Hmong China History: Funeral Practice of the Chinese Hmong
Cindy Yang, Kelly Wonder, and Ezra Zeitler
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

Background

- Eight female UWEC students, including myself, during their Freshman year discovered the common interest of knowing more about our self identity and the Hmong that reside in southern China.
- In the summer of 2012, we, along with two faculty members traveled to Southern China for an intensive 3-week field study/experience in 17 different Hmong villages.
- My research focused on how significant events are marked or celebrated, who participates in them, how and where.

Methodology

- We visited 17 different Hmong Villages located in the Yunnan Province.
- Participants were interviewed about their traditional, spiritual, and ritual knowledge of significant events and how they are celebrated.
- Because of certain language barriers and time, I narrowed my topic down and focused on the Funeral practices of the Hmong.

Findings

- Funerals used to last a week long, but because of time consumption and the availability of family and friends, they are now shortened to three or four days (Funeral Wise 2011). A resident of the 13th Village stated that because of financial issues and time, funerals are also now only three or four days.
- A mouth organ instrument known as the "qeej" plays a crucial role in funerals by communicating with the spirit world and providing a path between the two worlds. The qeej is accompanied by the drum that keeps and guides the qeej player to be on track with the songs (Falk 2004). Multiple villages agreed that the qeej plays and still plays an important role in the funeral process, along with animals.
- Y. Xyooj of Kunming stated that cows/oxen, pigs, and roosters are sacrificed so that guests who attend the funeral have meals to eat. Cows/oxen are valuable so more than not, they are substituted with pigs unless the family has money to afford cows/oxen.
- A resident from Yi Ke De mentioned that funerals are held within the deceased’s home, because that is where the deceased lived.
- Y. Xyooj explained to me that day one involves washing the corpse from top to bottom and dressing him/her in hemp clothing so his/her ancestors will be able to recognize him/her. The qeej player plays the first song known as "Qhuab Kev," meaning "Opening of the Way." The second song played is called "Qeej Tu Siah," meaning "Song of Expiring Life."

Findings Continued

- He said day two is a mourning day for family and friends and didn’t mention anything about day three.
- Lastly, he stated that day four, usually the last day of the funeral, is where the corpse is taken out of the home to be buried. One last song is played by the qeej player before the corpse leaves the home.
- Gold paper money is burned before the burial so the deceased will have money to use in the spirit world (Falk 2004). When I asked L. Xyooj about burning paper for money, he said that some people still do this, but it is no longer common.
- Y. Xyooj also mentioned that the qeej and drum are not present at the burial site because the last song that was played before leaving the home meant the departure of the deceased and instruments.

Discussion

- Funerals in China were similar to the funerals in the United States. Because of animals, paper money, the qeej, and the drum are important and crucial for funerals in America, the data found states that these are important as well.
- Even though they are similar, I did find that here in America, the song "Qeej Tu Siah" is played first before the song, "Qhuab Kev." I discussed this matter with an elder in the United States and she said that because the first song is meant to show/realmize that the deceased is really deceased before showing him/her the way back to his/her ancestors.
- Although these findings tell me that over the years, the way that funerals are done have kept consistent.
- There are several possible reasons for these findings:
  - Language barriers with different dialects
  - Government modernization
  - This research was done on the Hmong in the Yunnan Province.

References


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