



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.
- Qualitative interviews and observations was conducted and participants were asked the following:
 - How long is a typical funeral?
 - How does your village perform a funeral?
 - What happens on each day of the funeral?
 - Do you still use the qeej and animals as a part of the funeral? Why do you sacrifice animals?
 - What do the songs that the qeej plays mean?
 - Where are funerals typically held?

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 “Showing/Opening the Way. The second song played is called “Qeej Tu Siav,” meaning “Song of Expiring Life.”



Left to right: Ezra Zeitler, Becky Vang, Kelly Wonder, Denise Lee, Chee Yang, Choua Xiong, Nou Vue, See Yang, Cindy Yang, Crystal Vang, in Lijiang, Yunnan Province, China.



Tombstones can be found in gardens of the country sides to hills and land next to roads.



Traditional altars that are made inside homes and hung on one side of the wall in the home.



A cemetery that was built for people who served in the Military.

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 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 Siav” 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/realize 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.
- Due to the fact that when associating with the Hmong, their language has a strong Chinese accent to their Hmong that makes it harder for me to understand them.
- With government modernization, many Hmong villages are busy with agriculture and are spending less time at home.
- Because only the Hmong in the Yunnan Province was researched, it does not account for other Hmong living in different Provinces.

References

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