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A COMPARISON OF MEMORIAL SERVICE TO THE DEAD BETWEEN CHINA AND BELARUS

This article provides general information on the traditions of the memorial service in China and Belarus. Having analyzed the customs of the two countries, the authors came to the conclusion that both countries provide the solemn remembrance before and after the funeral. As for the differences, China's memorial service mainly uses personal condolences and funeral recitation of eulogy to commemorate, while the memorial service in Belarus is mainly led by priests in the church.

Key words: China; Belarus; memorial service.

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СРАВНЕНИЕ ПОМИНАЛЬНЫХ ОБЫЧАЕВ КИТАЯ И БЕЛАРУСИ

В данной статье представлены общие сведения о традициях поминальной службы в Китае и Беларуси. Проанализировав обычаи двух стран, авторы пришли к выводу, что в обеих странах предусмотрено торжественное поминовение до и после похорон. Что касается различий, то в Китае поминальная служба в основном использует личные соболезнования и панегирик в память, в то время как поминальную службу в Беларуси в основном возглавляют священники в церкви.

Ключевые слова: Китай; Беларусь; поминальный обычай.

Introduction. The memorial service is an important activity in the lives of the Chinese and Belarusian people to commemorate the deceased. It reflects the respect, remembrance, and love of the living towards the deceased in different cultural backgrounds. By reminiscing about the deceased, living people gather and unite together, mourn the deceased together, and strengthen their emotional connection with each other.

Main part. 1. The form of Chinese people's memorial service for the deceased.

1.1 Condolence.

An environment of condolence. In China, after a person passes away, urban residents will take dead people's body to a public funeral parlour. After that, people will take the dead people family's living room as a mourning hall. Other family members will display photos of the deceased on one desk in the mourning hall. They will light candles, place food and flowers in front of the portrait. Rural residents also decorate mourning halls, where place the bodies of the deceased in ice coffins. The ice coffins are located in the middle position at the back of the living room, separated by curtains, and a table is placed in front of the coffins. Photos of the deceased are also placed on the table, and paper figures and cranes are placed on both sides of the table as decorations.

Condolence behavior. The relatives and friends of the deceased come home to offer condolences. When they arrive at the deceased people's home, someone leads them to the mourning hall to pay homage to the portrait of the deceased. At this point, someone will light three incense sticks and hand them to the mourner. The mourners insert incense into the bowl filled with sand on the altar, and then stand at the table, bowing three times to the portrait of the deceased. In rural mourning halls, relatives who offer condolences need to kowtow to the deceased three times. During the process of bowing or kowtowing, the child of the deceased needs to accompany and salute.

At the end of the salute, the mourner expresses condolences to the deceased's relatives, usually parents, spouses, or children, inquiring about the cause of the deceased person's illness and the process of death, recalling their virtues, and comforting their relatives.

1.2 Memorial service during funeral.

The official memorial service for the deceased in China is delivered by a dedicated person at the funeral. In rural areas, condolences are

generally expressed by the leaders of the village committee. If they were urban residents, the eulogy is generally delivered by the leader of the unit where the deceased worked during their lifetime. If they travelled a lot and didn't have a permanent house, the eulogy is read by a friend of the deceased during their lifetime.

A eulogy usually reviews the life of the deceased, pointing out their contributions to work, virtues, and expressing regret for their passing.

1.3 Remembrance ceremony.

In rural China, the relatives of the deceased have specific commemorative rituals for the deceased. For example, the 49 days after death are a very important time for remembrance. On a seven-day basis, on the last day of each seven-day period, the family members of the deceased worship and remember the deceased by burning paper money, inviting monks or witches to perform rituals, and other means.

On the first, second, and third anniversary of the deceased person's death, relatives of the deceased will also use methods such as going to the grave to burn coins to commemorate them. Especially on the third anniversary, the relatives and friends of the deceased will participate in the memorial ceremony, and there will be speeches from relatives to recall the life and virtues of the deceased, and once again express gratitude to the relatives and friends who came to attend the memorial. After the third anniversary of the death, all commemorative ceremonies regarding the deceased have officially come to an end.

2. The memorial service in Belarus.

2.1 Memorial environment in Church.

Belarus is quite religious (about 73 % of people consider themselves Orthodox), so the ceremony of commemorating the dead most often takes place in the presence of a priest and in a church [1].

In the Orthodox Church, all important stages of a person's life are sanctified by prayer. Of course, this also applies to the transition of the human soul from temporary life to eternity. It is customary to perform a funeral service for a person once — in church. If for some reason this is impossible, then it is done at home or in a cemetery. Only the clergyman of the nearest church parish can perform a funeral service. Reading the Psalter is especially important in the first time after death: it gives comfort to both the soul of the deceased and his relatives.

The priest performs the funeral service. Most prayers are not read, but sung, hence the name (the literal meaning of the Russian word “отпевание” can be perceived as “the process of singing for a person”). The purpose of this ritual is to guide a person’s soul into another world. The process is called to free the soul from sins, cleanse it from corruption, so that it appears pure and humble before God. The rite consists of reading and singing poems and canons. The reading of the Apostle and the Gospel is also carried out. The chants talk about a person’s earthly journey. It is reported that he was once expelled from paradise for violating the commandments. But since man was created in the image and likeness of his Creator, the Church, together with those present, pray for forgiveness of his earthly sins. They pray to take the soul back to heaven, to give hope for posthumous forgiveness of sins. People who attend the ceremony must pray with the priest. So, they call on God to help the soul of the deceased.

During prayer, those present try to repeat the prayer after the priest, cross themselves, mentally forgive the deceased’s offenses and stand up for his Kingdom of Heaven. While singing “Come, we will give the last kiss, brothers, to the deceased,” relatives and friends, taking turns approaching the coffin, kiss the aureole on the forehead of the deceased and the icon on his chest [2]. After farewell, the icon is removed and taken home to pray in front of it. Following the reading of the prayer of permission, its text is placed in the right hand of the deceased and the body is completely covered with a veil. The priest sprinkles earth on top of it in a cross-shaped motion, then the coffin is closed with a lid and delivered to the burial place.

The procession may make several stops and pray for the soul of the deceased. The quantity is selected individually. Upon arrival at the cemetery, the coffin is lowered into the grave. The feet of the deceased should face east. A Cross is installed in the place where they are located, and subsequently a monument can be erected. The grave is covered with earth. Everyone can throw a handful of earth and say goodbye to a person forever.

2.2 Remembrance ceremonies.

Calendar commemorations occupy an important place in the structure of traditional funeral rites of Belarusians. This is especially true for commemorating the dead ancestors in the spring — at Easter and Radunitsa. According to the Orthodox traditions, Easter is celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon of spring. Radunitsa is celebrated on the 9th day after Easter.

In the calendar memorial cycle, an important place occupies a ritual of honoring deceased ancestors — Dedy. This is the one of the most archaic and distinctive traditions, widespread among Belarusians and partly Ukrainians [3, p. 147]. The ceremony itself consists of a funeral feast, which is held at home. According to popular belief, these days the souls of deceased ancestors descend to earth to see how they are venerated, and come to their homes for funeral services meal [4, p. 296].

2.3 The memorial ceremony of non-religious people.

There're quite a lot of people who do not consider themselves to be part of the Orthodox religion and during their lifetime are atheistic. Such individuals also provide the memorial services.

Mostly, during his or her lifetime, a non-Orthodox person gives instructions on how to bury him (mostly cremation is preferred). Relatives and friends of the deceased say goodbye to him in the ritual hall. A cross is not placed on the grave (only at the request of relatives); the monument should also be very laconic, without a cross engraved on it.

During the formation of secular foundations, the concept of “civil funeral service” appeared in society. This event is not a church event, and is rather of a mass nature. As a rule, relatives organize such farewells when the deceased was a popular person and the number of people wishing to bid farewell to him was large.

The place for holding the funeral meeting is the choice of relatives. Most often, the ritual ceremony takes place in the funeral hall of a crematorium or morgue: it is more familiar and simpler. But sometimes, fulfilling the will of the deceased or of their own accord, relatives choose less standard locations: a favourite home, a cinema, an exhibition hall. The latter options are acceptable if the deceased was an actor or artist.

The scenario for holding a civil ceremony is standard. The coffin with the deceased is brought into the room, those who come come up to say goodbye to the deceased, express condolences to the relatives, and lay flowers and wreaths. After the ceremony, all participants go to the cemetery; usually the funeral service takes place on the day of the funeral.

The details of the ritual ceremony are discussed with the master of ceremonies of the chosen ritual service; much depends on the profession, status, and age of the deceased. Often a microphone is installed in the hall, and those gathered can express condolences and say a few good words about the deceased.

3. Comparison between China and Belarus memorial service: the common ground and difference.

3.1 The common ground: remembrance and mourning before and after the funeral.

By comparing the forms of remembrance between China and Belarus, we noticed a commonality between them, which is the pre-funeral remembrance. Whether in religious or private settings, collective mourning before funerals is a very important form of remembrance. This kind of public remembrance is a confirmation and recognition of the social status and social identity of the deceased.

This formal form of commemoration and mourning, equivalent to official forms, conveys social and collective recognition of the deceased individuals, including praise for the deceased's virtues, achievements, social responsibility, family responsibility, etc. during their lifetime. It comforts the deceased and encourages the living to inherit these good qualities, as each one receives sincere gratitude and friendly remembrance. Public contemplation is equivalent to a grand guiding ceremony of social spirit. It means that communities and families will not forget the contributions each person has made to their families and society. At the same time, with the help of this important ceremony, everyone around the interpersonal circle of the deceased is united. People reminisce together, comfort each other, understand each other, their emotional connections become closer, and their relationships become friendlier.

Also, after the funeral ceremony itself both Chinese and Belarusian have the remembrance ceremonies in different time periods.

3.2 The differences.

Of course, there're some differences in the remembrance of the deceased between China and Belarus.

3.2.1 Different reminiscing leaders and location.

China's memorial service mainly uses personal condolences from families and eulogies read at funerals to commemorate; the memorial service in Belarus is mainly led by priests in the church.

China's memorial service is dominated by families and communities, with the main locations being at home and funeral homes; the memorial service appears as a program for funerals. The memorial service in Belarus is mainly led by religious organizations — the church; the

form of memorial meetings has a single functionality; the location of the memorial service is mainly in the church, but also in the places chosen by families and sometimes cemeteries.

3.2.2 Different frequency of commemorative activities and ceremonies.

China has diversified ways of reminiscing, and attaches great importance to the ceremony and duration of reminiscing. The reminiscing ceremony has stages and periodicity. The Belarusian way of reminiscing is less diversified and includes several widespread religious holidays, such as Easter, Radunitsa and Dedy.

Another difference is that community remembrance in China is accomplished through public speeches by community leaders, mainly summarizing and evaluating the public services and image of the deceased. The remembrance in Belarus is mainly completed by the priests of the church, and its form is mainly chanting religious hymns and praying. This difference is mainly due to the fact that the behavioral norms of most Chinese people follow Confucianism, and the essence of commemorative etiquette is to inherit Confucianism, which values etiquette. In addition, due to the religious pluralism in China, apart from the integration of folk beliefs such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, no religion has gained a transcendent status in the collective life of ordinary Chinese people, and people place greater emphasis on collective evaluation of individuals. As the management organization of group life, the evaluation of the community office to the dead represents the collective evaluation to the dead. The community leader delivered a speech, essentially representing the attitude of the community towards the deceased.

However, the main ethnic groups in Belarus are Belarusian and Russian nationalities, and the majority of people believe in Eastern Orthodoxy, so the church is very important in people's lives. Most Belarusian attach great importance to the role of the church and pastors in memorial ceremonies. In the church, pastors lead the ritual of remembrance for the deceased, which also demonstrates the collective expression of affirmation and recognition towards individuals through religious remembrance.

Conclusion. The memorial service, whether in China or Belarus, serves as a profound expression of respect and remembrance for the

deceased. While China emphasizes communal gatherings and diverse rituals, Belarus leans towards religious ceremonies led by priests. Despite these differences, both cultures share the common goal of honoring the departed and fostering community unity. Whether through familial traditions or religious practices, the memorial service stands as a poignant reminder of our enduring connections to the past and the importance of collective remembrance.

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