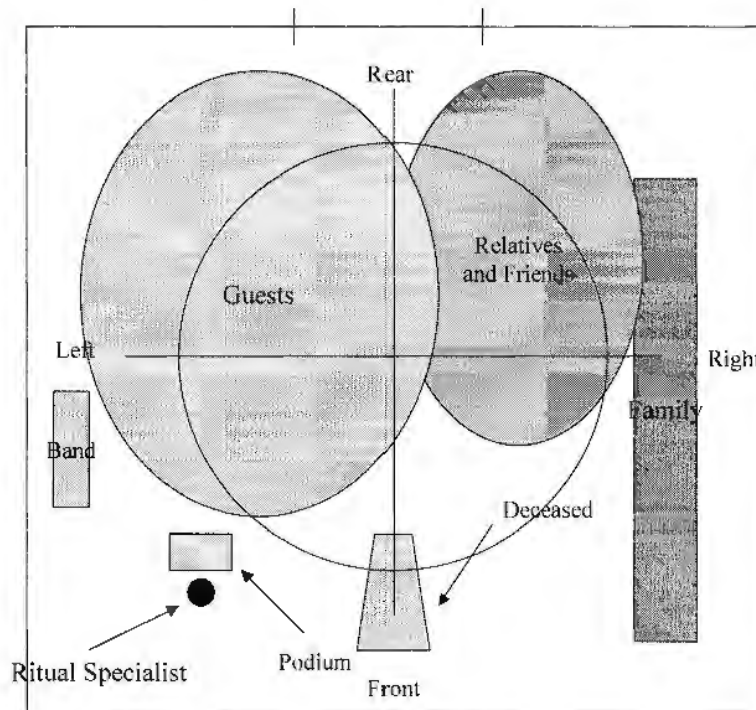
Similar to rural funerals, the relatives and friends group consists of "affines" or those persons related to the deceased through marriage, but outside of the primary agnatic line. Also included in this group are individuals with personal bonds to the deceased that are not based on family ties or official institutions such as a work unit or party affiliation.

In urban funerals the rules for assigning who is or is not considered to be a member of the family group is similar to rural funerals. The criteria for membership are based on the principles of agnatic descent. The patriline is emphasized here and those who are not a direct part of this group must be placed in the relatives and friends group.

As the above description attests, the division of mourners and participants in urban funerals shares many similar characteristics of their rural counterparts. However, the placement of these social groups within the ceremonial space varies significantly. In urban funerals, the guests occupy the left side of the hall while the family group is

positioned on the far right. The relatives and friends group is gathered in the right and rearward part of the hall and tend to be more loosely dispersed. The following table provides a visual representation of group placement in a typical reform funeral.

**Figure 30: Reform Funeral Spatial Layout**



Discussion

From the diagram above significant differences in the inter-group relations between urban and rural funerals truly emerges. Unlike rural funerals, the guests group is now the most prominent group and remains so throughout the entire ceremony. More importantly, this group permanently occupies the high status (left-hand side) of the ceremonial space. The relatives and friends group also occupies a much more prominent position and is more central to the proceedings than in rural funerals. Most importantly,

the family's position has undergone a significant change. Once the primary group of the proceedings, the family is now relegated to a highly ambivalent position to the far right of the proceedings; traditionally, individuals in the far right-hand side are of lesser ritual importance than other participants. On one hand, the family's importance to the proceedings is displayed by its placement, which is forward of the other participant groups. This placement scheme demarcates the families centrality to the proceedings and their close relationship with the deceased. Yet on the other hand, the space they occupy is considered to be of lower status; one traditionally occupied by females in rural funerals. Also, unlike rural funerals, there is no open physical space separating males and females. Males and females are grouped together in the right-hand side of the ceremonial hall suggesting an important structural change. The state, by negating the ritual enactment of gender inequality, visually displays the socialist ideals of bilateral kinship and gender equality.

From this comparative analysis of inter-group relations, it can be seen how the positioning of groups in urban funerals reflects the family's waning influence as a principle of social organization in ritual. In addition, the family's position in the ceremonial space displays its dependence on the state. In reformed funerals the work unit is central to the proceedings suggesting the importance of economic rank and contribution over the relationship to the deceased as defined by generation, age, and gender. Lastly, overt ritualistic displays related to ancestor worship, defined by kinship are not performed. Kneeling, bowing, for example are discouraged. The contemporary urban funeral is in essence an idealized performance of secular commemoration based on

认真学习马列主义，毛泽东思想，邓小平理论和“三个代表”重要思想，衷心拥护以胡锦涛同志为总书记的党中央，拥护党的十六大。他在离开领导工作岗位之后，仍然关注党的国家的前途和命运，为祖国社会主义建设取得的成果欢欣鼓舞，对共产主义事业的前途充满信心。

*Comrade Sun Jianguo advocated Deng Xiaoping's enlightened policy decisions that lead the party achieving a great historical turning point, advocating economic development as his central policy. He upheld the Four Basic Principles and adhered to the foundations of economic reform. He diligently studied Marxism, Leninism, Mao Zedong's thought, Deng Xiaoping's theories and the "Three Representations". He faithfully followed the central party as led by President Hu Jintao and also followed the party's 16<sup>th</sup> congress meeting. After resigning his official position, he still paid attention to the party and the country's future. He felt greatly encouraged by the success of the socialist development and was fully confident about the future of the communism.*

他始终以人民利益为重，廉洁奉公，艰苦朴素。他严于律己，宽以待人。他关心爱护干部，处处表现人民公仆的本色。他的革命精神和崇高品德，永远留在人们的记忆中，是我们学习的榜样。

*He had always put the people's benefits first, was incorruptible, worked hard and lived plainly. He treated himself strictly, but treated others kindly. He cared about other officials and showed his true colors everywhere as a servant of the people. His revolutionary spirit and high moral character will be remembered forever. He is a model for us to imitate.*

There are several interesting aspects in the socialist eulogy structure. First, the reading of eulogies also exhibits a rural/urban ritual divide. Elaborate eulogies of the type above are rare in rural funerals and only occur if the deceased was part of a formal work-unit. In San Zhao, rural families' funerals will either skip the reading of eulogies altogether or simply have the funeral director make a brief opening statement welcoming the participants and introducing the deceased. This introductory eulogy may be followed by a family member's personal eulogy to the deceased. In rural funerals, the attributes of

the deceased recognized are limited to those that relate to the maintenance of the patriline. These qualities are best expressed in the visual display of the agnatic line as they fill the ceremonial space and not by the reading of eulogies. Also, rural funerals are only partially concerned with how the deceased lived his or her life. The proceedings are also an important venue for the family to display its vitality through elaborate displays of filial obedience.

Second, eulogies are a vehicle to promote correct belief in socialist values. The eulogy structure highlights the merits and contributions of the individual only as they relate to the socialist ideals of the state. These eulogies are designed to celebrate not only the deceased, but the state itself. The scripted structure and the “poverty of expression”(Bloch 1974:55-56) of the eulogy as a form of oration is important because it provides a proscribed, historical biography of important national leaders and their approach to socialism. In so doing the eulogy creates a distinct oratory style which portrays the state’s authority as legitimate, historical and most importantly, natural. These eulogies carry a message that conveniently glosses over ever present social and political inequalities or contradictions. This is similar to Bloch’s (Bloch and Parry 1982: 55) observation on language usage in ceremonies like the funeral tend to be highly structured and formalized in order to project an idealized cosmological order in which history and thought are united creating an undeniable ancestral heritage of national forefathers.

Thirdly, urban eulogies are dynamic. Eulogy content is continually adjusted to the contemporary political context. References to the deceased’s resistance to the “leftist elements” of the Cultural Revolution and the inclusion of Hu Jintao’s and the People’s

**Figure 31: San Zhao Cemetery Plot Distribution by Province**

<b>Province</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Shaanxi	93	23.79
Henan	68	17.39
Hebei	36	9.21
Shandong	32	8.18
Jiangsu	17	4.35
Shanxi	15	3.84
Liaoning	12	3.07
Shanghai	10	2.56
Jilin	8	2.05
Anhui	7	1.79
Hubei	7	1.79
Beijing	6	1.53
Hunan	5	1.53
Gansu	5	1.28
Heilongjiang	3	0.77
Jiangxi	3	0.77
Guangdong	2	0.51
Guangxi	1	0.26
Neimenggu	1	0.26
Not Recorded	24	6.14
Unreadable	6	1.53
<b>Totals</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Only 93 (24%) of the 391 plots surveyed at San Zhao identify as being from Shaanxi province. The remaining plots are identified as having remains from provinces other than Shaanxi. The frequency counts and percentages for plots identified as having remains from people born outside of Shaanxi province are summarized in the table below.



respondents' sense of discomfort and anxiety suggest the presence of a rupture, not only between the physical acts of grief expression which make up the performance in different ritual contexts, but also differences in the feelings that these performances evoke. It is my view that these instances are evidence that the state's socialist death rites, with the performative and oratory dimensions have been accepted and inculcated deeply into the ritual and emotional lives of those seeking to settle their dead.

#### Case #1: An Urban Woman and Her Aunts

For example, in one telling case I interviewed a young urban woman who had lost her mother six months earlier. While she considered herself a "city girl" her mother had grown up in a rural suburb and still had deep connections to relatives in her natal village. Therefore, the attendees at her mother's funeral were a combination of rural family and urban friends and guests from her family's work unit. As she related her experience, she suddenly confessed that she was still deeply upset over her performance in the funeral. Her disclosure began with the simple comment:

*I just don't know if I cried enough...*

She went on to explain, that as the funeral got underway, two aunts from her mother's natal village positioned themselves just behind her, one on her right and one on her left. At first, she didn't understand, but soon realized that they were there to catch her and hold her during the ceremony as she wailed and then carry her out of the hall at the end of the ceremony after she collapsed in inconsolable grief. She went on to relate that during the funeral she knew that she

counter to socialist ideals of funeral reform. Because the bodily and emotional expression in traditional funerals is also a physical display, its practitioners, both participant and observer, pay great attention to the details which suggest that it is being performed correctly. In other words, a great deal of attention is placed on correct practice or orthopraxy. Through the reconfiguration of social and spatial hierarchies of the memorial service, the ceremonial space becomes an arena designed to suppress these traditional displays and the political baggage that comes with them. However, the memorial service is not only about suppressing traditional forms of authority.

When looking at the reconfigured space and eulogy structure (order and content) it is clear that these ceremonies are a moment of quasi-worship of the state, the party and socialist ideals. The ceremony promotes the new social order through celebrating the individual and the nature of their relationship to the state. This celebratory element is not in the form of physical display or scripted emotional expression, but in the oratory content and primacy given to the state and its functionaries (e.g. the work unit). The memorial service then, is an exercise in the promotion of correct belief, or orthodoxy. Almost worshipful in form and content, the celebration of the state elevates leaders of the past to quasi-deified state suggesting that these events are not entirely secular, but almost religious in nature in their celebration of civic virtue as a natural, unquestionable authority. The memorial service then, has two functions: 1.) to suppress practices related to traditional forms of authority and; 2.) to promote beliefs related to the current form of authority -- the socialist state. And as the case studies presented above suggest, to a large extent, the state's values have become an important part of the grieving process..

Individuals do become emotionally invested in the reformed ceremony and not only make efforts to promote their correct state-centric beliefs, but also feel a distinct disconnect when coming up against traditional forms of death ritual. Many urbanites feel uncomfortable performing rural death rites and vice a versa. To me, this suggests that the reformed rites are not barren, empty exercises, but an effective ritual form that has been thoroughly integrated into the social and emotional lives of its urban practitioners. However it must be acknowledged that while I believe that people do willingly participate and do find the created rituals efficacious, it is not entirely clear the extent to which people buy into these values and what personal attributes of the deceased are being celebrated in these ceremonies.

As Bloch (1988) has observed: funerals are limited in their negotiation because the ritual structure is often quite rigid leaving little wiggle-room for improvisation. Funerals are in this sense artificially closed systems because they gloss over messy contradictions of everyday life and construct cosmological narratives that give credence to a particular point of view. Perhaps this is so because they are first social constructions which seek to make sense of inexplicable and tragic presence of death and second dangerous events that must be contained or controlled in certain circumstances and second, the dead are powerful symbolic figures related to familial, communal and even national politics. One only need to look at the official policies of the Chinese state in designating the appropriate content and performance of these ritual events to understand that this is a very real phenomenon related to attenuating the threat of death, directed toward maintaining social control and affirming the political ideals of the nation.

## The Intersection of Socialist Merit and Agnatic Descent

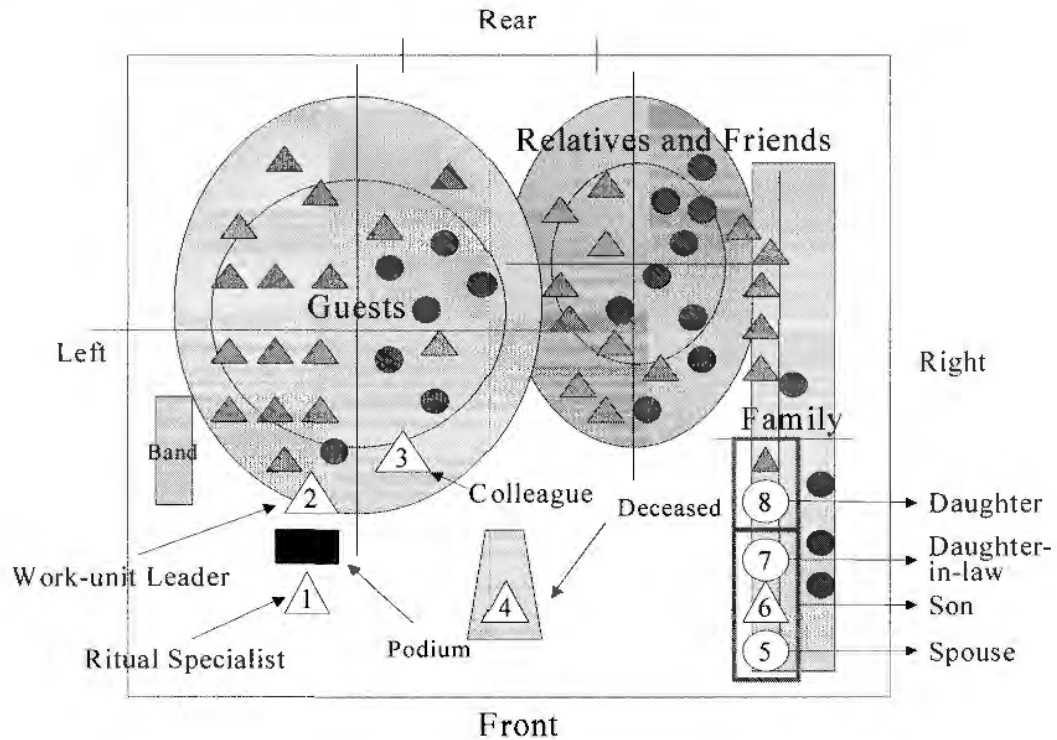
In the data presented above I have shown how the CCP has attempted to restructure the social and spatial hierarchy of the memorial service to reflect socialist ideals. A comparison of rural and urban inter-group relations does seem to suggest that generation, age and gender as organizing principles of death ritual have been replaced by an idealized performance of socialist values that celebrate the state and symbolically relegate the family and principles of agnatic descent to the lowest position in the in the social and spatial hierarchy. In this way, the state has asserted, not only its position of dominance in the proceedings, but has also promoted the socialist ideals of secularity, social and gender equality and bilateral kinship principles.

However, in the case of reformed death practices, there may be more to this picture. When shifting from a focus from inter-group relations in the memorial service to an investigation to “intra-group relations,” or – how individuals are placed *within* participating groups – an entirely different story emerges. While inter-group relations are clearly organized to celebrate the state and its socialist ideals, individuals within these groups organize themselves according to principles of agnatic descent, thereby presenting *a seemingly insurmountable contradiction – the performance of socialist equality on a bedrock of demonstrated agnatic descent.*

## **Intra-group Relations: The Intersection of Socialist Merit and Agnatic Descent**

From a careful analysis of intra-group relations it soon becomes evident that the ideology of the entire proceedings of the memorial service is being undermined in a subtle, but powerful way. In direct contradiction with the principles of the inter-group relations, the spatial positioning of individuals within groups reconstructs a social hierarchy in much the same way as rural funerals; and more importantly, evidence of this problem is present in all three of the participating groups. The table below, drawn from an observed funeral typical to San Zhao, gives an example of the contradiction between the inter-group and intra-group relations.

**Figure 34: Intra-group Hierarchies in the Memorial Service**



What is particularly fascinating about intra-group relations in memorial ceremonies is the extent to which it is expressed among all participants in all groups. Even those groups which are not a part of the agnatic structure of the family and are in no way related to the family or each other also organize themselves according to the social and spatial hierarchy found in traditional/rural funerals. The same principles of generation, gender and age which are so clearly displayed in the rural funeral context also appear in each group. Senior, aged males occupy positions of higher status in respect to their relationship to junior, younger males and or females. In the example provided above,

it is important to note that the surviving spouse, son and daughter-in-law (individuals #5,#6,#7) are placed in higher status positions than the daughter (individual #8). Also, the daughter-in-law is still assumes the greatest burden of grief and is expected to collapse in despair over her husband's father's death. Two aunts were positioned behind help assist her during her obligatory collapse. This structure clearly replicates the traditional grief division of labor and agnatic social hierarchies.

In the Family group the principles of agnatic descent in spatial positioning are the most obvious and rigid with survivors aligning themselves according to their social distance from the deceased according to agnatic descent principles. The family is defined patrilineally with surviving cognates and male affines being the primary members. The members are also aligned according to the generation, age, and gender social hierarchy. Senior, aged males have places of priority over junior, young females.

The principles of agnatic descent also influence the placement of individuals in the Relatives and Friends group. Although this group is less constrained by kinship proscriptions of the Family group, senior, aged males occupy spatial positions which indicate their status as being higher to that of junior, younger males and females. Also, within this group the separation between males and females is more obvious. Females consistently positioned themselves to the right of the men in much the same way as seen in rural funerals.

Even the Guests group, which is the primary vehicle by which the state displays the principles of socialist equality, participants place themselves according to the social and spatial hierarchies of rural funerals. Senior, aged and male representatives are in

positions of prominence while junior, young and or female participants fill the lower status positions. In so doing, they replicate the very social hierarchy they are seeking to replace!

While senior, male and aged representatives occupy positions of highest status, there are times when a younger male or female may occupy a high status position due to professional rank. While cultural proscriptions are the most common principle of social organization in these groups, if the guests group represents a professional, military, or political work unit rank becomes the primary determinant of spatial position. However, in my data, elder males most commonly occupied high status positions within the ceremonial space. This is partly due to the persistence of the social hierarchy which favors this demographic, and also partly because senior males, rather than females, most commonly held positions of economic and political prominence in contrast to their more junior and or younger counterparts. In addition, even in instances in ranked groups people of equal rank also positioned themselves according to seniority, gender and age.

Once again, what I find interesting about this particular configuration of individuals within groups in urban funerals is that they appear to be consistently aligning themselves within the ceremonial context according to traditional rules of the social and spatial hierarchies found in rural funerals; an alignment which directly contradicts the socialist values displayed in the CCP's construction of the ceremonial space at the inter-group level.

In addition to the memorial service, contradictory relationships between socialist ideals and agnatic descent are present in grave rites at San Zhao and in the architecture of



practitioners and domestic observers, the seemingly insurmountable contradiction of performing socialist equality on a foundation of demonstrated agnatic inequality..

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

In my concluding comments that follow I will briefly discuss the theoretical implication of the data described in this study. Two specific areas of interest will be discussed, both of which are related to Watson and Rawski's debate over the relationship between drivers of ritual action and cultural conceptions of Chineseness. First, I will address Watson and Rawski's debate on the drivers of ritual action by looking at the role of orthodoxic and orthopraxic elements in the construction of inclusive and exclusive communities. Second, I will then briefly discuss the problem the reformed rites pose for ritual theory as it relates to the greater question of "Chineseness".

### **The Strategic Expression of Orthopraxy and Orthodoxy**

In the previous chapter I addressed the presence of a contradiction concerning the performance of socialist ideals on a bedrock of agnatic descent principles and its significance in the performance of the memorial ceremony. In addition, the behavior expressed in this contradiction has significance in the discussion about the relative importance of orthopraxy vs. orthodoxy as a driver of ritual standardization. What this data in the discussion on space and social hierarchy in the memorial service clearly shows is both the simultaneous presence of orthodoxic and orthopraxic elements, but more importantly the flexibility of their expression in the performance of death ritual. Different from Watson and Rawski's either/or debate on whether orthopraxy or orthodoxy was the driver of ritual standardization, my data suggests that both elements are continually present in Chinese death ritual, but are expressed to different degrees at different ritual

moments. In essence, the contradiction between socialist ideals and agnatic descent principles remains, but in the memorial service for example, orthopraxic principles of agnatic descent are subsumed by an emphasis on orthodoxic principles of correct socialist belief. I would also argue that how these elements are expressed in conjunction with each other can tell us much about what it is these rituals are designed to accomplish.

In her discussion on ritual, Catherine Bell makes the observation that orthopraxy and orthodoxy are ritual elements related to defining group or community membership (Bell 1997) (Moore and Myerhoff 1977, Myerhoff 1977). For Bell, orthopraxy is most often found in rituals which establish membership in an exclusive community, while orthodoxy on the other hand, is usually directed at encouraging membership into an inclusive community. My data suggests that this hypothesis has merit when thinking about Chinese death rites.

It has been well-established in rural, face-to-face communities like the one that James Watson had worked in, that ensuring the rituals were done correctly (orthopraxy) was of great importance. In these cases, the proper performance is important because through the rituals hierarchical relationships are publicly demonstrated clearly delineating who is or is not a member of an agnatic descent group. For as Bell has observed, “orthopraxic traditions are experienced as cultural communities – often defined in ethnic or racial terms – to which one automatically belongs by birth.” (Bell 1997: 194) By performing the ritual correctly participants publicly display their position in the social hierarchy asserting their identity and membership in an exclusive community.

However, in ceremonies where the goal is to create inclusive communities, an emphasis on orthodoxy (correct belief) becomes of primary importance. This principle is readily observable when looking at the memorial service. The memorial service emphasizes correct belief because it is geared at providing an expression of inclusive membership as defined by the party and state. Loyalty to the state and party is the focus, rather than kin-based inequalities. It seems likely that the CCP chose this ritual moment for ritualization because the memorial service coincides with the final moment in Chinese cosmology where the deceased individual person and merits can best be judged. The memorial service then, is in essence a measure of the deceased's correct belief in the national project and the legitimacy of the leadership is a part of how the party creates a "natural order" of power relations. The state's authority becomes a part of the cosmological order and is seen as natural and hence unquestioned. For as Bloch (Bloch 1989: 45, Bloch and Parry 1982: 6) has observed, the power of ritual lies in its ability to smooth out contradictions in the creation of authority, which the participant perceive to be a part of the natural order of things. This perception of the naturalness of authority is important for in both the orthopraxic or orthodoxic tradition individual participants, in their acquiescence and active participation, both constitute and are constituted by the ritual form.

The state's secular projection of socialist values reflects the principles of nationhood, while the quasi-religious practice of adhering to correct practice signifies the unity of the agnatically-defined ancestral community. Here, both orthopraxic and orthodoxic elements are expressed depending on their intent. In stressing correct socialist

belief the government seeks to downplay differences and create political unity based on establishing a cosmological order based on the belief in socialist principles. The emphasis on orthodoxy serves to project important ideological messages necessary for the attenuation of difference and support the idea of national unity over regional differences; and in essence, serves to define the attributes of the ideal national citizen. However, when faced with an international crisis such as the problem of territorial integrity, where exclusivity of membership is paramount to making contested claims to territory, the government publicly utilizes orthopraxic elements such as those seen at Huangdi Ling to define exclusive membership to a geographical and civilizational concept of Chineseness.

While the tendency has been to isolate either orthodoxy or orthopraxy as the primary driver of ritual action, this study has shown that these elements are always present, but expressed to different degrees depending on the objective of the rite or ceremony. Urban ceremonies such as the memorial service are predominantly concerned with the creation of an inclusive community – the nation – emphasizing correct belief while simultaneously de-emphasizing descent-based social hierarchies and inequalities that undermine this message. Rural rites on the other hand, emphasize orthopraxic qualities which define the participants as members of an exclusive community through the correct display and expression of descent. The responsive nature of orthopraxic vs. orthodoxic expression remains present throughout the gamut of Chinese death-related behavior exhibiting itself not only in the rites of the ordinary dead, but also those of the state lending these rites a strategic and flexible nature that makes them responsive to social context.

## **A Comment on Socialist Death Ritual and the Question of “Chineseness”**

In the beginning of this study, I pointed out that a central question for the study of socialist death ritual in modern China is the issue of their “Chineseness.” How could such a radical disruption of the traditional ritual system, which was thought to be an integral part of cultural reproduction, be considered Chinese? Could it be that the practitioners of reformed rites are not Chinese? Could it be that our notions of the importance of ritual are wildly overstated? Although the answer to this question is extremely complex, I would argue that in the case of Chinese death ritual, what makes both forms uniquely Chinese is an adherence in both ritual forms to pre-existing principles of social organization originally based on agnatic descent – specifically the ritualized and reciprocal relationship between the dead and the living. Although the reformed funeral modifies certain elements of the ritual process through: 1.) the introduction of a new ritual form (the memorial ceremony) and 2.) the suppression of overt displays of superstition and traditional forms of ancestor worship, and ; 3.) the radical change in the treatment of the remains, in reality, the core social relationships that have long been part of the process of ritualization remain intact. This can be seen most clearly in my discussions of the process of determining the deceased’s social worth and the seemingly insurmountable contradictions present between the ritual actions of the architects of the socialist experiment and its subjects. To me, the contradiction of socialist merit being expressed

on a bedrock of agnatic descent and the integration of cremation into the ritual process where the deceased undergoes the transformation from being recognized as an individual in this world and becomes defined by his or her position in a agnatically-defined kin-group in the next is proof positive of the persistence of agnatically-defined, reciprocal social relationships in contemporary death ritual and Chinese society in general. These principles of social organization, based on agnatic descent, which govern rural and urban relations persist and are reflected not only in secular relationships but in cosmological orders including the socialist civic religion and more traditional forms of Chinese popular religion with its Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist elements. The reformed death rites reflect dramatically the growing imbalance in the political power between those allied with the state and those outside, who are less able to benefit from its available resources. The imprint of asymmetrical power relations is palpable (context, bodies and strategy) throughout the reformed funeral process, but its overall ritual structure and adherence to basic fundamentals of long-held social organization remain intact, keeping intact their essential Chineseness.

## **Final Comments**

It is been my argument throughout that this study of death rites tell as much, not only about individual mourners and the deceased, but also much about the broader community in which the rites occur. In seeking to make this connection from death rites to social worth of persons to community or even nationally held values, I have sought to touch upon aspects of death ritual and ceremony from moment of death to final resting

place and beyond. The method used has been comparative in examining the performance of death rites in different settings including rural and urban contexts and the role of the state in the modification and creation of death ritual. It is the inflection of two elements that I believe are important in understanding contemporary death rites in China. The first relates to changes in the nature of commemoration and remembrance of individual and the second relates to the inflection of the state/national and deals (Socialist) into the death process.

For the urban individual, the shift has been one best described by "it's not who you are and death, but what you were in life that counts." By this statement I mean to say that to some extent there has been a discernible shift away from worship to commemoration. This also suggests a change in the transformation of the role the dead play in the lives of the living. Essentially, one's position in an agnatic kinship network (descent person) is not as publicly valued as one's contributions in life (individual person). Descent is expressed, but appears to be more an expression of affect relations than jural relations. The ancestors' symbolic role in the lives of family members has been attenuated, while the ritual emphasis of one's merits and contributions in life has been increased. This suggests a decrease in the jural authority of senior generations and an increase in the relative importance and autonomy of the individual. The commemoration of individual achievement in life, not one's descent position in death, is what garners the highest degree of public recognition in reformed death ritual. In the reformed funeral system the fate of the soul is less dependent on their position within a kinship system than it is on their rank and contribution to the modern political/economic system. Basically a



difference has emerged between the valuation of descent and merit. In rural funerals the focus is on the family and the community, whereas in urban funerals, the focus is on the individual and their contribution to the nation.

Mourners' public reinforcement of important social categories through death ritual is as a measure of sorts for understanding what is valued in contemporary Chinese society. What is particularly interesting about the social worth approach is that it gives as direct information concerning specific individuals at the end of their lives; and because the Chinese funeral system emphasizes and even judges or celebrates the person's accomplishments in life, they are excellent means of looking at values over the total span of individual activity. The individual's success in creating a family, maintaining family connections, making were contributions, living to an advanced age, and in the case of modern China, exhibiting a dedication to the nation, the party and its leadership through active participation in civic organizations are all highly valued individual attributes frequently displayed in celebrated in Chinese death rites.

The second major change lies in the role of the state in the performance of death rites. The state has long been important in the performance of Chinese death rites, but in the past, the role of the state did little to confront the meaning of death like the Chinese Communist Party has tried to do. The state's continued involvement in death ritual also shows that death ritual has long been, and continues to be, an instrumental method for ensuring political unity and claims for territorial integrity.

From its inception, the PRC has been involved above the practical and political, and ideological aspects of settling the dead, as evidenced by its establishment of the laws,

organizations, institutions and infrastructure designed to expedite remove of the dead from society and to celebrate socialist ideals. The state's creation of monuments to national leaders and cemeteries for national heroes attests to the symbolic power of the dead. Furthermore, the recent investment in the temple of Huangdi Ling with its very public emphasis on the site as an ancestral birthright to contested territory is evidence of the significance of the dead as powerful symbolic objects used for making claims to the cultural, territorial and even national borders of the People's Republic of China. By establishing a demonstrated birthright to territory the PRC leadership makes claims to Taiwan and clear political statements to both itself and the international community concerning China's national and territorial sovereignty. Interestingly, the CCP public worship at sites such as Huangdi Ling ironically replicate aspects of ancestor worship of the imperial era, particularly that of the late Qing. The difference however is that under the Chinese Communist Party we witness the death of the lineage ancestors (or demonstrated ancestry) and the birth of the national ancestors (imagined, but not demonstrated). The national ancestors belong to all, are inclusive and directed at national, political and territorial integrity.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Excerpts for Chairman Mao's Speech "For the People"**

人总是要死的，但死的意义有不同。中国古时候有个文学家叫做司马迁的说过：“人固有一死，或重于泰山，或轻于鸿毛。”为人民利益而死，就比泰山还重；替法西斯卖力，替剥削人民和压迫人民的人去死，就比鸿毛还轻。张思德同志是为人民利益而死的，他的死是比泰山还要重的。”

“今后我们的队伍里，不管死了谁，不管是炊事员，是战士，只要他是做过一些有益的工作的，我们都要给他送葬，开追悼会。这要成为一个制度。这个方法也要介绍到老百姓那里去。村上的人死了，开个追悼会。用这样的方法，寄托我们的哀思，使整个人民团结起来。

[从“为人民服务”来的话。]

## **Appendix B: China's National Funerary and Interment Laws and Regulations**

### **国家殡葬法规**

#### **殡葬管理暂行条例**

##### **北京市殡葬管理暂行条例**

1996年7月11日北京市第十届人民代表大会常务委员会第二十八次会议

通过

#### **第一章 总则**

**第一条** 为了加强殡葬管理，深化殡葬改革，保护土地资源和节约用地，促

进首都社会主义精神文明建设，根据国家有关法律、法规，结合本市

实际情况，制定本条例。

**第二条** 本市各级人民政府应当加强对殡葬工作的领导，把殡葬工作列入国

民经济和社会发展计划。

第三条 市民政局是本市殡葬管理的主管机关，负责本条例的组织实施。各

区、县民政局负责本区、县的殡葬管理工作。公安、工商行政、城市

规划、房屋土地、卫生、环境卫生、环境保护等管理部门应当按照各

自的职责，做好有关殡葬的管理工作。

第四条 本市对殡葬行业实行统一管理。本市殡葬管理工作坚持实行火葬，

改革土葬，节约殡葬用地，提倡节俭、文明办丧事的方针。

## 第二章 丧事管理

第五条 本市行政区域内，除市人民政府批准的边远山区为土葬改革区以外，

其他地区均为实行火葬的地区。

第六条 火葬场、殡仪馆由市民政局根据实际需要统一规划、设置。

第七条 火葬地区内死者的遗体，一律实行火化。土葬改革区内死者的遗体

应当在当地人民政府指定的区域内深葬。