Dying socialist in capitalist Shanghai: ritual, governance, and subject formation in urban China's modern funeral industry

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DYING SOCIALIST IN CAPITALIST SHANGHAI:
RITUAL, GOVERNANCE, AND SUBJECT FORMATION IN
URBAN CHINA’S MODERN FUNERAL INDUSTRY

by

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my parents:

Szu-chi Liu (劉思起) and Tsui-Chuan Liu (劉翠娟)

for their love and support.
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Without Robert Weller, this dissertation would not be possible. I am very fortunate to have had such a great mind to be my mentor, supervisor, and friend throughout my doctoral training and beyond. Working with him has been one of the best things that has happened in my life. His intelligence and warmth have been crucial for both my academic and personal life. I also would like to thank Charles Lindholm whose expertise in psychological anthropology and good humor have opened up another set of doors for me. I am grateful for his patience in commenting on my work, correcting my English, and for his overall enthusiasm for my research. Kimberly Arkin’s critical eye for argument and theory have played an essential role in shaping this project right from the very beginning and have been crucial for me in finding the arc that would allow me to complete the writing of this dissertation. Meanwhile, her friendship and support has helped me to get through some dark moments in my life. I would also like to thank Robert Hefner, the chair of my committee, whose succinct and vital comments on my work in general have helped me greatly throughout my graduate training and in particular have challenged me to hone the key concepts I work with here. Finally, Donald J Hatfield, my outside reader and friend spent time on commenting my dissertation above and well beyond what an outside reader would normally be expected to do. His creative remarks and our occasional chats over beers were some of the most fun moments I had during the final stages of my writing.
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explains why and how urban Shanghainese are primarily commemorated in death as model socialist citizens despite the rise of individualism, the resurgence of religion, and current government opposition to socialist civil funerals since market reforms initiated in 1978. The study draws evidence from archival materials, interviews, and participant observation fieldwork between June 2010 and January 2012 (including attendance at over 75 funerals). The Chinese Communist Party’s original funeral reforms, especially the promotion of socialist funerals, aimed at eliminating religious, affective, and relational ideas of self through the removal of “superstitious” elements, ritualized and externalized grief and mourning, and all horizontal ties among its citizens. The dead were thus envisioned as undifferentiated socialist subject-citizens directly tied to the party-state in socialist funerals.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the state began to discourage socialist funerals, while marketizing all state funeral parlors. Shanghai state
funeral parlors thus started to pursue “personalized” funerals commemorating the deceased as individuals. However, despite such moves, the socialist funeral has become the dominant form of commemoration. The dissertation argues that when death became a profit-making business, the government lost its moral capacity to dominate the subject formation of the dead. Shanghai people saw state parlors' effort to promote personalized funerals as simply another instance of profiteering. “Dying socialist” became a critique of the neoliberal regime, momentarily de-naturalizing the capitalist reality of Shanghai life.

Meanwhile, the rise of semi-legal private funeral brokers mediating between the bereaved and state funeral parlors further pushed death into a moral vacuum. Simultaneously, these brokers also provided a new platform for the inclusion of traditional and religious funeral elements within socialist civil funerals. The thesis ends by considering two forms of socialist funerals—popular religious/Buddhist and Protestant versions—and their respective subject formation. The former seeks to add new frames alongside the socialist frame, while the latter seeks to supplant the socialist frame with an entirely different narrative. The first is pluralist and accommodative. The second is revolutionary, striving for a singular Protestant subjectivity to supplant the old socialist one.
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CHAPTER 1       INTRODUCTION

Before it moved to its current location, the restaurant “Prosperity” was originally located directly across the street from the Longhua Cemetery of Revolutionary Martyrs (longhua lieshi lingyuan 龍華烈士陵園) in Shanghai.¹ This cemetery is where the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) veteran soldiers are buried and commemorated. Next to this martyrs’ cemetery is Longhua Temple (longhua si 龍華寺)—the largest and one of the four most famous ancient Buddhist temples in Shanghai.² While the location of Prosperity generally attracted much foot traffic of people passing by due to the popularity of the Temple, for some reason all prior businesses to open on that particular spot had failed. After the owners of Prosperity took over the spot from previous shop owner, they decided to open a restaurant that targeted funeral banquets. Funeral banquets are known as “doufufan” (豆腐飯) in Shanghai. This is because one of the must-have dishes in such banquets is thick tofu soup. With roughly 10 million people living in Shanghai Proper,³ there are only three city funeral parlors (binyiguăn 殯儀館): Baoxin (寶興), Longhua (龍華) and Yishan (益善) Funeral Parlors. All of them are administratively located under the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau. Having a relationship with one of these three should ensure an easy, steady stream of business. Prosperity's decision to take up the funeral

¹ “Prosperity” is a pseudonym. For more regarding the anonymity of my research subjects, please see footnote 4 in this chapter.
² The other three are Yufo si (玉佛寺), Jing’an si (靜安寺), and Zhenru si (真如寺).
³ As in 2014, the Shanghai Proper includes eight districts. They are Huangpu (黃浦), Xuhui (徐匯), Changning (長寧), Jing’an (靜安), Putuo (普陀), Zhabei (閘北), Hongkou (虹口), and Yangpu (楊浦)
banquet business was exactly in part because its location placed it next to Longhua Temple and only about a ten minute drive from Longhua Funeral Parlor. It was also in part because another funeral banquet restaurant had already been doing quite well nearby. They figured that Prosperity’s business should be able to quickly succeed. However, for whatever reason, once Prosperity opened up their business, like all the other businesses in that same place before them it simply wouldn't take off.

It is a common practice for restaurants in Shanghai to have a Laughing Buddha (xiaomianfo 笑面佛) or Wealth God (caishenye 財神爺) as their patron god. Prosperity, too, had a shrine for the Laughing Buddha in the beginning as well. However, since Prosperity’s business did not take off, the bosses switched to worshiping Guanyin (觀音), the Bodhisattva of Compassion instead. This Bodhisattva, too, unfortunately, failed to deliver the prosperity the owners had hoped for. Finally, running out of options, they decided to hire a fengshui master to take a look at the restaurant to see if there was anything that could be done to save it. The fengshui master came and almost immediately told the owners that Prosperity’s problem lay in having all of the spirits in the Longhua Cemetery of Revolutionary Martyrs just across the street. It also was not just about having general spirits to deal with; either Guanyin or the Laughing Buddha could have held those back. These spirits, however, were one and all Communist Party members and therefore must have been atheists. As such, regular gods or goddesses simply would not work. The communist spirits were not afraid of “superstitious” trickery. The only way to control these martyr-spirits was to have someone that they were actually afraid of. As a result, the only possible solution was to have the Great Proletarian Leader, Mao Zedong
himself, the Chairman of their Party, to command them. Prosperity promptly replaced Guanyin with Chairman Mao in their shrine and their business boomed.

Prosperity's business was so good that they later had to move to another location with more space. In its current location, the Mao shrine is located prominently in the center of the front entryway. Most of its customers, however, come in through the back door because it connected directly to the nearby bus parking lot. Although the new location is far away from the martyrs’ cemetery, Prosperity not only kept Mao’s shrine in the restaurant, but expanded on the theme as well. When I visited Prosperity during my fieldwork, one of the long walls of the main dining area was decorated with the full text of one of Mao's most famous speeches, “Serve the People” (weirenminfuwu 為人民服務). This speech was painted in beautiful black calligraphy on the white wall.

Serve the People is not only one of the most important texts that defines what being a model socialist means, but also is the first text under the CCP that asked Chinese people to have “memorial meetings” (zhuidaohui 追悼會). Contemporary memorial meetings in Shanghai are a kind of socialist civil funeral. While the Republican Nationalist government established memorial meetings earlier, the CCP modified them significantly under their rule. In these memorial meetings, everyone is memorialized as model socialist citizens through two highly stylized speeches: a “memorial speech” (daoci 悼詞), given by the deceased’s work unit, and a “thank you speech” (daxieci 答謝詞), given by the chief mourner. I will analyze socialist memorial meetings in Chapter 7.

Since switching to the worship of Chairman Mao, Prosperity began to throw an annual banquet on the day of Mao’s birth. Celebrating a deity’s birthday is a common
practice in Chinese popular religion (minjian zongjiao 民間宗教). The main people who Prosperity’s boss invited to the banquet were funeral brokers (binzang zhongjie 殯葬中介) instead of “state practitioners”—a term I use to describe people who work in state funeral parlors. Funeral brokers are private entrepreneurs who mediate between the bereaved and state practitioners. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, however, this relationship is complicated as the bereaved can also arrange their funerals directly through the state parlors. Funeral brokers must thus both cooperate with and compete against these same parlors. In fact, funeral brokers were only recently legalized in Shanghai, and Shanghai is one of only four jurisdictions in China to have done so. This annual banquet at Prosperity was meant to be a celebration of Prosperity’s host God, Chairman Mao, and also a thank you banquet for funeral brokers for introducing the bereaved to their restaurant for their funeral banquets.

The story of Prosperity's intriguing combination of communism and “superstition,” of atheist Mao as the only God able to control his atheist, martyred ghost followers, and of a capitalist banquet business combined with socialist civil funerals was heaven for me as an anthropologist. I once asked a funeral broker if he found that it made sense to have Chairman Mao in a funeral banquet restaurant. He told me that just as Chinese carpenters worship Lu Ban (魯班, 507-440 BCE) as their occupational patron god since he invented several carpenter crafts, it makes sense to have a funeral banquet restaurant that worships Mao because Mao invented the memorial meeting. While his statement about Mao “inventing” memorial meetings was not entirely correct, it did point out the deep relationship between Mao, his Serve the People speech, and memorial
meetings in the contemporary Chinese funeral industry and in contemporary urban death rituals.

I suggest in this dissertation that Prosperity's unique situation stems directly from contemporary Shanghai's particular conglomeration of changing political economic tensions in the funeral industry and agentive interactions between state parlors, private funeral brokers, and the bereaved. This dissertation, based on participant observation fieldwork and extensive interviews, explores this particular conglomeration, its related ethical sources and their respective processes of subject formation through changing funeral rituals. Finding such a conglomeration, complete with the ongoing critical role socialist memorial meetings play in it, is particularly intriguing because it was not at all what I had expected to find in contemporary urban Shanghai funerals.

Before I started my fieldwork, I had expected to find and follow two trends in death rituals in urban Shanghai: the emergence of personalized funerals and the revival of traditional Han Chinese funerals. The first expectation, for the emergence of personalized funerals, was based on a commonly observed phenomenon all over China—the rise of an individualized self as China moved away from high socialism and from a planned to a market economy (or what Deng Xiaoping called a “socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics”). Scholars have approached this process through a wide variety of theoretical angles. Some focus on individualization (Yan 2009), some focus on globalization and modernization (Link et al. 2002), and still others focus on privatizing processes (Hoffman 2006; Li and Ong 2008). Under these theoretical frameworks, scholars have explored a wide variety of topics ranging from conjugal units (Yan Y.
2003), sexual cultures (Farrer 2002), televised love and homosexuality (Rofel 2007), talent centers (Hoffman 2006), and utilitarian individual networks (“guanxi”) (Kipnis 1997; Yan 1996; Yang 1994). While these scholars differ as to whether this phenomenon should be interpreted as a triumph of individualism, globalization, and capitalism; as a loss of morality; or as a growing commensurability between neoliberal subjectivity and socialist-authoritarian states, there is a general consensus that a concept of an individualized, modern, or privatizing self has emerged in China.

Moreover, scholarly works in Euro-American arenas have long identified a close relationship between modernity, individualism, and an individualized self (Bellah et al. 1985; Giddens 1991; Taylor 1989). This kind of individualized self is often expressed through the desire and pursuit of sincerity or authenticity or both (Anton 2001; Charles Lindholm 2008; Martin 1997; Seligman et al. 2008; Trilling 1972). Whether or not a person needs to be envisioned as some kind of autonomous and independent individual, the effort to be who they are and act accordingly is what matters here. It is the attempt to match the internal state of being and thinking to external behaviors that creates an “authentic” and “sincere” self. In this sense, I assumed that I would find increasing numbers of personalized funerals in urban Shanghai as more Chinese come to want a commemoration of their beloved as they were while they were alive. At the very least, I thought that I could find a strong desire for, if not actual moves toward, personalization and de-ritualization of funerals even if the number of personalized funerals were low.

My second expectation, which appears almost counter-intuitive to the first, was to see the ongoing re-emergence of folk death ritual as had been commonly practiced
among Han Chinese. Scholars have identified the formation of a standardized set of folk funeral elements at least since late imperial China even though they disagree as to whether correct thinking (orthodoxy) or correct performance (orthopraxy) was the major mechanism for standardization (Katz 2007; Rawski 1988; Sutton 2007; Szonyi 2007; Watson 1988a). One key characteristic of this standardized set of folk death ritual is ritualized wailing and weeping (Chau 2004; Johnson 1988; Oxfeld 2010; Stafford 2000; Standaert 2011; Watson 1982). In such a funeral, the bereaved construct the deceased as embedded in ancestor-descendant ties and as a continuing part of reciprocal relationships between the living and the dead. Through funerary rites and ancestor worship, the bereaved transform dead bodies into a symbol for the lineage’s fertility or as a segment of an eternal patriline at the end of life (Ahern 1973; Baker 1979; Brook 1989; Cohen 1976; Fei 1946; Freedman 1965; Fried 1953; Hsu 1971; Jordan 1972). In other words, traditional folk death ritual constructs religious and relational kinds of self.

As it turned out, however, and in spite of all of the literature to the contrary, both of these expectations (increasing prevalence of personalized and of folk funerals) were wrong. What I found in my fieldwork on urban Shanghai death ritual was that no matter whether the deceased was a humble retired worker, a petty capitalist, a university president, or a government official, they all were commemorated in memorial meetings. Every deceased person was lauded for their contributions to constructing the socialist Chinese state through verbal narrations of their employment history no matter how far the content of that work might appear to be from constructing socialism. The significance of socialism in memorial meetings is like the significance of Chairman Mao at Prosperity. I
attended over 75 full funerals and many more in part between June 2010 and January 2011. All of them had memorial meetings as the core of their funerary rites. Personalized funerals and their associated individualized expression of grief and mourning only occurred when the death was an abnormal one (such as the death of a young child) or when the deceased was some kind of “cultural celebrity” (e.g., a film director). Traces of traditional Han Chinese funerals could indeed be observed, especially in Buddhist or popular religious versions of these memorial meetings, but these were really segregated, peripheral traces rather than main events. In other words, the kind of self articulated in contemporary Shanghai funerals is the following combination: 1) the absence of personalized selves and the repression of expressing emotions, 2) the central significance of socialist selves through memorial meetings, and 3) the marginality of religious and relational selves.

To give some idea of what memorial meetings look like, I am going to describe the first three funerals I attended after I started fieldwork. The very first one I attended was the funeral of a retired government official. This memorial meeting was held in the second largest memorial meeting hall of “Huangpu Funeral Parlor” with about three hundred mourners. This included the head of the Parlor as well as the head of the Shanghai Funeral and Interment Service Center (FIS) since the deceased was affiliated with the Civil Affairs Bureau, which supervises the funeral industry.  

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4 I did participant observation in all three city funeral parlors and several suburban funeral parlors with one of them as my primary site. In order to keep specific places and people anonymous, when I refer to stories about particular persons or places I locate all of the different funeral parlors the stories take place within as “Huangpu Funeral Parlor” throughout my dissertation. In order to also give a clear picture of the differences between these, however, I use their real names.
At this funeral, the work unit representative’s speech narrated the deceased's life history. This included when and where the deceased was born and when, where, and how he had died as well as a chronological review of the deceased’s work history and the socialist ethics (such as selflessness and frugality) that the deceased had embodied. The son of the deceased then gave a thank you speech that sounded very much like the memorial speech. Although the socialist narratives seemed odd to my ears since it reminded me of the kind of speeches heard in Taiwan under martial law, it was not hard for me to understand having this kind of speech for a government official in China.

The second memorial meeting I attended, which was actually on the same day as my first, was for a sixty-year-old man. He was an ordinary retired worker. His funeral was in one of the smaller memorial meeting halls and there were about thirty attendees. The representative of the deceased’s work unit was a chubby woman in her forties or fifties. She used a plain, rather monotone voice to read the memorial speech without any emotion from a piece of paper. Then the daughter went up to give a thank you speech. She started thanking the leaders of her father’s work unit. And then she gave a thank you speech that also sounded identical to the memorial speech, just like the first memorial meeting I attended. Her voice was also flat and emotionless. Since I stood behind her (I was attending with a state practitioner), I saw that her speech was a pre-printed speech and that she had simply filled in the blanks on the paper. In the end of her thank you

when I describe public knowledge about funeral parlors, for example, that the two centrally located city funeral parlors in Shanghai are Longhua and Baoxin. As a result, my description of Hunagpu is inconsistent. For example, sometimes Hunagpu has cremators on site but sometimes Huangpu does not. This was because a new urban policy of the Shanghai government moved the cremators of the two city funeral parlors (Longhua and Baoxin) to the third one (Yishan). Otherwise, in China, funeral parlors and crematoriums are synonymous.
speech, she switched from talking to the audience about her father to talking directly to her father. I later found out that this is again a standard practice for thank you speeches. She said, “Father, how could you leave so suddenly?” At this moment, her voice suddenly started to break down a little bit. Though tears ran down her face, she again repressed them and finished up reading her thank you speech. I looked at my watch. It was 2:50 pm—only 10 minutes after we had started.

Several days later, I went to my third memorial meeting. The deceased was an old lady who died in her eighties. She was a housewife for her whole life. A representative from her Residential Committee (juweihui 居委會) gave a memorial speech. The Residential Committee is the lowest level grassroots Party organization in urban China that ties individuals directly to the state. Again, she was commemorated as a model socialist citizen in her memorial meeting in both the memorial speech and the thank you speech even though, like the deceased in the second memorial meeting, she was just an ordinary person. It was then that I started to see not only the format of the memorial meeting being repeated, but also the significance of socialism in commemorating a person regardless of her or his background. These findings surprised me even more once I realized that the CCP has been preventing people, especially government officials and Party members, from having socialist civil funerals since shortly after the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Meanwhile, since the start of the economic reforms, Shanghai state funeral parlors have promoted personalized funerals. I tackle these issues particularly in Chapter 6.
As a whole, this dissertation tackles *how* and *why* people die socialist in Shanghai after three decades of embracing market economy and *how* seemingly incompatible ideas of self co-exist such that the deceased is commemorated as a proper socialist citizen first and as a religious and/or relational subject second. In tackling this overarching question, I also explore the political economic structure of death ritual and the funeral industry that supports this particular conglomeration of dying socialist, religious, and relational. These structural and governing aspects are especially important for understanding the performance of these socialist civil rituals within a state monopolized, profit making institution (funeral parlors) in capitalist Shanghai where the socialist self is made the core of the self of the commemorated dead.  

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**Death Ritual as a Site of Subject Formation**

Anthropologists have long treated death ritual as something productive. For example, death ritual restores the normal flow of community life that was interrupted by death (cf. Durkheim 1965 [1912]); funerals help individuals to deal with psychological loss or fears associated with death (cf. Becker 1973; Malinowski 1948); funerals, as a rite of passage, transform the participants from one stage to the next (Turner 1969; Van Gennep 1960); and death ritual can be understood as a moral (social) obligation to attend to decaying biological bodies (Bloch and Perry 1982; Hertz 1960; Metcalf and Huntington 1979; 2000; Suzuki 2000). My research here explores one specific aspect of

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5 Before I move on, I want to make it clear that when I describe Shanghai as capitalist, this does not mean that I see no difference between capitalism in liberal-democratic societies and in socialist-authoritarian societies. My intention here is rather to articulate the commonly accepted incompatibility between socialism and capitalism and the irony of the reality.
the societal obligation to attend (to) dead bodies. That is, how do the living create new identities for a dead person and what does this mean in its larger social context?

Recognizing the co-existence of the world of the living and that of the dead has meant that the identities of a subject continue to exist even after the biological end of life. Radcliffe-Brown (1930) calls this the “social personality” of the dead. In this sense, when a subject dies and becomes a dead body that is going to decay, it needs to acquire a new identification posthumously in socially and culturally recognizable ways. To put it in Hertz’s terms, death ritual is the society’s moral obligation to make decaying dead bodies culturally appropriate beings. In other words, decaying dead bodies force the living to re-conceptualize their perceptions about the dead both in terms of who the dead were before and who the dead should be afterward. In China studies, ritual surrounding death have long been a key site to understand what being Chinese means considering the wide variety of religious ritual among various groups of people (and especially in relation to regional and class differences) (cf. Freedman 1974; Wolf 1974)

Yet, surprisingly, the productive nature of ritual in constructing the identities of the dead (and the living through the dead) has been largely absent in contemporary studies of subject formation. To simplify what is actually a very diverse set of research here, I think that there are generally two dominant approaches to the study of subject formation in anthropology. The first emphasizes how subjects are products of the interaction between (more or less) innate individual psyches (and their agentive action) and external political and economic structures (cf. Biehl, Good, and Kleinman 2007; Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997; Ortner 2005; Parish 2008). These authors tend to define
subjectivity as emotional states of the subject, or to use Raymond Williams’ term, subjectivity consists of “structures of feelings” (Williams 1977). These works often present complicated and multi-layered accounts of the subjective experiences and feelings of subjects as subjects living in a world of “violence, political domination, and social suffering” (Biehl, Good, and Kleinman 2007). Luhrmann points out that such an emphasis stresses “the emotional experience of a political subject” (2006:346, italics are original). The second approach tends to stress how subjects become subjectified (parallel to the ways that an object becomes objectified) as external political and economic structures create subjects accordingly (cf. Ong and Collier 2005; Rabinow and Rose 2006; Rudnyckyj 2010; Yan H. 2003). These authors tend to define subjectivity as “subjectification” (French: “subjectivation”) and their works often present cohesive and at times encompassing accounts of how external forces, governments especially, turn people into governable subjects. The first approach often seeks theoretical inspiration from psychoanalysis or other parts of psychological anthropology and the latter often finds their tools through Michel Foucault and his concepts of biopower and governmentality or other scholars of critical theory.

To some degree, the need to choose such an either-or epistemological position (whether as assumption to start with or as conclusion to end with) is at least partly due to methodological constraints. That is, scholars usually study subjectivity at the intersection between an individual subject and structure (whether or not this subject is individualized and individuated) through either a top-down (subjectification) or bottom up (psychosocial) process. However, neither subjects nor structures are necessarily
homogeneous. Although a psychosocial approach is more likely to leave space for ambiguity and plurality, it still may fall into this epistemological dilemma—the subject is either “empty or not” to begin with. This is not to mention that the shaping processes might be hierarchically top-down or bottom-up sometimes, and at other times various processes might simply exist in competition or juxtaposition.

Sherry Ortner discusses her own engagement with subjectivity with a critical balancing act: “By subjectivity I will mean the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desires, fear, and so forth that animate acting subjects. But I will always mean as well the cultural and social formations that shape, organize, and provoke those modes of affect, thought, and so on” (2005:31). Building on and exploring in detail the second part of Ortner’s definition—“the cultural and social formations that shape, organize, and provoke those modes of affect [and] thought”—this dissertation takes Biehl, Good, and Kleinman’s emphasis on political subjects in understanding subjectivity as its departing point. Specifically, I propose here a methodological shift of focus from examining individual experiences to beginning with a middle ground, ritual, by treating ritual as a productive “rhizome” (Deleuze and Guattari 1980). Robert Weller (2006) in Discovering Nature proposes a theoretical approach to studying the flow of power, ideas, and practices between the global and the local with examples from environmental movements in Taiwan and China. He suggests seeing these “nodes of power” as creative sites where different (yet particular) ideas and practices about environmentalism meet at confluences and are remixed. I suggest that by re-orienting our site of exploration to ritual as a node, we can see subjects created at the intersections where individuals commit themselves to
externalized, conventional, and repetitive acts and where governing power and other normative forces interact with each other.

Consequently, by “subjectivity” here I mean the condition of being a subject as realized and expressed in a ritual node. In this particular rhizome, the living (re)creates new identities of and for the dead. It is in this sense that I propose to study subject formation through death ritual; funerals are where the living actualize their social obligation to attend to the dead. This can simultaneously shed light on the subject formation of the living. Specifically, through exploring the connection between ritual and subjectivity, I argue that it is through the rituals created and enacted in the frictional relationships between state funeral practitioners, private funeral brokers, and the bereaved that the public definition of the self of the deceased is made. While this does not replace a psychosocial understanding of subjectivity, this shift does provide a perspective to research plural processes of subject formation, their interaction, their potential for conflict, and the ambiguity of what being a subject means.

Doing Fieldwork on Death in Urban China

Despite the increasing amount of work on the contemporary resurgence of religion in China, we have very little data on contemporary Chinese funerary practices in general and urban death rituals in particular. Many ethnographies of China may have a chapter or a section covering contemporary rural funerals in the post reform era (Chau 2006; Liu 2000; Oxfeld 2010; Siu 1989), but even these short treatments tend to have only a rural focus. We only have very sporadic data on contemporary urban Chinese

To some degree, this lack of data is associated with social scientists’ imagination of what “Chineseness” means. Many simply considered urban death ritual not to be “really” Chinese and therefore not worth studying if we want to understand “Chinese Culture.” A professor in China once asked me why I even wanted to do fieldwork in urban Shanghai if I wanted to study Chinese funerals. He said, why didn't you go to a rural village? In fact, even my funeral professional informants thought the same thing. Many told me that if I wanted to study “(Han) Chinese Funerals,” I should go to the countryside. Some directly told me that there is no “Chinese Culture” in urban Shanghai funerals. Some even told me that if I wanted to study traditional (Han) “Chinese Funerals,” I really should go back to Taiwan to do my research.

However, if we accept that there is no need to assume some kind of essence for Chinese culture, then urban Han Chinese cultural and social practices are just as “Chinese” (or just as “Un-Chinese”) as their rural counterparts. The question of what is (are) the kind(s) of subject that is (are) formed in contemporary urban death ritual would then be just as important (if not more so due to population concentrations) in understanding what being Chinese means today. After all, the CCP has brought about dramatic and rapid changes in handling dead bodies and performing death rituals in urban China. Does this mean that we therefore see different kinds of subjects being constructed through utterly different kinds of ritual?
Furthermore, this insufficiency in the ethnography of death is also at least partly a result of methodological constraints. Finding the dead (and, therefore, the bereaved) was one of the key difficulties that I also faced in conducting deliberate ethnographic research on funerals and death. For a specific focus on death, a traditional village or community study will not work because there is no guarantee of observing death and funerals within a small population at any particular time. This is why the vast majority of anthropological studies on death and funerals in China have been anthropologists who went there to study something else. Then, when a funeral did occur, they wrote about it as a part of their understanding of the larger networks and meanings of social life in that community. Were they to have been thought to be primarily studying death, few people would have wanted them around. Of course, some special groups of people or institutions such as hospices or nursing homes for the elderly might provide access with a higher probability of witnessing death, yet the anthropologist in such a case is likely to be seen herself as evil or immoral because she comes to wait for people to die (unless, that is, her goal is instead to study the process of dying). This is not even to mention the moral and ethical issues of the research itself here.

This is part of the reason that this study necessarily focuses more on the funeral professionals than the bereaved and why I chose funeral parlors as my main field site. While in this choice I lost some access to the complicated networks and meanings of the social life of the deceased and the bereaved, as Clifford Geertz (1973) illustrates in his famous analysis of the death of a Javanese boy, I gained access to a wide variety of funerals that cross class, gender, age, and political hierarchical differences. I saw both
normal and abnormal deaths and their respective funerals. This wide variety provides a spectrum for understanding death ritual in urban Shanghai that details but also goes beyond individual cases.

Most important of all, this focus on funeral professionals opens up the possibility of studying the political economy of death and the death industry as well as the subject formation process of this particular group of people who have long been seen as morally ambiguous in Chinese contexts. To be clear, paid funeral professionals have been crucial in folk death ritual in Chinese societies at least since late imperial times (Watson 1988 b). Yet, this focus on funeral professionals is even more crucial today since individual households and communities no longer handle death in contemporary urban China. The removal of death and dying from domestic spaces and personal experience and its placement in the hands of professional institutions (like hospices, hospitals, nursing homes, and funeral parlors) is not particularly unique to Shanghai. Urbanization and its consequent erasure of death from the social gaze have been observed in many other places as well (for the American case, see Laderman 2003; for the French case, see Aries 1974).

As I mentioned briefly above, “funeral professionals” in Shanghai include “state practitioners” who work in funeral parlors and “funeral brokers” who are private entrepreneurs. While the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau owns all three city funeral parlors, civil affairs bureaus at district levels own their respective suburban funeral parlors. Prior to 1998, the Funeral and Interment Administration (FIA), under the Civil Affairs Bureau, administrated and managed funeral parlors directly. Now the
management of the city funeral parlors has been passed on to the Shanghai Funeral and Interment Service Center (FIS).

Institutionally speaking, funeral parlors and FIS are both kinds of *shiye danwei* (事業單位)—a term that is usually translated as “public institution” or “service organization.” *Shiye danwei*, prior to the Opening Up, would have been categorized as semi-governmental non-profit organizations based on American categorizations (Pearson 2007). However, since the Opening Up, administrating bureaus have asked all *shiye danwei* to become financially independent if not profit making. Funeral parlors are no exception to this. This was why, when I first arrived, I was given the impression that funeral parlors were a kind of state enterprise (*guoying qiye* 國營企業) instead. I will discuss funeral parlors and their marketization in Chapter 4.

Nevertheless, funeral parlors have remained a state monopoly since marketization. To use my informants’ words, this means that state practitioners do not need to “go out to find the dead” since funeral parlors are the only possible destination for dead bodies. In contrast, funeral brokers are “self-employed households or individuals” (*getihu* 個體戶) fully submerged in China’s market economy. They therefore have to go out to find the dead before they arrive at the funeral parlors. Funeral brokers have to persuade the bereaved to hire them as brokers even though these bereaved could just as easily go to a funeral parlor directly instead. I describe how funeral brokers went about finding dead bodies in Chapter 5. In an almost black comedy sense, funeral brokers’ primary task was not that different from mine as an anthropologist doing research—we both follow the dead.
State practitioners in funeral parlors and funeral brokers share a very complicated relationship. They have collaborator, competitor, and governor-governed relations all at the same time. I mentioned their difference here because I started my fieldwork primarily working with state practitioners in funeral parlors without knowing that they were also basically a part of the government beforehand. My first stage of participant observation in Huangpu did not go well from the very first day precisely due to my ignorance of hierarchy in state institutions and office politics. During this time, I mainly sat with state practitioners in the sales department. I sat through countless business meetings with state practitioners to observe how they talked to the bereaved, how they made funeral arrangements and what they thought about the industry, funeral parlors, and urban death ritual. This was also the same time I started to get to know funeral brokers. While I eventually figured out the power issues at play in Huangpu and built rapport with some state practitioners, I never did manage to navigate my way through the interpersonal politics of what was essentially a government bureau fraught with stratified and monetized tensions.  

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6 Ever since I started my fieldwork in Huangpu, I had a nagging recollection of a famous political catch phrase in Taiwan—“a little white rabbit accidentally fell into a jungle.” In 2002, after Chen Shuibian (陳水扁) was elected President of the Republic of China (ROC) in Taiwan for the first time, he invited Zong Caiyi (宗才怡), the then chief accountant of Poway, California to be the Minister of Economic Affairs of the ROC. Zong resigned after only 48 days in power as she could not handle the furious interpellation from legislators. She became the shortest lived minister in the history of the ROC in Taiwan. This record was broken in 2013 when the Minister of National Defense resigned after a mere six days in power. On her resigning statement, she described herself as “a little white rabbit accidentally fell into a jungle.” I do not have any particular opinion about this politician, but I did think that the statement gave people a chance to repeat their prejudices against female politicians. However, eight years later when I desperately tried to find my way in a Shanghai funeral parlor, this joke became my reality. No matter what kind of feminist pride I had, I felt that I was a trapped rabbit in bureaucratic politics where I had no way of knowing about or preparing for in advance.
fieldwork in a state institution definitely made it worse.

I eventually shifted my base of fieldwork to primarily working with funeral brokers after seven months. This was the second stage. In the next twelve months, I worked with funeral brokers from four different companies. I spent most of my time with funeral brokers from Longevity Funeral Ritual Service Company. Among Longevity’s funeral brokers, I especially worked with Chen Ting (the owner of Longevity), Chen Yu (Chen Ting’s younger sister), and Tang An (Chen Yu’s husband). These funeral brokers were my key informants. Working with funeral brokers meant that in addition to sitting through business meetings conducted in their offices, I also followed them to where the bereaved live to observe business meetings. Also, I spent a lot of time attending memorial meetings in the parlors. I helped brokers at Longevity to set up memorial meetings and stood through memorial meetings with them. Some days I even attended three memorial meetings in a row. I also accompanied brokers to take the bereaved to various funeral banquet restaurants after memorial meetings since this was the end of their routine jobs. The bereaved usually did not invite funeral professionals to join in the banquets.

Accompanying funeral brokers in Longevity through their routine work was an important way for me to learn about both the Shanghai funeral industry and death ritual, but I also often found myself learning just as much (if not more) from having lunch with them in their office. While we ate our respective homemade lunch boxes, we exchanged personal stories, stories about particular customers, and gossiped about particular state practitioners in funeral parlors or other funeral brokers.

After changing my field base, I still frequently had to work in funeral parlors and
interact with funeral practitioners since Shanghai people, by law, could only have their funerals in a parlor—they could not just host funerals on the street like people in rural China and other smaller Chinese cities do. Rather than distancing myself from the funeral parlors, as it turned out, this switch helped me to understand them from a very different perspective. I actually came to know more, as a whole, about funeral parlors, their internal and external politics, and their position within the wider Shanghai funeral industry after the switch than prior to it.

Another part of my participant observation fieldwork involved observing religious rituals at temples, at the deceased’s homes, as well as during burial and worship rituals in cemeteries. These religious rituals are either Buddhist or Daoist salvation ceremonies (most of them were Buddhist). I also conducted interviews with Buddhist monks, Daoist priests, and Protestant pastors. I discuss religious variations on the socialist civil funeral in Chapters 8 and 9 specifically.

In addition to these participant observation methods mentioned above, I also conducted ten life history interviews and numerous semi-structured interviews. Three of them were with senior state practitioners who joined funeral parlors prior to the Cultural Revolution. Among these three, two were in Shanghai and one was in Hunan Province. The rest were with state practitioners and funeral brokers. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with scholars, government officials, and industry leaders who were related to funeral governance or the death industry. This included people from private commercial cemeteries (in Shanghai and Hunan), religious organizations (Shanghai), funeral professional associations (Beijing, Shanghai), the Civil Affairs College in Hunan
Provinces, and some funeral parlor directors and brokers from Hunan and Sichuan Provinces.

Finally, I did archival research at the library of the Chinese Funeral and Interment Profession in Shanghai and documented the exhibit contents of the Shanghai Funeral Museum. The writing of Chapters 2 and 3 as well as part of Chapter 4 was based on these primary sources collected in the archive. Most of these sources are internal governmental documents of the Funeral and Interment Administration prior to the Cultural Revolution.

**Chapter Summaries**

My dissertation unpacks the specific co-existence of socialism, religion, and other folk ideas of death and dead bodies through this socialist civil funeral and its variations in urban Shanghai. Part I of the dissertation explores the political economy of death. Part I contains four chapters that respectively explore the history of funeral parlors prior to the Opening Up, funeral parlors since marketization, and the rise of private funeral brokers in Shanghai. I begin in Chapter 2 by laying out the “scope” of funerals, funeral governance, and the death industry under the CCP. Specifically, I argue that funeral governance under the first few years after the immediate take over was aimed at cleaning up dead bodies with an intention to prove the CCP’s capacity to govern (in contrast to the failures of the Japanese-backed and ROC governments). Chapter 3 argues that death became a project of state moral governance prior to the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1978 by analyzing how the Shanghai government nationalized the funeral industry and promoted socialist funeral reforms. These funeral reforms envisioned everyone as undifferentiated
and individualized socialist subject-citizens directly tied to the party-state.

In Chapter 4, I describe how the introduction of a market economy in general and China’s preparation for its entry into the WTO in particular commenced another rapid economic restructuring of state funeral parlors in Shanghai. State practitioners transformed their roles from officials responsible for constructing the bereaved as political subjects to entrepreneurs caring about profit and “customer satisfaction.” Over the course of these changes, death has fallen from its position as a moral project to an economic one capable of generating profit for the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau. As a result, the government lost its legitimacy to dominate subject formation.

Moreover, in the middle of such rapid moral and economic transformations of death and the funeral industry, has seen the rise of semi-legal funeral brokers who are situated in a structurally fragile and middle location of the Shanghai death industry. In deploying their “edge ball politics” (meaning pushing the envelope) to gain a piece of the market, they brought about two unintended consequences: they further pushed death into a moral vacuum on the one hand and provided a platform for the partial resurgence of traditional funerals on the other. I describe this dual process of making death both amoral and moral in Chapter 5.

Part II tackles how death could be analyzed as a site of subject formation. It contains four chapters. Each chapter deals with a particular aspect of funerals and the kind of ideas of self that are associated with these. Specifically, I analyze personalized funerals and neoliberal subjectivity in Chapter 6, memorial meetings and socialist subjectivity in Chapter 7, religious variations (Buddhist and folk funeral versions) of
memorial meetings and religious as well as relational subjectivity in Chapter 8, and in Chapter 9, Protestant variations of memorial meeting and Protestant subjectivity.

Chapter 6 describes funeral parlors’ efforts to promote personalized funerals. As a reaction to the economic restructuring and the rise of funeral brokers detailed in Chapters 4 and 5, contemporary state funeral parlors began to promote personalized funerals that commemorate the deceased as autonomous and unique individuals. As opposed to religious or folk alternatives to standard socialist memorial meetings, such funerals are secular, modern, and more profitable. Their promotional efforts, however, have largely failed. This is because the bereaved see personalized services as simply another attempt at profiteering, and profiteering through death has become a real public concern since 2000.

In spite of the state funeral parlors’ promotion of personalized funerals, Shanghai people continue to die socialist through the performance of modernist bodily movements (such as bows rather than prostrations) and stylized socialist verbal utterances (memorial speeches) in memorial meetings. I describe the formation and popularization of memorial meetings in Chapter 7. While it was the government’s monopolization of dead bodies that allowed the original expansion of dying socialist, I argue that dying socialist, ironically, is now critique: the bereaved entering the socialist frame of the memorial meeting momentarily de-naturalizes the capitalist reality of Shanghai life. As the state itself promotes “market” governance and personalized commemoration, actual opposition to the state is less linked to capitalism or liberal democratic values. Instead, it is more expressed by clinging to socialist rituals.
Chapters 8 and 9 then tackle the shape that alternatives to this memorial meeting ritual have taken and what this might mean for subject formation. While the majority of Shanghai people continue to die socialist today, they do not only die socialist. By performing religious rituals (chanting and giving offerings) and gift exchange (via funeral banquets) before and after (but not during) memorial meetings, the bereaved added Buddhist subjectivity, popular religious subjectivity, and guanxi subjectivity to the memorial meeting's dominant socialist subjectivity in a way similar to how prefaces and appendices might be added to a socialist book. In other words, what we see today is that Shanghai people seek conventionally shared plural subjectivities based, first, on socialism and, second, on religious moralities and reciprocal obligations that define what being a person means at the end of life. Chapter 8 analyzes these processes.

Chapter 9 discusses Protestant memorial meetings as one exception to this appendix-book format because rather than enabling plural subjectivities to co-exist alongside the socialist one, Protestants have attempted to create their own collectively shared singular subjectivity. They do so by creating a new frame to “encase” the meeting’s original socialist framing. This therefore has led to more conflict in Protestant memorial meetings than in those with modifications by other religious influences in Shanghai funeral parlors today.

Overall, in addition to contributing to China studies through my ethnography and history of a modern, urban funeral industry that few have written about, my dissertation sheds light on studies of ritual change, religious ethics, subjectivity and governance. With its historical focus on socialist and post-socialist strategies of governance, my research
results disentangle the often taken for granted connections between subjectivity and governance as well as neoliberalism and neoliberal subjects. I identify both possible alternatives to late-socialist neoliberal subjectivity and the mechanisms that have produced these alternatives. Moreover, I not only identify how capitalist and non-capitalist ethics are enacted in ritual and economy, but also illustrate under what conditions such ethical tensions articulate, when they may even be emphasized, and how these enable ritual change and alternate ways of defining people. My focus on ritual and its relation to governance and the political economic structures of the industry advances our understandings of critical contemporary issues by providing an in-depth account of how ritual change happens in the context of a developing country in a dense urban area, and in the midst of transformation from a socialist to a market economy.
CHAPTER 2 MODERN GOVERNANCE ON DEATH

On March 14, 1955, the Funeral and Interment Administration (FIA) submitted a document to the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau —two years after the Civil Affairs Bureau took over the FIA from the Health Bureau. The FIA asked the Civil Affairs Bureau to approve one of the two propaganda samples in the document. The FIA could then print out the chosen one as campaign material and disseminate it through the local Public Security Offices (police stations) and lilong (里弄, linong in Mandarin, meaning residential alleyway) associations to further reduce the number of exposed corpses on the streets. These two samples were:

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7 This chapter, the next, and Chapter 4 are primarily based on archival materials I collected in the Library of the Chinese Funeral and Intermen Profession (abbr. CFIPL hereafter) located in the Longhua Funeral Parlor in Shanghai in addition to secondary Chinese sources and my own fieldwork interviews. The CFIPL has a collection of original government documents mainly issued by the FIA between the 1930s and 1965. My informant told me that the CFIPL was more of a by-product when the Shanghai Funeral and Interment Service Center (FIS) established its Shanghai Funeral Museum (opened in 2008). These original documents were previously stored in bags in the basement of the FIA. When the FIS decided to establish the Shanghai Funeral Museum (also located in the Longhua Funeral Parlor), a group of people (some of whom were from funeral parlors and some from the Shanghai Funeral Culture Research Institute) took these documents out of the basement for the Museum. Other original documents in the CFIPL archives were personal belongings of the previous chairs of the FIA. In addition to these original documents, the CFIPL also has copied documents retained from the Shanghai Municipal Archives. These documents were collected as part of their effort to build the Museum. All of these documents were loosely stored in folders but had not been cataloged in the CFIPL. These archive materials were meant to serve only as references for the people building the Museum. As far as I know, the archival materials in the CFIPL archive are not yet known to English readers (and probably only known to a very few Chinese readers), I have translated some excerpts at length as they serve my ethnographic or theoretical purposes. In addition to these archival materials, CFIPL also has a collection of published books on death (primarily in Chinese), industry magazines, and policy pamphlets.
Don’t Casually Dump Dead Children’s Bodies
After a person dies, his/her body will soon decompose. The process of decomposition is the best time for spreading germs around. The bodies of those who died from contagious diseases pose even higher risk. This is even more so in urban areas where the population is dense. Today, some citizens do not understand this danger [of dumping bodies] and the proper protocol [of corpse disposal] so they casually dump dead children’s bodies on the streets. It has become an extreme threat to our city, its environmental hygiene, and the appearance of the city. In order to correct such bad habits, we hope that all citizens would work together. When such an unfortunate event happens, please call any nearby [funeral] branch or us. We will send a car to pick up the body.

March 14, 1955. Shanghai Funeral Service Station
Propaganda Sample I

Further Eliminating Body Dumps
Body dumping is a bad habit leftover from previous counter-revolutionary governments. Since Liberation, the People’s Government cares about the suffering of the people so it tries its best to facilitate the handling of children’s bodies. As a result, body dumps have decreased. This has positive effects on urban hygiene and the appearance of the city. In order to further eliminate body dumps, we hope that all citizens work together to help us. If you encounter such issues, please call any of our branches or us.

March 14, 1955. Shanghai Funeral Service Station
Propaganda Sample II

The document accompanying these samples states: “Our city still faces a serious issue in regards to the matter of exposed bodies. Taking January and February [1955] as an example, there were totally 5,177 exposed bodies in January. This is an average of 172

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8 Due to the limitations of the archive, I don’t know which propaganda sample, if any, the Civil Affairs Bureau actually approved in the end. Who wrote the campaign materials? Why did she or he or they write two versions with one focusing on hygiene and the other focusing on politics? Writing after the Three-Anti’s (anti-corruption, anti-waste, and anti-bureaucracy) and the Five-Anti’s (anti-bribery, anti-tax evasion, anti-state property theft, anti-cheating on government contracts, and anti-stealing state economic information) movements that ended the short-lived liberty that Shanghai enjoyed during the immediate time after the CCP’s takeover (the end of “liberty” after the “liberation”?) as well as in the midst of one of the most intense points of the “socialist transformation” that eventually nationalized agricultural, handicraft, and capitalist industries in China (the so-called First Five Year Plan 1953-1956 ), perhaps the writers were trying to figure out the “correct” direction of the political winds blowing above their heads?
bodies per day. Although the number of exposed bodies decreased in February, there were still 3,465 exposed bodies. That’s at least 115 bodies per day. Many citizens do not understand the proper handling procedures or the special institutions that collect bodies, so they casually toss children’s bodies on the streets. This has seriously influenced the hygiene and appearance of our city. In order to further eliminate body dumping, we need to increase our propaganda. We propose to print out one sample to disseminate.”

These two excerpts reflect two very different concerns within the governance of death in China. The first propaganda sample focuses on hygiene, describing the danger of abandoning dead bodies on the streets largely in terms of disease and public health. The second, while mentioning health, focuses instead on the key words of the Communist Revolution, on Liberation and the ongoing need for a revolution in the habits of the people from those of the counter-revolutionary (or “feudalistic”) past to those of a People working together for the glory of Socialist China. These two documents also mark a critical moment in the history of funeral governance in Shanghai. Only a few years earlier, responsibility for funeral governance had been shifted from the responsibility of the Health Bureau to that of the Civil Affairs Bureau. As I discuss below, this marks the re-emergence of funeral governance as a key site for the creation of proper socialist subjects.

To understand this shift, however, it is important to first understand the historical scope of funerals in China, the circumstances under which a “modern” funeral industry

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9 Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration. 1953. “Guanyu loushi chuli de xuanchuan ji cheshi shou fe biaozhun wenti biaozhun wenti baoqing heshi” [Regarding the propaganda of handling exposed bodies and fees for collecting bodies], CFIPL.
emerged in Shanghai, and the significant reasons behind the CCP's early emphasis on health in terms of funeral governance. In this chapter, I first provide a brief overview of the birth of the Chinese death industry in general and of the Shanghai death industry in particular. These two are intertwined because Shanghai was the birthplace of the modern Chinese death industry. This background helps to explain what some of the modern funeral institutions were like in Shanghai before the Communist takeover in 1949. This is important because these institutions were the objects of funeral governance after the CCP consolidated its power (roughly around 1955)—something I discuss in detail in the next chapter. As a direct result of this funeral governance both funerals as rituals and the funeral industry itself were fundamentally changed.

The second part of this chapter describes what funeral governance entailed around the time of the regime change. I argue that before the CCP consolidated its power the object of funeral governance was dead bodies instead of funeral institutions. By displaying the Communist Party’s ability to remove dead bodies from public space—something that the Republican government failed to do, the CCP established its legitimacy and ability to govern as sovereign through its governance of death and dead bodies.

The Scope of “Funerals” in China

Chinese death ritual contains three interrelated sets of rituals: ceremonies of bin (殯), zang (葬), and ji (祭). Bin, originally referred to keeping a coffin in a temporary shelter before burial. Bin and sang (喪) are synonyms. For many Chinese speakers, sang
is actually a much more commonly used word. *Bin* ceremonies (*binli* 殯禮), or *sang* ceremonies (*sangli* 喪禮), are rituals conducted during the period of time after death and prior to burial. This traditionally included preparing bodies for body burial, managing pollution, presenting offerings, mourning and hosting mourners, making arrangements for follow up rituals and so on. *Zang* meant to inter or to bury. *Zang* ceremonies (*zangli* 葬禮) are rituals conducted at the gravesite. While both *bin* and *zang* ceremonies are prescribed, Rubie Watson (1988) argues that grave rites (*zang* ceremonies) are more flexible and therefore more open to political manipulation.

*Chubin* (出殯), the funeral procession, literally denotes the leaving of the place where the body was encoffined. It is the transition between *bin* and *zang*. If we see death ritual as a whole in terms of liminality, then *chubin* was a liminal moment within a larger liminal period. It is also the last appearance of the corpse in an area of the general public. As the dead bodies move through the streets and are surrounded by mourners they are encountered by whomever happens to be passing by, reminding those people of the presence and reality of death. *Chubin* were both the defining moment and the most spectacular part of funerals throughout imperial China, the Republic of China (the ROC, 1911-1949, also known as the Republicans, Nationalists, or the KMT), and the period immediately after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC, also known as the Communists, or the CCP). The process of moving from *bin* to *zang* was meant to ensure a proper transition for the deceased in at least two senses: as a way of properly leaving the community of the living (this world) and entering the world of the dead (the next) as well as appropriately transforming decaying corporal bodies into generating
spirits. Performing rituals correctly transformed dead bodies with their potential for powerful pollution into ancestors who, as a part of an eternal patriline might eventually grant material wealth, benevolent guardianship, and luck to the deceased's living descendants.

As a result of this transformation, the final part of Chinese death rituals is ji. Ji means to offer sacrifice. In the context of death ritual, ji particularly refers to ancestor worship. Ji assures the continuous renewal of the relationship between the living descendants and their deceased ancestors even long after biological death. Overall, death rituals were the temporal and spatial sites where the grieving family showed their filial piety, displayed their wealth and status, exchanged gifts in public, and repaired the disruption of normal community life caused by death.

In contemporary China, funeral governance is called “the administration of bin and zang” (binzang guanli). The death industry is called the binzangye (殯葬業), the industry for bin and zang. My own research here is primarily a story of bin ritual, bin governance, and the bin industry in contemporary China. For reading convenience, I call these three things funeral ritual, funeral governance, and the death (or funeral) industry respectively throughout the dissertation.

The Birth of the Modern Death Industry

Shanghai is one of four independent municipalities in China today. The other three are Beijing, Tianjin, and Chongqing. In the Chinese administrative system, municipalities are on a parallel level with provinces (this would be like, for instance, the
city of Washington or New York City being granted the same rights as the states of, say, Virginia and New York). Prior to the CCP’s takeover, Shanghai was the commercial and financial center of China. It emerged out of a sleepy, rather low-population area into this position as it became a treaty port in 1843 after the Treaty of Nanjing when the Qing Empire lost the First Opium War. International powers soon set up various settlements outside of the old City Wall. Eventually, the International Settlement was established in 1845 and the French Concession in 1849.\textsuperscript{10} Within the old City Walls was the Chinese Administration Area.\textsuperscript{11} These semi-colonizers and their associated international influences and businesses turned Shanghai from a small fishing village to a city of immigrants known as the “Pearl of the Far East.”

Meanwhile, these semi-colonizers also made Shanghai the birthplace of the modern Chinese death industry. Modern funeral institutions such as funeral homes (\textit{binyiguan} 殯儀館, literally meaning \textit{bin} ritual hall), modern commercial crematoria (\textit{huozanchang} 火葬場), and commercial public cemeteries (\textit{gongmu}) were all first established in Shanghai as those semi-colonizers needed to handle the deaths of their people. In the following sections, I provide descriptions of these modern funeral institutions.

\textsuperscript{10} The International Settlement was first ruled solely by the British with the French and Americans all joining later. Still later, the French decided to have their own concession. The British and Americans’ then jointly-governed institution in the International Settlement was called the Municipal Council.

\textsuperscript{11} This was ruled by the Qing government until 1911 when the regime changed over to the Republicans until 1949. The Republican rule was interrupted when the Sino-Japanese War broke out. The Japanese army occupied the Chinese Administration area from 1937 and then supported a puppet regime to rule this area. The International Settlement and French Concessions remained nominally unoccupied until 1941 when the Pacific War broke out. In 1943, the British and Americans reached an agreement with the Republicans and therefore ended their claims to rights over their concession. This move, however, was more symbolic than practical since the Republicans did not have control over Shanghai until the end of the war in 1945.
institutions’ entrance into China.

The British established the “Shandong Road Foreigner Cemetery” (Shandonglu waiguo gongmu 山東路外國公墓) in 1844. This was the first commercial public cemetery in Shanghai. It was for foreigners who died in China. The first commercial public cemetery for Chinese was not built until 1909.\textsuperscript{12} Prior to the establishment of Chinese public cemeteries, Chinese people who died in Shanghai and who could afford proper burial were transported back to their hometowns and then buried there. I will return to this point a bit later.

Traditional Chinese cemeteries are private or lineage based places. Though lineage based cemeteries have more than one single nuclear family buried there (and though the extent of “actual” blood relationships between lineage members in the largest of these cemeteries could be quite small), they were corporate cemeteries (Cohen 1990). Thus, they were quite unlike commercial public cemeteries whose plots sold for a fee to almost anyone. Another kind of traditional “public” cemetery were “charity cemeteries” (yizhongdi 義塚地) in the sense that people who were buried there were, indeed, unrelated. People who died in Shanghai but could not afford the postmortem trip home were often buried by their relatives in charity cemeteries run by their native place association so that these poor souls would be at least buried on their hometown’s property. In Shanghai, one of the most famous cases of this was the charity cemetery of

\textsuperscript{12} In 1909, a businessman named Jing Runshan (經潤山) bought 20 acres of land for building a cemetery in Hongqiao, Xujiahui. This land was later confiscated for railroad construction. His wife, Wang Guozhen (汪國貞) later bought land in Zhanghong Road and started Xielu Garden Wanguo Public Mausoleum. This was the first for-profit cemetery for Chinese. See \textit{Shanghai Funeral Museum}, pp.94.
**siming gongsuo** (四明公所), the Ningbo (寧波) Native-Place Association (Bryna Goodman 1995).\(^{13}\)

Though charity cemeteries seem to be somewhat closer to the model of the new modern public cemetery, these were places that no one really chose to be buried in. They were where people without identification, with identification but without family, or with identifiable families but without financial means were buried. Historically, charity cemeteries (and lineage cemeteries as well), lacking proper care by the living, often became “cemeteries of no name” or *luanzanggang* (亂葬崗), literally meaning a chaotically buried cemetery. Without proper identification and without descendents’ worship, these “cemeteries of no name” became the main playgrounds of wandering and unattached ghosts, dangerous places altogether different from an ancestor’s final resting spot.

As for crematoria, in 1896 the Municipal Council of the International Settlement established Jing'an Temple Cemetery with a crematorium attached.\(^ {14}\) This Council established the “Cemetery Department” under its Health Committee thirty years earlier in 1866. The Cemetery Department was actually the first funeral governing institution in Shanghai. The crematorium in Jing'an Temple Cemetery was the first modern commercial crematorium in Shanghai.

To be clear, cremation was not foreign in a Chinese context. Historically,

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13 Soon after the establishment of French Concession, the French wanted to take over *Siming gongsuo*’s charity cemetery and other lands for their use. This eventually turned into several blood fights between French and Shanghai people.
14 It is located across the street from the famous Jing'an Temple so the cemetery is called the Jing'an Temple Cemetery. It is, however, Buddhist and it is not related to the temple.
crematoria were a part of Buddhist temples that were known as *huashenyao* (化身窯).

The increased popularity of Buddhism, at least since the Song dynasty, had made cremation more palatable (to a certain degree) in areas where Buddhism was influential (for more on this see Patricia Ebrey 1990). Yet, the dominant and morally proper way of interment among the majority of Han Chinese was still body burial. This was especially the case among intellectuals whose funerary practices followed Confucian teachings more closely. Unlike *huashenyao*, essentially just using a pile of wood to burn bodies, Jing'an Temple Cemetery’s crematorium had gas-generated cremators.

The first funeral homes did not show up until 1924 when an American company, the China Casket Company, set up an “International Funeral Home” in Shanghai. The Chinese called this Wanguo (萬國) Funeral Home. This funeral home was similar to funeral homes in America and it only served foreigners in the beginning. I will discuss this particular funeral home in detail in the next chapter.

Saying Wanguo Funeral Home was the first funeral home in Shanghai does not mean that there were no specialized funeral shops before this. While the family members of the deceased generally handled funerals at home, specialized funeral providing shops indeed existed prior to the colonial powers’ incursion into Shanghai. These included both “guanqidian” (貫器店) and “hongbaigang” (紅白杠). The former provided rentals of ritual goods for both weddings and funerals, and the latter literally means “wedding and funeral (sedan chair or coffin) carrier.” While guanqidian operated as full time businesses, hongbaigang were more “amateur” in the sense that many people who worked there worked only part time. The primary task of the hongbaigang was to plan
and carry out funeral processions—the most public centered step of any funeral before the CCP tighten up its control over funeral governance. Nevertheless, these kinds of shops were not where bodies were handled and commemorated. While funeral professionals have been an important part of folk death ritual (J. Watson 1988), the emergence of funeral homes in Shanghai marked the beginning of the institutionalization of dead bodies and death ritual in China.

Before I move on, I want to make clear that I have chosen to call contemporary *binyiguan* funeral “parlors” rather than funeral “homes” on purpose. Through this distinction in language, I want to emphasize and convey the difference between funeral homes (under the Republican and early Communist era) and funeral parlors (after the Cultural Revolution) despite the Chinese name remaining the same for both. Funeral homes and funeral parlors were two very different kinds of historical product in Shanghai. For example, private companies or associations (such as native place associations) in Shanghai operated funeral homes until the mid 1950s when they were all nationalized. I will discuss this nationalization process in the next chapter. Even when nationalized, however, these funeral homes still practiced body burial as before. As the Cultural Revolution began, all Shanghai funeral homes were shut down. Funeral parlors, on the other hand, all belonged administratively to the Civil Affairs Bureau. Moreover, they really should be seen as synonymous with crematoria (*huozanchang* 火葬場), not funeral homes. In fact, most funeral parlors/crematoria in China were built in the 1960s and 1970s exactly to implement the state’s cremation policy. The Chinese government only renamed crematoria (*huozanchang*) “funeral parlors” (*binyiguan*) in 1984 in an
attempt to reduce people’s fear of cremation. I analyze funeral parlors and their historical emergence in much more detail in Chapter 4. For now, however, let me return to the eve of the Chinese Communist takeover.

**Governing Dead Bodies: Cleansing a City of Corpses**

On the 15th of August 1945, the Japanese government officially announced its surrender. After more then eight years the Sino-Japanese War had finally reached its end. Japan had occupied the Chinese Administrative Area of Shanghai as early as 1937 when the Battle of Shanghai broke out. The heart of Shanghai (the French Concession and parts of the International Settlement), however, remained outside of Japanese occupation until 1941. Wars, by definition, create a great loss of life. This is even worse in cities, like Shanghai, where food shortages, dense populations, and diseases were prominent in addition to the actual violence of guns, bullets, and soldiers. Countless people died and were left on the streets. Shanghai was a city of corpses and governing dead bodies was one of the most urgent tasks by the time of the immediate post-war period.

Wars were not the sole reason for Shanghai’s dead body problem, however. Dealing with dead bodies had always been a big problem there. As Christian Henriot describes, “Shanghai was like a gigantic funnel that swallowed up lives by the hundreds

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15 Another difference is that (contemporary) funeral parlors do not usually provide arterial embalming—the common American practice of embalming. In China, only internationally transported bodies need arterial embalming. Funeral parlors usually slow down decomposition by refrigerating dead bodies and also performing hypodermic embalming. Hypodermic embalming means injecting embalming fluid through the deceased's blood vessels. Foreigner operated funeral homes generally provided arterial embalming as they did in the Untied States during the Republican era.
or thousands, *even in times of peace*” (2009: 409, emphasis added). Death and its afflicted bodies were so prevalent that it was a part of the “commonplace” of the day, going unremarked in conversation and newspapers. Henriot’s work on such “masterless bodies” or “bodies without masters” (*wuzhu shiti* 無主屍體) shows how the very visibility of bodies in every corner of Shanghai City thus rendered death *invisible* to the social gaze throughout the Republican era and the early Communist Period. Wars simply worsened these matters.

At this time, administratively speaking, there were three categories of “dead body problems” in Shanghai funeral governance: accumulated coffins (*jijiu* 積柩), above ground coffins (*fucuo* 浮厝), and exposed corpses (*loushi* 露屍). The first refers to coffins with bodies in them that had not yet been buried. Many of these were stored in coffin repositories (*bingshe* 丙舍 or *jijiusuo* 結柩所) or funeral homes. As for above-ground coffins, these were usually for people who couldn’t afford to pay for a place like a coffin repository in the first place. In such cases the bereaved would find a place, such as an abandoned house or simply a roadside, to lay the coffin down above ground until they saved up enough money to be able to send the deceased home. These coffins were usually made of cheap wood and poorly sealed. It did not take long before people passing by were able to smell the decomposition and see the blood mixed with body fluids that would spread on the ground around it. As time went by, many above-ground coffins simply were abandoned. Their bereaved may have failed to save up the money, met other challenges, been forced to move on, or themselves passed away. The war not only created
more death, but also increased the very disruptions that made even more people abandon coffins.

Finally, the third problem, of exposed bodies, entailed corpses that had been dumped on the streets. Henriot says that the majority of these exposed bodies were infants and children under 10. Since children were “not considered potential ancestors and had committed an unfilial act by the mere fact of dying young” in China (Freedman 1970:165), adults generally would not offer proper funerals to dead children, if they even held any funeral at all. The death of children was not the death of a full person, conceptually speaking. Henriot, however, points out that the fact that large numbers of dead children were found encoffined or wrapped in mats shows that such an explanation itself is insufficient if not misleading. The key is less about a refusal to offer proper funerals, and more about the reality of high mortality, especially infant mortality. This is more important for explaining the high number of dead infants and children even though it is often overlooked (2009:410). He explains that “[t]he high figure of children, many of them newborn or infants, is not surprising. They were the least prepared to survive in a context of poor housing, lack of food and adverse weather conditions” (2009: 416).

Pushan Shanzhuang (普善山莊) and Tongren Fuyuantang (同仁輔元堂) (Pushan and Fuyuantang respectively hereafter) were the main two charity organizations that devoted themselves to collecting and disposing of exposed bodies and abandoned coffins (with bodies in them) that had been left on the streets of Shanghai. 16 They usually buried

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16 Pushan is also known as the Shanghai Public Benevolent Society. Rich Shanghai business people such as Wang junsheng (王駿生) Li Guqing (李谷卿) funded this charity organization. It was first established in 1913. Its sole task was to clear exposed bodies and abandoned coffins.
adult dead bodies individually in charity cemeteries while cremating children’s bodies collectively. This difference in body disposal shows that the former is recognized as a subject even if their identification was unknown. The latter simply falls into a non-person and non-subject category. While their parents might give them coffins or at least a mat if they could afford it, their non-subject status made collective cremation a legitimate mortuary practice.

While the “normal” effects of war exacerbated the above three problems, other political decisions added additional pressures into the governance of dead bodies in Shanghai: eight or more years of war had drastically constrained the transportation of newly deceased bodies between Shanghai and other “home” places. The bereaved in Shanghai with the means to do so generally stored their beloved’s coffins (with their remains within them) in coffin repositories until they were ready to transport them back to their hometown. The Japanese puppet regime that ruled the Chinese Administrative Area set up barriers to prevent any kind of transportation in or out of its area. As a result, the body accumulation problem exploded. Soon after Japan officially announced its surrender on August 15, 1945, the FIA (at that time under the Shanghai Municipal Government’s Health Bureau) announced policies for cleaning up accumulated coffins and promoting cremation. The FIA estimated that there were over 100,000 accumulated

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(with bodies in them) off of the streets. Fuyuantang was established in 1809. It started out focusing on collecting bodies and donating coffins, and later expanded into a multi-functional charity organization including clinics and a school. For more on these organizations, see Christian Henriot (2009) and Liang Yuansheng (2009).

17 Wu Jianxi 健熙. N.d. Qingchu jijiu yu Shanghai saying binzang ye gaizao 清除積柩與上海私營殯葬業改造 [Cleaning up accumulated coffins and the transformation of the private Shanghai funeral and interment industry 1949-1957], CFIPL archive.
(occupied) coffins in Shanghai. These were deposited in native place associations, charity organizations, coffin depositories, funeral parlors, and lineage temples, and all were still awaiting their final journeys home.\textsuperscript{18}

From 1946 to 1947, Republican China’s Shanghai Municipal Government promulgated a series of funeral related regulations.\textsuperscript{19} Yet, despite its intent and effort spent on perfecting the legislative issues of funeral governance, what the Republican Government most urgently needed to do was to solve the eight year backlog of accumulating coffins in depositories, above-ground coffins, and exposed bodies all of which were still piling up. On June 17, 1946 the Health Bureau released a communiqué intending to make the solution to the problem of accumulated coffins the Bureau’s primary task. It requested all funeral parlors, coffin depositories, and native place associations to transport all of these accumulated coffins out of Shanghai by the end of the year. Any remaining coffins would be treated as “masterless” coffins and therefore would be cremated collectively shortly afterwards.\textsuperscript{20}

The Trade Association of Funeral Parlors, Coffin Repositories, and Coffin Transportation Offices soon challenged the Health Bureau's decree by submitting petition

\textsuperscript{18} Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau 上海市民政局. 2005. Shanghai Tongzhi 上海通志 [Shanghai general local history], Vol. 43, shehui shenghuo [Social life], Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe.
\textsuperscript{19} They were the “Shanghai Cemetery and Crematoria Administration Regulation,” the “Shanghai Funeral Parlor Administration Regulation,” the “Shanghai Coffin Repository Administration Regulation,” the “Shanghai Coffin Transportation Administration Regulation,” and the “Shanghai Private Cemetery Administration Regulation.”
\textsuperscript{20} Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration 上海市殯葬管理處. 1946. “Chengming fengling banli chuqing jijiu kunnan qingxing ji bubian yilu huohua liyou yangqijian heshi zunshi” 呈明奉另辦理出清積柩困難情形□不便一律火化理由仰祗鑒合適遵事 [The difficulties of cleaning up accumulated coffins and the inconveniences of cremating all bodies], CFIPL archive.
letters to various state apparatuses, including the Shanghai City Council, and even calling a press conference to mobilize public opinion to postpone the policy's implementation.21 Funeral business operators argued in these public negotiations that coffins stored in their facilities were not like those stored in charity organizations or coffins above ground. They were not masterless, even if their masters were temporarily unreachable. Not to mention that they were professionally kept coffins paid for by bereaved persons who wanted to safely store their beloved dead.22 If the owner suddenly showed up and ask for these coffins, funeral professionals would have nothing to give them. Another less vocalized reason was the huge loss of profits this could cause these funeral facilities. Coffin repositories charged like hotel rooms—the longer a coffin stayed, the more money was owed. If coffins could not be deposited for a long period of time and bodies had to be cremated immediately, then coffin repositories, coffin transportation offices, and funeral parlors would all lose a significant amount of income and might even go bankrupt entirely.

As a result, in the name of “protecting ancestors,” funeral professionals also argued against sudden implementation of cremation. I will discuss cremation, and especially how the CCP promoted cremation in the 1950s and 1960s in the next chapter.

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21 Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration 上海市殯葬管理處. 1946. “Chengming fengling banli chuqing jijiu kunnan qingxing ji bubian yilu huohua liyou yangqijian heshi zunshi” 呈明奉另辦理出清積柩困難情形暨不便一律火化理由仰祗覩合適遵事 [The difficulties of cleaning up accumulated coffins and the inconveniences of cremating all bodies], CFIPL archive.
22 Shanghai Coffin Repositories and Transportation Association 上海市殯葬寄柩運葬商業同業公會. 1947. “Wei huohua shiguan zhiai nanxing, ruo bi yu shishi yiti huohua, yi ying xian wancheng falv chengxu” 為火化屍棺窒礙難行，若必欲實施遺體火化，亦應先完成法律程序 [Cremation is hard to implement. If this is a must, the legal procedure should be followed], CFIPL archive.
During this negotiating process, the FIA first postponed their December deadline to the end of April 1947 and then again to the end of October. At the same time, however, it announced a plan of six steps to clean up accumulated coffins. On April 14, 1948, the Health Bureau issued a new communiqué. It said that based on data they had received from funeral parlors, coffin repositories, and guilds, there were a total of 2,225 coffins that were masterless and these would be cremated in a month, some time after May.23

A year later, on May 27, 1949, Shanghai was “liberated” by the Communist Party. The Health Bureau of the Shanghai People’s Government took over the FIA from the old Republican Health Bureau. In July of 1949, the (new) Health Bureau issued its own “Implementation Rules for the Fifth Step of Cleaning Up Accumulated Coffins” proclamation.24 The government officials, who were largely the same people from the old bureau,25 decided that the first four steps had been more or less accomplished under the Republican regime and that they could now move on to the fifth. This particular event reminds us that even a revolution does not always indicate a political and governing disjuncture at the ground level. The seeming complete rupture of political ideology and

23 Shanghai Health Bureau 上海市衛生局. 1948. “Shanghai weishengju gongbao” 上海衛生局 公報 [Shanghai Health Bureau communiqué], No. 37-26, CFJPL archive.
24 Qingchu jijiu diwu bu zou shishi banfa 清除積柩第五步驟實施辦法.
25 When the PRC took over Shanghai, it allowed the last head of the FIA, Gao Buqing, to continue to be the head until November 8, 1950. He was then fired for corruption. Xuli became the next head of the FIA. See Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration 上海市殯葬管理處. N.d. Shanghai minzhengshi xiabian chugao 上海民政史下編初稿 [Draft of the history of the Shanghai civil governance II], p.4. CFJPL archive. I will call this manuscript “The Draft” hereafter. There was no Part I in the CFJPL archive. This hand written version eventually became “Chapter 17 binding guanli 殯葬管理 [Funeral and interment administration]” in Shanghai minzhengshi 上海民政志 [History of the Shanghai civil governance] published in 2000. If we compared the Draft with the final published version, we can see a significant amount of details were removed or edited. This official version can be accessed online: http://shtong.gov.cn/node2/node2245/node65977/node66002/index.html.
form of government did not mean the discontinuity of social reality and governance. Dead bodies were still on the streets and the same officials still ran the FIA even if the Mayor of Shanghai City had changed. Governing death was (and is) a rather continuous process even if official discourse from one side or another might link a particular policy to a particular period and only to that period.

Although this new rule stated that all accumulated coffins had to be transported out of Shanghai between July 12 and October 12 or the Bureau would cremate the remaining accumulated coffins collectively,\textsuperscript{26} in reality, and just as had happened under the previous regime, the implementation was not very successful.\textsuperscript{27} Many reasons were given and most of them were the same reasons for opposition under the Republican state such as the unwillingness of funeral professionals to lose potential income. The Communist state nevertheless intended to create a historical disjuncture since its legitimacy was to be built on claims to be a different government—a state that cares about people, capable of implementing polices, and ending social suffering. In pursuit of this policy, it eventually did clean up those accumulated coffins, regardless of the protests of funeral professionals.

\textsuperscript{26} Shanghai Health Bureau 上海市衛生局. 1949. “Shi weishengsu zhi binzang guanli suo wen: cha qingchu benshi jijiu yi an” 市衛生局致殯葬管理所文:清除本市機柩一案 [An order by the Health Bureau to the Funeral and Interment Administration: Regarding cleaning up accumulated coffins in the city], CFIPL archive.
\textsuperscript{27} Shanghai Health Bureau 上海市衛生局. 1950. “Shi weishengju cheng shifu wen...wei qingchu jijiu wenti shen duo” 市衛生局呈市府文...惟清除機柩牽涉問題甚多... [A report by the Health Bureau to Shanghai Government: …cleaning up accumulated coffins is a complicated matter...], CFIPL archive.
On May 23, 1950, the Bureau issued their “Supplementary Provisions to Clean Up Accumulated Coffins in Shanghai Municipal City” proclamation. These provisions further defined any coffins that stayed in the city for over six months as “accumulated coffins” and therefore rendered them legitimate objects of state clean up. With this, along with the implementation of other rules and the actual execution of policies, accumulated coffins were more or less removed by the end of 1952—a total of 83,629 accumulated coffins were handled. Starting from 1951, the FIA shifted its attention to cleaning up above-ground coffins. They handled over 10,000 above ground coffins around the Beipiao (北票) Pier of the Rihui (日暉) Harbor and around Tongji (同濟) University alone—the two places that had the highest concentration of above-ground coffins. The FIA hired about 400 funeral professionals and 300 temporary workers to work daily at the task. They opened up some of the caskets and picked out the remains, cremated some right there on the spot, and moved some to Dachang (大場) Cemetery to be buried. By the end of 1952, the FIA had eliminated a total of 209,708 above-ground coffins.

As far as exposed bodies went, the FIA still worked with the two charity organizations, Pushan and Fuyuantang, just as in pre-liberation times (in the intervening period under the CCP, however, these had been merged into a single entity called the

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28 Shanghai shi qingchu jijiu buchong banfa 上海市清除積柩補充辦法.
29 “Shanghai Cleaning up Accumulated Coffins’ Price Deduction and Temporary Regulations,” “Shanghai Funeral Parlor Administration Regulation,” “Shanghai Coffin Depository (or Repository) Administration Regulation,” “Shanghai Coffin Transportation Administration Regulation,” “Shanghai Private Crematoria Administration Regulation,” and “Shanghai Private Cemetery Administration Regulation.”
30 Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau 上海市民政局. 2005. Shanghai Tongzhi 上海通志 [Shanghai general local history], Vol. 43, shehui shenghuo [Social life], Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe.
Shanghai Funeral Service Center). On October 23, 1953, the Shanghai Government announced new “Instructions about Handling Exposed Bodies.” This communiqué again declared that these exposed bodies would be cremated collectively unless someone claimed ownership. The bodies of children and infants would be cremated collectively in Xi Baoxin (西寶興) Crematorium. This place was the predecessor of Baoxin Funeral Parlor today. Between June 1949 and October 1954, the city cremated some 129,248 exposed bodies and buried 34,382 exposed bodies.\(^{31}\) Officially speaking, the task of cleaning up accumulated coffins and exposed bodies ended in 1954.\(^{32}\)

In 1953, the CCP decided that the new task of the FIA would be “Promoting Cremation, Transforming Customs” (tuixing huozang yifeng yisu 推行火葬移風易俗) because, just like their Republican counterparts, the CCP saw the roots of these dead body problems in the Chinese customary preference for body burial. Consequently, the CCP restructured the administrative position of the FIA moving it from the Health Bureau to the Civil Affairs Bureau on March 9, 1953. The FIA has remained under the Civil Affairs Bureau ever since. This administrative change shows that the governance of death shifted from a matter of cleanliness to a matter of civility and from a short-term,

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31 Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau 上海市民政局. 2005. Shanghai Tongzhi 上海通志 [Shanghai general local history], Vol. 43, shehui shenghuo [Social life], Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe.

32 All told, by 1954 they had cleaned up some 456,967 dead bodies (note that these numbers do not include those bodies that were successfully sent home and buried). To give an idea for comparison, according to the 1950 US census, this number would have placed this City of the Abandoned Dead as the 20\(^{th}\) largest city in the United States, around the same size as Seattle and Kansas City. As compared to American cities in 2012 (by US census estimates), it would have been the 38\(^{th}\) largest and bigger than Atlanta, Georgia. Shanghai’s own population in 1950, according to UN statistics, was 5,333,000 people. (http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/wup2001/WUP2001_CH6.pdf).
massive clean up project to a long-term project aimed toward social and cultural transformation. As a result, the object of funeral governance has shifted from dead bodies to civil matters. However, even after funeral governance shifted to civil matters, the CCP did not go straight into reforming funeral customs. Instead, what they did first was to reform funeral institutions. I explore this point further in the next chapter. This administrative change also marked the turning point where the new regime saw itself as finally having its feet solidly rooted in China following their initial consolidation of power. While the CCP had cleaned up the city and demonstrated their difference from their Republican predecessors, this was not revolution. Only after passing the initial unstable period, was the CCP ready to carry out revolution in governing death and the death industry.

We can return now, briefly to the two propaganda samples with which I opened the chapter. Other than pointing out the seriousness of dead bodies abandoned in Shanghai even after the CCP demonstrated their superior ability to clean up the city (over the KMT), these two excerpts can be seen to reflect the political history of the FIA and of its mission. The first focuses on health concerns, the second on the political concern that these bodies without history were dangerous leftovers from the suffering of the unliberated past. While the priority of funeral governance changed as the FIA moved from the Health Bureau to the Civil Affair Bureau, these dual focuses remain crucial even today. This policy change did not mean that coffins and bodies had disappeared completely from the streets. The continuance of health concerns and abandoned bodies is evident from fact that these propaganda samples were written in 1955, some two years
after the government declared the beginning of their new campaign. Recall that the text attached to the two excerpts noted that there were still “5,177 exposed bodies” found on the streets within a single month (albeit one of the coldest months of the year).

As with “revolution,” on the ground, one era and the next tend not to be separated by clear and distinct lines, but rather bleed across those boundaries from one into the other. However porous the boundary may be, this shift did indeed mark a boundary whereby, going forward, funeral reform's primary focus was on creating socialist-citizen subjects. While cleaning up the mess left from the previous occupying regimes was important for consolidating the CCP’s power, it was time to start implementing their own ideas of social revolution to fundamentally solve these issues at their roots. Thus, while the problems of accumulating masterless bodies was not so quickly and neatly left behind, the dominant theme of the next part of this history revolved around these socially and culturally transformative intentions—how to make its death industry, funeral rituals, and deaths, both “modern” and “socialist.” In this sense, the CCP picked up on the modernizing project at the point that the Republican regime had failed to continue. As a result, this administrative change not only signifies the way the goal of funeral governance changed from regulating hygiene to civility, but also articulates the re-emergence of the governance of dead bodies as an integral part of governing citizens—the making of political subjects.

Even after funeral governance shifted to civil matters, however, the CCP did not go straight into reforming funeral customs. Instead, as I explore in the next chapter, what they did first was to concentrate on “structure” and on reforming funeral institutions. This
administrative change also marked the turning point where the new regime saw itself as
finally having its feet solidly rooted in China following their initial consolidation of
power. While the CCP had cleaned up the city and demonstrated their difference from
their Republican predecessors, this was not revolution. Only after passing the initial
unstable period, was the CCP ready to carry out revolution in governing death and the
death industry.
CHAPTER 3 THE MAKING OF POLITICAL SUBJECTS AT THE END OF LIFE

After the initial takeover, implementing a socialist transformation became an overwhelming movement that swept, albeit unevenly, all over China. Regarding governing death in Shanghai, this transformation specifically involved three policies. The first was to nationalize all funeral institutions. The second was to promote cremation. The third was to transform the (believed) unproductive and wasteful nature of the death industry into literal productivity. This especially referred to the development of pig raising sideline businesses in Shanghai funeral homes and cemeteries. The degree that each of these policies were implemented varied: the first policy was implemented the most thoroughly; the second went up and down, but eventually was implemented fully in Shanghai when the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) began; the third was especially executed around the time of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961). In this chapter, I describe each of these new governing attempts in turn. My goal is to illustrate how the FIA initiated these structural changes and how such governing attempts impacted what being a “Shanghainese” or a Chinese person meant.

I. Nationalizing Funeral Institution

After the FIA was transferred from the Health Bureau to the Civil Affairs Bureau in 1953, one of its first new tasks was to transfer the ownership of the property of funeral institutions to the state in order to nationalize the Shanghai death industry. There were three common types of ownership for funeral institutions at that time: 1) foreign capital,
2) Chinese associations or Chinese capital, and 3) religious institutions. All three implied objects of identification that indicate the potentiality and multiplicity of thinking about what being a person meant in China in general but in Shanghai in particular. These different institutional affiliations mediated, crosscut, and even overshadowed the connections between individual subjects and the socialist state and therefore were prime targets to be redefined and “nationalized.” In this section, I discuss how the FIA nationalized funeral homes owned by foreign capital, native place, Chinese capital, and a crematorium of Buddhist temple in turn. What I argue in these examples is that the FIA eliminated alternative sources of identity (alternative to the socialist state) through nationalizing the property of these non-socialist institutions. This was the CCP’s first step toward creating political subjects at the end of life in Shanghai.

**Nationalizing the External Others**

For most Chinese who did not live through the Shanghai of the 1930's, Wanguo (萬國) Funeral Home will not ring any bells. Yet, many will probably have heard about the funeral of Ruan Lingyu (阮玲玉), the then most famous Chinese silent movie star who committed suicide in 1935 at the age of 25. Wanguo handled her funeral, and her funeral procession “was three miles long, three women committed suicide during it and the New York Times ran a front page story, calling it 'the most spectacular funeral of the century'” (Cousins 2004). About a year later, one of the most important contemporary Chinese writers (one of the few claimed by both Communists and Republicans), Lu Xun (魯迅), died in Shanghai. Wanguo Funeral Home handled his funeral as well.
As mentioned in Chapter 2, Wanguo was the first funeral home in Shanghai. The story of Wanguo began when a funeral home in New York sent two people, the boss’s son and one employee named R.O. Scott, to Shanghai in 1924. They started the China Casket Company there and named their funeral home the “International Funeral Home” in English and “Wanguo,” meaning ten thousand countries, in Chinese. This company originally served only foreigners. When business didn’t turn out as well as they had hoped, they extended their service to Chinese. However, not many Chinese used their services, at least partly because the operation completely followed then current Euro-American funeral styles.

In 1934, the company in New York decided to close the funeral home and R.O. Scott took this chance to buy it from his former employer. After buying Wanguo, he shifted his target customers from foreigners to rich Shanghai businessmen, celebrities, intellectuals, and artists. With this switch, he also allowed many Chinese ways of operating funerals to intermingle with Western styles in Wanguo. The movie star Ruan Lingyu’s funeral made Wanguo a household name in Shanghai overnight. As Wanguo’s business took off, many Chinese imitated it and many funeral homes, such as the China Funeral Home, the Centre Funeral Home, and the Shanghai Funeral Home among others suddenly began to spring up in Shanghai.33

During the war, the Japanese puppet regime that ruled the Chinese Administrative Area took over Wanguo and made it state-owned. When the war finished, however, the

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33 In 1931, a Chinese businessman from Nanchang (南昌), Jiangxi (江西) Province named Tao Xingyu (陶醒予) established China Funeral Home (中国殯儀館). This was the first funeral home of Chinese capital in Shanghai.
Republican state returned Wanguo to its owner, Scott. By 1949 when the CCP took over Shanghai, Scott decided to return to America. He asked a Chinese man named Dong Shoupeng (董壽朋) to continue to run the funeral home for him. On September 8, 1951, the Health Bureau submitted a request to take over Wanguo. This first request, however, did not receive approval. On May 29, 1953, when the Civil Affairs Bureau wrote to the Health Bureau to discuss their impending receipt of the administrative functions of the FIA they also brought back up the issue of taking over Wanguo from its private foreign owner. In this document, the Civil Affairs Bureau suggested that, considering the excellent quality of the funeral home’s equipment and the profit it generated, the Civil Affairs Bureau should continue to run Wanguo after the state take over.\footnote{The Draft, p.24, CFIPL archive.}

On December 7, 1953, the Shanghai Military Control Committee, the highest administrative authority at that time, ordered the Civil Affairs Bureau to take over Wanguo.\footnote{A temporary administration that was established when the Communist Party was in the process of “liberating” China. This committee exerted military control over the city it was in charge of. This form of governance disappeared as the Party gained full control of China. Military Control Committees emerged again during the Cultural Revolution.} In this order, it said that the owner should turn all property belonging to this funeral home to the state without sabotaging, transferring, or hiding any of it. All workers were to be kept on to work as usual.\footnote{The Draft, p.24, CFIPL archive.} Two days later, the vice chair of the Civil Affairs Bureau had a meeting with Dong Shoupeng to inform him of the take over. Later on that same day, the head of the Social Unit (FIA was underneath this unit within the Civil Affairs Bureau hierarchy), Fan Yuling (樊玉玲), and another five people accompanied Dong Shoupeng back to Wanguo. As soon as they entered Wanguo, they called a meeting.
to tell all of the employees about the take over and to reassure them of their future job security in order to stabilize the workers’ worries about their uncertain future. From announcing the official order to the actual take over, it took the Civil Affairs Bureau only two days to nationalize Wanguo. In the same month, the bilingual sign outside Wanguo was changed to read (now only in Chinese) “Municipal No. 1 Funeral Home” (*shili diyi binyiguan* 市立第一殯儀館). The foreign private-capital funded funeral home had now officially become a Chinese public funeral home.  

One of my informants who worked in a funeral home in the early 1950s told me that Wanguo was responsible for introducing the American style of embalming to Shanghai and all of Shanghai's funeral homes’ embalming fluids were sourced either legitimately or illegitimately from Wanguo prior to its being taken over by the state. Before 1949, all but two of the employees in the Wanguo were foreigners. The vice manager was a Jewish man named Lonise Holte and two Russians, L.A. Kasikousky and Kosta Levchenko, worked in the cosmetic and embalming unit. Levchenko always worked independently when he embalmed a body. Before he left for Brazil in 1952, he taught Zhu Miaogen (朱妙根), Scott's private tailor, the technique of embalming. When the Civil Affairs Bureau nationalized Wanguo in 1953, it forced Zhu Miaogen to then teach embalming techniques to other fellow Chinese funeral professionals.  

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37 The Draft, p.23-24, p.63, CFIPL archive. Although these funeral homes were now all state owned and therefore share a lot of similarities with funeral parlors, they were not yet “funeral parlors.” The key reason is because these funeral homes still practiced body burial. As mentioned in previous chapters, funeral parlors today are synonymous with crematoria.  
**Nationalizing Internal Differences**

The traditional Chinese idea of a proper death was (and to a large degree still is) to be buried in one’s hometown like “falling leaves returning to their roots” (*luoye guigen* 落葉歸根). In contrast to Euro-American conceptions of “urbanites,” imperial Chinese urban life was seen as temporary and most residents thought that they would return to be buried in their native places with their ancestors—the sojourning aspects of imperial Chinese cities described by Skinner (1977: 539; Golas 1977: 564). Pre-communist Shanghai was no exception. Bergere describes Shanghai in the early 20th century, “[t]he population was fragmented into communities that had virtually no communication with each other. Shanghai was a Tower of Babel where provincial dialects created as many barriers between the Chinese as national language did between the Europeans” (2009:84). Since native place was one of the most important sources of identity for individuals and given the need to return in death to one's ancestral home, coffin repositories were often facilities attached to native place associations or native place association based guilds (Sinn 2003).³⁹ When they had enough coffins to fill up a boat, those coffins would be transported back to their hometown.⁴⁰ For poor people, native place associations provided charity cemetery plots in Shanghai so that the poor could at least be partially returned to

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³⁹ This type of organization was also very common in other urban areas and in centers for international migrations as well. One of the original high level organizations of Chinese residents in British colonial Hong Kong with any power was that of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals that oversaw (as charity work) the receipt of coffins returning their residents home from lives working abroad (Sinn 2003).

⁴⁰ Coffin transportation companies (*yunjiusuo* 運柩所) were another related funeral institution in Shanghai. They were specialized coffin transporting boat companies.
their hometown by being buried on their hometown associations’ property (Bergere 2009:101).

Xijin (錫金) Funeral Home, like many other funeral homes prior to the socialist transformation, was associated with Xijin Association—a native place association. The association was first established in 1902 for people who came to Shanghai from Wuxi (無錫) and Jinkui (金匱) cities. Just a few years before Wanguo Funeral Home took off, the Xijin Association’s coffin repository already contained several funeral halls and a funeral service department. These funeral halls and the service department were the predecessor of the Xijin Funeral Home. Over the first 40 years of Xijin’s operation, their service gradually expanded from providing for only people who came to Shanghai from the same area of origin to providing for-profit services to the general public.

In 1954, the Civil Affairs Bureau and the Shanghai branch of the People’s Relief Administration of China decided that all forms of native place associations, established with social funds, counted as public property and therefore needed to be “returned” to the state. In this sense, such a change was not a change from private to state ownership. Rather, those properties were seen as already “public” in the first place. They were “public” entities that were improperly held for the benefit of a small proportion of the public and should therefore be fully public. In July 1954, the Civil Affair Bureau formed a four-person team to take over Xijin. About four months later, the Bureau officially finalized its take over on November 13, 1954. Since there were not many funeral homes

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41 This take over process was to continue at the same time that the funeral home went on with its daily business. The People's Relief Administration of China decided to take over estate property first and then non-estate property. See the Draft, p.25, CFIPL archive.
in downtown Shanghai by then, the Bureau decided to make Xijin into a city funeral home. In March 1955, the Xijin Funeral Home was renamed the “Shanghai Municipal Xijin Funeral Home.”

In addition to funeral homes like Xijin that were run by associations, there were also many funeral homes run by private Chinese individuals or companies at that time. While the socially funded associations related to funeral institutions and cemeteries were simply nationalized, these private and commercial funeral institutions became “public-private joint management” (gongsi heying 公私合營) operations. According to the Civil Affairs Bureau’s 1956 plan, there were a total of nine funeral homes, three coffin repositories, and two crematoria that needed to become public-private joint management enterprises. The first private and commercial funeral institution that went through this process was Anle (安樂) Funeral Home in January 1956.

After the success of Anle as a trial case, the “Private-Public Joint Management Committee” was formally established on April 14, 1956 in order to nationalize all private funeral institutions. The FIA then merged and nationalized all private and commercial funeral homes.

42 The story of Yong Xi Tang (永錫堂) was very similar to the Xijin Funeral home. It started as a coffin repository for members of the Zheshao (浙紹) Association—founded in the early 18th century for people who came to Shanghai from Shaoxing, a city in Zhejiang province. This coffin depositary later also had a funeral service unit. In 1954, the People’s Relief Administration of China reorganized Yong Xi Tang and took over its property. In order to keep their jobs, the employees of Yong Xi Tang then worked together to establish a Yong Xi Funeral Home independent from the Zheshao association. In January 1956 when it was nationalized, it closed its doors and all its employees were transferred to work in Xijin or Xieqiao Funeral Homes.

43 Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau 上海市民政局. 1956. “Shanghai shi minzheng gongzuo guihua” 上海市民政工作規劃 [Annual work plan for Shanghai civil affairs governance], CFIPL archive.
funeral institutions between 1956 and 1958. After this series of acts, by 1958, only five funeral homes remained in Shanghai. They were Wanguo, Anle, Xieqiao (斜橋), Xijin, and Guohua (國華) Funeral Homes. These five remained open until the Cultural Revolution.

In this public-private joint management model, the original owners gained 5% in dividends from the annual profits every year after nationalization. These dividends, however, were suspended in September 1966 at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Although many owners stayed in their jobs early on, often working as day-to-day managers, the FIA assigned personnel were the ones who held the real power in running the business. After nationalization, employees were no longer employees of a private capitalist organization; they were employees of the FIA—a state bureau reporting directly to the party-state.

**Nationalizing Religious Funeral Institutions**

While nationalization of private and commercial cemeteries, funeral homes, and coffin repositories went relatively smoothly, the nationalization of religiously affiliated funeral institutions caused more issues. The former were each nationalized within a couple of months, the latter took almost ten years. The crucial factor here was related to the fact that religious funeral institutions were caught between two bureaus. One was the

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44 For example, Dazhong (大眾), Leyuan (樂園), Hu'nan (滬南) and Hong'an (虹安) Funeral Homes were either closed or became different types of non-funeral related companies (in some cases making use of the space and employees to start a new factory). Liyuan (麗園) Funeral Home merged with Xieqiao (斜橋) Funeral Home. Jin’an (近安), Hongqiao (虹橋), and Tonghai (通海) Coffin Repositories were merged with Anle Funeral Home.
Civil Affairs Bureau that had by then been placed in charge of all funeral related business. The other was the Religious Affairs Bureau that was in charge of all religious institutions. Here I discuss the story of Haihui Temple (haihuisi 海會寺) in depth to give a sense of the complicated texture of the Chinese state at that time, even in terms of “nationalization.”

In 1949, the sutra chanting service business was not going well in the Haihui Temple. In order to gain some additional income, the head monk, Huikai (慧開) got some money from a few fellow Buddhists to start the Haihui Temple Crematorium and registered with the Business Administration Bureau as a company serving the general public. It officially started its business in January 1950. In addition to the seven monks assigned by Huikan to work there, Haihui Temple Crematorium hired around twenty other workers. Although Haihui Temple and the Crematorium were adjacent to each other, their finances, space (including land and houses), and personnel were separate. Their business, however, was still not very good as most Shanghai people rejected cremation so long as they could afford body burial. When the nationalization process started in 1956, the Shanghai Religious Affairs Bureau, in response to a Civil Affairs Bureau inquiry (i.e., cross-bureau pressure), said that the Haihui Temple Crematorium was a business in nature and therefore should be included in the nationalizing project.

As explained by the Religious Affairs Bureau the problems only grew from there:

45 Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau 上海市民政局. 2000. Shanghai minzhengzhi 上海民政志 [History of the Shanghai civil governance], Ch. 17, binding guanli 殯葬管理 [Funeral and interment administration], Shanghai: Shanghai shehuikexueyuan chubanshe.
Over the course of the nationalizing process, though, Comrade Zhu Jinfu, who was sent by the FIA to run the crematorium, seriously violated religious policies. He attempted to convert the Grand Hall [of the Haihui Temple itself] into a mourning hall. He also forced monks to stop being monks (huansu 還俗). Some monks refused, yet they were told that the minority must obey the majority’s decision. In the end of July 1956, the head of the sales department, Gu Jinshen called a meeting with nine monks. Comrade Gu told them in the form of an administrative order that there would be no Buddhist ceremonies [in the crematorium] and all religious activities were to be terminated in the temple. Those monks who did not want to return to the lay life soon came to our bureau [the Religious Affairs Bureau], the Religious Affairs Department of the Luwan District Government, Shanghai Buddhist Association. Our bureau [the Religious Affairs Bureau] and the religious affairs departments soon contacted Comrade Mao, the Division head of the Civil Affairs Bureau, Comrade Shu, the head of the FIA, and the representative Comrade Gu. We told them that they should not touch the Grand Hall. After several attempts at negotiations, although the Grand Hall was intact, they locked it up and suspended its usage. The above series of examples of violations of [the government's] religious policies caused many Buddhists unhappiness and even such that they mistakenly thought that the state had nationalized the Haihui Temple.46

Here, the Religious Affairs Bureau stepped in to halt nationalizing actions taken by the Civil Affairs Bureau due to their conflict with the government's religious policies, the turf of the Religious Affairs Bureau. The two bureaus eventually sat down to negotiate and finally decided on a two-step plan. The first step was to make Haihui Temple Crematorium a privately run company as a sideline business of the temple. The temple itself would be subordinated to the Buddhist Association of China (which was itself subordinated to the Religious Affairs Bureau). The Civil Affairs Bureau would assist with the cremation business and the education of the workers in the crematorium. If

46 Shanghai Religious Affairs Bureau 上海市宗教局. 1957. “Guanyu chuli haihuisi huozangchang jingguo qingkuang he jinhou chuli yijian” 開於處理海會寺火葬場經過情況和處理意見 [Regarding the incident of the Haihui Temple’s Crematorium and its solution], CFIPL archive.
this failed, then the second step would be to separate the temple and the crematorium with the Buddhist Association supervising the former and the FIA taking over the later. However, the Religious Affairs Bureau later complained that the FIA not only did not do the right thought work (sixiang gongzuo 思想工作) to educate the workers in the crematorium, they even told those workers who wanted to be nationalized that there was nothing they could do and that their supervisor was the Buddhist Association, not the FIA.

From the Religious Affairs Bureau’s perspective, this was an attempt to work against the existing agreement by suggesting the problem lay in the workers' location within the Religious Affairs Bureau rather than the Civil Affairs Bureau. The tension between monks and crematorium workers worsened over the next few months due to a continuing degeneration in the business of the crematorium. So much so that the workers blamed those monks who refused to return to lay life as the reason that the crematorium was not nationalized and ultimately not doing well. As a result,

“five families of the workers, led by Gu Jinshen, moved into the crematorium (despite the fact that they all had their own houses in Shanghai and some even originally lived in the countryside). After they moved in, they even hung women’s underwear in front of the Grand Hall [of the temple]. This disturbed and upset the monks very much.”

47 Shanghai Religious Affairs Bureau 上海市宗教局. 1957. “Guanyu chuli haihuisi huozangchang jingguo qingkuang he jinhou chuli yijian” 關於處理海會寺火葬場經過情況和處理意見 [Regarding the incident of the Haihui Temple’s Crematorium and its solution], CFIPL archive.
Such a provocative act of forcing monks who had taken vows of abstinence to be exposed to women’s underwear upset the monks greatly. The monks then made a formal request to the Religious Affairs Bureau to solve the situation. When the Religious Affairs Bureau passed along the complaints to the Civil Affairs Bureau, the latter claimed that they did not own the property of the crematorium so they could not deal with the issue. The Religious Affairs Bureau finally relented and requested that the Shanghai CCP Committee approve the separation of the temple and the crematorium.

The decision at the top levels continued to go back and forth, presumably as other political issues and policies changed. The Shanghai CCP Committee approved the Civil Affairs’ Bureau’s request, submitted on 22 August 1960, to nationalize the Haihui Temple Crematorium and other religious cemeteries on December 3, 1960. However, it seems that on May 18, 1961, this issue went back to the negotiating table. On June 11, 1961, the Shanghai CCP Committee approved a motion to suspend the Civil Affairs Bureau’s nationalization of religious funeral institutions. The issue was only finally solved at the end of 1965 on the eve of the Cultural Revolution. It was at this time that Haihui Temple’s crematorium along with Shanghai’s other religious cemeteries were finally nationalized by the Civil Affairs Bureau for good.48

This vignette shows the complicated process that was necessary to eliminate religious sources of identity within funerals. The intra-bureau competition provided space for monks and crematorium workers to fight (via their respective vertical backers) for

48 Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau 上海市民政局. 2000. Shanghai minzhengzhi 上海民政志 [History of the Shanghai civil governance], Ch. 17, binding guanli 殯葬管理 [Funeral and interment administration], Shanghai: Shanghai shehuikexueyuan chubanshe.
their own interests despite the fact that this occurred in the midst of a seemingly overwhelming project of nationalization. Nevertheless, this case shows how the CCP eventually successfully separated funerals from the religious realm. This separation is crucial in understanding the eventual establishment of socialist civil funerals and civil funeral institutions that were devoid of religion in Shanghai.

**Nationalizing the Objects of Identification**

Through this examination of the way that various funeral institutions were nationalized, I argue that these nationalization projects were instances of the breaking of those non-Party ties and sources of identity that were prevalent in Shanghai. I specifically refer to three sources of identity that were available and important to many Shanghai residents of the time—foreign influences (the external others), associational life and other intermediary loyalty (the internal others), and religion. As a cultural contact zone, Wanguo not only transmitted Euro-American cultural influence and body techniques for handling dead bodies, but also represented the colonial invasion that made its existence possible in the first place. Wanguo thus represented an internal “external other” that simultaneously stood for both cosmopolitan foreignness as well as colonial humiliation in the context of Shanghai. Therefore, by eventually transferring this foreign cultural capital to the socialist state, the nationalization of Wanguo expelled foreign influences both as sources of cosmopolitan identity as well as eliminating reminders of colonial shame. This funeral home then changed its name from “ten thousand countries” (wanguo), one that showed its global lineage (having arrived with the colonial invasion and having begun
serving foreigners in Shanghai), to the Municipal No. 1 Funeral Home, a name that emphasizes its administrative status in relation to the beginning of the Communist period and to the municipality (shili, meaning at the municipal level). The American boss, the Jewish manger, and the two Russian embalmers were erased as if they had never existed. The only part that reminded the living about the particular history of Wanguo was “No.1” of its new name. Yes, Wanguo was also the first pre-Communist modern funeral home in Shanghai.

While institutions of foreign capital represented the invasion of the external other, funeral institutions belonging to Chinese native place associations and institutions of Chinese capital represented a type of “internal other” that united and divided people into different groups. Regardless of this unity and diversity, these institutional ties stood clearly in between individuals and the state. They represented one of the most important ways of identifying what being a person meant in pre-Communist Shanghai and in the immediate time period after the regime change. Beyond the boundary of family, identity markers such as native place created community boundaries in urban Shanghai where practically everyone was an immigrant. These regionally divided public differences were eradicated as the FIA took over the funeral institutions of native place associations, disbanded them and redistributed their property and employees into state enterprises. As a result, while there was no need to erase the particular (cosmopolitan and colonial) history of Xijin as occurred at Wanguo, the funeral home’s new name also emphasizes its “belonging” to the municipality. Being a part of Xijin was fine as long people recognized the Chinese socialist state was the first and foremost object of identification (and, of
course, so long as the funeral home did not treat people from “their” place differently than anyone else).

Finally, religious associations stood for transcendental and alternative sources of power that regulated relationships and between humans and the larger cosmological world. Such characteristics gave religious affiliations the potential to compete with the Party for group loyalty on the one hand as well as a clearly linking them to “feudalism” and “superstition” on the other. Yet, at the same time, the socialist constitution legally allowed “religion.” Even though the state’s definition of religion referred to institutional religions (subject to the party-state) instead of to diffused religions (C. K. Yang 1961), state recognition of religion nevertheless created ambiguity for religious funeral institutions. Were they funeral institutions and therefore to be governed by the Civil Affairs Bureau or were they religious institutions and therefore to be governed by the Religious Affairs Bureau? This uncertainty allowed inter-bureau politics to thrive and gave religious funeral institutions a much longer life span within this socialist transformation than any other funeral institution.

Although all of these acts might seem to focus purely on changes in ownership, the consequences went beyond shifts in economic wealth or power. Each says something about how the state went about erasing alternative possibilities for what being a Shanghainese or Chinese person might mean. With the removal of various funeral institutions that built upon differentiated group identities, individuals were left only with the choice of linking themselves and their dead more directly to the state without intermediation. As a result, nationalization atomized both funeral professionals and the
bereaved such that their sole connection and loyalty went straight to the state without any dilution or competition from different social loyalties or “contamination” through associational ties. These nationalizations were therefore a key part of the social and cultural engineering performed by the state to reduce horizontal ties among people in favor of vertical ties between the people (a single, undifferentiated public) and the party-state. In other words, individuals were being atomized as they were “liberated.” The elimination and alienation of these other sources of identity established the foundation for creating a new sort of subject, a political subject citizen who is directly linked to the state. In the next section, I discuss the steps that followed as the state aimed at creating a collectively shared singular subjectivity at the end of life that is first and foremost based on socialism and socialist idea of person.

II. Promoting Cremation in Shanghai

Cremation as a kind of body disposal among Han Chinese people existed long before the birth of the modern Chinese death industry. Although its exact origin is still up for debate, its increasing popularity was linked to the popularization of Buddhism in China (Xiang Mingsheng 1992). As a type of institutional funeral facility, “all recorded crematoria [in China] were run by Buddhist temples, although it was also possible for people to cremate their own dead by constructing a pyre on open ground” (Ebrey 1990: 414). As a form of interment in imperial China, cremation was often an option for people who believed they would move on to a Buddhist Nirvana as well as for those who were too poor to afford body burial.
Imperial Confucian scholar-officials, however, objected and even sought to criminalize cremation because they maintained that cremation not only violates principles of filial piety, but also meant being animal-like—only beasts, or non-humans who were incapable of human sentiments were able to destroy their loved one’s bodies. Moreover, for a deceased parent to be a proper ancestor (and thus a proper postmortem personage), Confucian scholar-officials believed that the deceased's body had to remain whole in death. The rituals performed before and during body burial as well as afterward during the ancestor worship that is enabled by the proper funeral and burial rites were all thought to be critical filial obligations of all descendents. For certain areas such as Jiangnan (江南) where Shanghai was located, the tension between folk tendencies to make cremation available and the imperial state’s stand on body burial was particularly fraught (Fang Xianliang 2006). After Shanghai became a treaty port, cremation was again associated with devout Buddhists or Buddhist monks, foreigners, and extremely poor Chinese (Xiang 1992).

Under the socialist regime, the need to clean up dead bodies probably played a more important role than ideological reasons for kick-starting the actual on-the-ground promotion of cremation. In an official document addressed to the Shanghai Municipal Government, the Civil Affairs Bureau indicated that there were three usual ways of dealing with accumulated, above-ground, and exposed bodies (at that time): transporting the bodies out of Shanghai, burying them in nearby public cemeteries, or cremation. However, according to the Civil Affairs Bureau, the number of cemetery plots available

49 This area is south of the Yangtze River (or Changjiang 長江). Shanghai is one of the important cities in this region.
could only last one year and four months. Transportation out of Shanghai, too, was not convenient or cost effective. They explained that the lack of sufficient land in the urban environment of Shanghai obliged the FIA to seek alternatives. On December 2, 1951, the FIA posted an announcement in state newspapers to encourage the general public use Xi Baoxin Crematorium instead of looking for burial sites.

Furthermore, the Civil Affairs Bureau proposed to build more crematoria in Shanghai, especially since the government wanted to have more adults cremated, and established more public cemeteries to tide the city over until enough people accepted cremation. The Shanghai Municipal Government replied to say that the Civil Affairs Bureau was on the right track. However,

“[The Civil Affairs Bureau] should not solely depend on administrative orders to force the masses to accept cremation, they should not decrease the price of cremation so much that it is impossible to maintain crematoria. They also should not blindly and exaggeratedly campaign for cremation so that the current cremation facilities cannot meet the demand. […] In approving all of the above, we should be well aware of the difficulty and the extended time needed to change the old customs. We should be reasonable, act accordingly and appropriately, we should not rush into things or force things with orders. We should not let private cemeteries freely charge people [whatever they like], yet we should also not allow public cemeteries to just go ahead and increase prices because this will cause the masses to feel upset and therefore lead us into a passive position (reacting rather than leading).”

The kind of governing philosophy revealed in this document shows that despite the fact that promoting cremation was to become the centerpiece of socialist funeral reforms, its

50 Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau 上海市民政局. 1953. “Guanyu binzang gongzuo jixiang yijian cheng shifu wen” 關於殯葬工作進行意見呈市府文 [Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau’s opinions on funeral governance], CFIPL archive.
implementation was to be more cautious and pragmatic than passionate and revolutionary. This was in contrast to the nationalization of funeral institutions, which was done rapidly through administrative orders. Specifically, promoting cremation emphasized campaigning through persuasion, or “doing thought work” (gao sixiang gongzuo 搞思想工作) to use the vernacular term.

There were two waves of cremation campaigns in Shanghai. The first happened before the nationalization of funeral institutions (1956-1958) and the second happened right before the Cultural Revolution. In the following sections, I first provide a brief overview of cremations campaigns. Then I discuss the specific techniques used in persuading the bereaved to accept cremation in Shanghai.

**Cremation Campaigns**

There were two waves to cremation campaigns in Shanghai. The first wave went on and off from 1954 to 1956 and the second peaked between 1963 and 1965. In the first campaign, the spirit of funeral governance was memorialized in the slogan, “Promoting Cremations, Maintaining Body Burials, and Encouraging Body Transportation” (tichang huozaa, weichi tuzang, guli waiyun 提倡火葬、維持土葬、鼓勵外運). In practice, the FIA set up a crematorium in Longhua Cemetery and another two, Xinlu and Lianxi Crematoria, in rural Shanghai in 1954 to enhance the infrastructural aspects of promoting

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51 The Draft, p.5-6, CFIPL archive.
cremations. Meanwhile, the FIA also simplified the procedures for cremation in June 1954, lowered the price of cremation by providing free funeral hall rental, free rentals of western-style coffins (used during the funeral but not to be cremated with bodies), and reducing the prices for body transportation, embalming fees, and so on. The FIA also increased the price of public cemetery plots so that, ideally, more people would choose cremation for economic reasons. From these policies, we can see that the FIA continued to maintain the three different ways of handling dead bodies—cremation, body burial in Shanghai, and transporting bodies out of Shanghai to be buried. Cremation was a priority but not the only way to inter dead bodies.

The first wave waned as the Anti-Rightist Movement kicked off in 1956. We can see the correlation between cremation campaign and adult cremation rate in Table 1 above. From Table 3.1, we can see that the adult cremation rate was 11.94% in 1953. It went up to 19.38% in 1954 as the campaign started. It then dropped to 15.16% in 1955, but then increased again to 23.08% in 1956. However, the rate fell off to 15.09% in 1957

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52 Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration 上海市殯葬管理處. 1960. “Shanghai binzang shiye de yixie qingkuang” 上海殯葬事業的一些情況 [The general condition of the Shanghai funeral and interment industry], CFIPL archive.

53 Starting from June 23, 1954, the bereaved only needed a burial certificate (maizang zheng 埋葬證) issued by a police station or issued by the Statistics Unit of Life and Death to proceed with cremation under the new policy. In the past, the court needed to send a coroner to the crematorium before a body was cremated. See 1953. “Guanyu binzang gongzuo jixiang yijian cheng shifu wen” 關於殯葬工作進行意見呈市府文 [Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau’s opinions on funeral governance], CFIPL archive.

54 Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration 上海市殯葬管理處. 1960. Shanghai Binzang shiye de yixie qingkuang 上海殯葬事業的一些情況 [The general condition of Shanghai funeral and interment industry], CFIPL archive.

55 As discussed in Chapter 2, cremation was the primary form of interment for handling children’s dead bodies in Shanghai. It is therefore not a good indicator for understanding how cremation campaigns changed (or did not change) people’s acceptance of cremation.
Table 3.1:
Annual Comparison of Pre-Cultural Revolution Cremation and Body Burial Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Deaths (PSB)</th>
<th>Number of Deaths (FIA)</th>
<th>Number of Cremations</th>
<th>Number of Body Burials</th>
<th>Total Cremation Rate (using FIA numbers)</th>
<th>% of Total Cremations that were children</th>
<th>Cremation Rate of Adults (using FIA numbers)</th>
<th>Cremation Rate of Adults (using PSB numbers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>74264</td>
<td>4102</td>
<td>27324</td>
<td>31420</td>
<td>55.20%</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>38.20%</td>
<td>18.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>49285</td>
<td>50482</td>
<td>24985</td>
<td>34679</td>
<td>10303</td>
<td>43034</td>
<td>19.26%</td>
<td>19.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>52669</td>
<td>6086</td>
<td>29426</td>
<td>35486</td>
<td>8911</td>
<td>6349</td>
<td>82.92%</td>
<td>11.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>45510</td>
<td>8562</td>
<td>22760</td>
<td>31328</td>
<td>6001</td>
<td>6943</td>
<td>72.67%</td>
<td>19.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>52785</td>
<td>8129</td>
<td>28466</td>
<td>36592</td>
<td>9416</td>
<td>7585</td>
<td>77.79%</td>
<td>15.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>41551</td>
<td>6290</td>
<td>16381</td>
<td>22671</td>
<td>12382</td>
<td>6702</td>
<td>64.20%</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>40130</td>
<td>6290</td>
<td>16381</td>
<td>22671</td>
<td>12382</td>
<td>6702</td>
<td>64.20%</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>44630</td>
<td>8533</td>
<td>15750</td>
<td>24283</td>
<td>14467</td>
<td>5388</td>
<td>64.87%</td>
<td>19.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>49114</td>
<td>10048</td>
<td>17422</td>
<td>27490</td>
<td>17131</td>
<td>5422</td>
<td>63.38%</td>
<td>22.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>45528</td>
<td>11215</td>
<td>14128</td>
<td>25343</td>
<td>14108</td>
<td>6077</td>
<td>55.66%</td>
<td>24.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>40193</td>
<td>9165</td>
<td>10661</td>
<td>19825</td>
<td>13887</td>
<td>6485</td>
<td>49.32%</td>
<td>33.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>32943</td>
<td>6989</td>
<td>7388</td>
<td>14366</td>
<td>12497</td>
<td>6077</td>
<td>43.62%</td>
<td>31.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>29919</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>7234</td>
<td>12958</td>
<td>10812</td>
<td>6149</td>
<td>61.33%</td>
<td>35.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>27606</td>
<td>13936</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>27606</td>
<td>13936</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PSB = Shanghai Municipal Public Security Bureau  
FIA = Funeral and Interment Administration, Shanghai Municipal Civil Affairs Bureau  
*PSB numbers cover those whose bodies were handled at home and used unregistered boats to transport bodies to places outside Shanghai. Yet, they exclude some newborn babies and non-Shanghai residents who did not have their household registration registered in Shanghai. The FIA numbers, in turn, do not have the former, yet cover the latter. This is why the two statistics are inconsistent.

and then saw little increase over the years as the FIA shifted its focus on nationalizing funeral institution (Xu and Xu 1999).

This drop in 1957 was ironic because it was in 1956 that Mao Zedong made his famous cremation proposal. Along with the other 151 functionaries in the Central Work Conference, Mao approved *A Proposal that all Central Leaders be Cremated after Death*. Mao made the following exhortation when he signed:

> To chant "Long life!" is to contradict natural laws. Everyone has to die sooner or later, whether they be killed by germs, crushed by a collapsing house, or blown to smithereens by an atom bomb. Anyway, one way or another everyone ends up dead. After people die they shouldn't be allowed to occupy any more space. They should be cremated. I'll take the lead. We should all be burnt after we die, turned into ashes and used for fertilizer.  

The China Funeral Association’s website today describes 1956 as a watershed moment where “from then on, China began funeral reformation” due to the signing of this proposal. Yet, even if this was a watershed moment in Chinese history, it did not bring an increase in the cremation rate in Shanghai. Instead, there were intriguing temporal divisions in CCP governance where policies played out quite differently or at quite different pace on the ground. In retrospect, it is ironic that Mao’s cremation proposal is recorded on the official website of Mao’s Mausoleum in Tiananmen Square: the very place where his body remains unburied, uncremated, and taking up a good deal of space.

While there was not much going on in terms of promoting cremation between 1956 and 1958 in Shanghai as the FIA occupied itself with nationalizing funeral

institutions, another small cremation campaign started in 1959. This campaign was a minor part of a different campaign that focused on reforming funerary rites. I will discuss this specific ritual reform in more detail in Chapter 7.

In any case, an unpublished internal draft of the funeral history of the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau (the Draft hereafter) explains that by National Day (October 1) of 1959, many citizens had complained of feeling tired of the cremation campaign. It says that some people in the Shanghai Municipal Committee of the CCP even criticized the FIA and, as a result, the “Comrades in the FIA had cold water thrown on them. The citywide cremation campaign stopped.” This description, of course, did not make it into the final published version of the history of the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau. Nevertheless, it shows that even though promotion of cremation was a central government decision publicly supported by Mao himself and implemented by the Shanghai FIA, this support did not translate into inter-bureau consensus at the levels directly above the FIA.

In 1961, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the central government (the predecessor of the Ministry of Civil Affairs) requested all civil affairs bureaus at local levels to prepare for a nation-wide promotion of Funeral and Interment Reform. This new promotion had four specific requirements: 1) Promote cremation and establish crematorium starting from the large cities and then moving on to medium and smaller...
cities, 2) Use barren mountains and deserted lands to build public cemeteries to reform body burial, 3) Break the old funerary customs and institute frugal funerals, 4) Use administrative unit division as the basic units to promote Funeral and Interment Reform in unity. In response to the Internal Affairs Bureau, the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau reported on July 26, 1963 that “there are six crematoria with a total of 23 cremators (furnaces) in Shanghai city. We are about to build gas cremators and meeting halls in the Longhua Crematorium”.

This notice then turned into the second wave of cremation campaigning. Starting in July 1963, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the central government in Beijing issued a nationwide document to investigate how the promotion of cremation had been carried out in each place and to ask for plans for the next year's building of new crematoria. This document reasserted (or reinstated) the central government’s determination to promote cremation. In 1964, to echo the call of the central government, the Shanghai FIA changed its policy slogan from “Actively Promote Cremation, Gradually Decrease Body Burials, and Reasonably Attend to Body Transportation” into “Actively Promote Cremation, Determinedly Minimize Body Burials, Holistically Reformulate Funeral Reform”.

63 Shanghai Funeral Museum p.97
64 Actively Promote Cremation, Gradually Decrease Body Burials, and Reasonably Attend to Body Transportation (Jiji tichang huozang, zhubu jinsuo tuzang, shidang zhaogu waiyun 積極提倡火葬, 逐步緊縮土葬, 適當照顧外運)
65 Actively Promote Cremation, Determinedly Minimize Body Burials, Holistically Reformulate Funeral Reform (Jiji tuixing huozang, jianjue yasuo tuzang, quanmian gaige binzang gongzuo 積極推行火葬, 堅決壓縮土葬, 全面改革殯葬工作)
On March 10, 1964, the Shanghai Municipal Government approved the FIA’s proposal to renovate Longhua Crematorium and Xi Baoxin Crematorium as a part of its effort to further promote cremation. By the end of 1964, a citywide “Transforming Customs and Promoting Cremation Committee” was established. This committee consisted of representatives from the Publicity Ministry of the Shanghai Municipal Committee of the CCP, the Public Security Bureau, the Personnel Bureau, the Labor Bureau, the Education Bureau, the Civil Affairs Bureau, and the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (Xu and Xu 1999). Several months later, in July 1965, the Internal Affairs Bureau of the central government announced its formal “Opinions about Funeral and Internment Reform.” This Opinion actualized the CCP’s effort to promote Funeral and Internment Reform in general, and cremation in particular, at a nationwide level. The campaign for cremation was again up and running at full steam.

Just prior to the start of the Cultural Revolution, government figures recorded 13,930 bodies being cremated in urban Shanghai in 1965, occupying 50.46% of that year’s deaths. Among these, 1,285 households were persuaded to accept cremation by funeral practitioners—a three-fold increase from the previous year. Shanghai had (and

66 Shanghai Funeral Museum, p.97
67 Yifeng yisu, tuixing huozang gongzuo wei yuanhui 移風易俗推行火葬工作委員會.
68 Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau 上海市民政局.1953. Guanyu binzang gongzuo jixiang yijian” cheng shifu wen 關於殯葬工作進行意見呈市府文 [Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau’s opinions on funeral governance], CFIPL archive.
69 A huge quantity of crematoria were built as the direct product of this statement. Specifically, 16 crematoria were built in all 16 cities with populations of over 100 million. 23 of 31 cities with populations between 50 and 100 millions also have crematoria. 26 of 75 cities with populations between 20 and 50 million people also got crematoria. See 1996. Binzang guanli 殯葬管理 [Funeral and interment administration]. Bejing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe.
70 The Draft, p.38. The total number of children involved in this figure is unclear.
still has) the highest cremation rate nationwide. In March 1966, the Internal Affairs Bureau even organized a national meeting in Nanhui (南匯) County of Shanghai City regarding the technical issues of building crematoria and installing new, cutting-edge gas cremators. This conference’s minutes were then distributed to the whole nation. According to the Draft, Internal Affairs’ ambition to promote national funeral reform was “the arrow just being shot from the bow.” Yet, the beginning of Cultural Revolution abruptly stopped the arrow from being released towards its target. I will return to the Cultural Revolution by the end of this chapter. For now, I will analyze how state practitioners on the ground actually went about “promoting” cremation. The actual technique of promoting cremation was important because I argue this technique aimed to detach individual mourners from their kin relations.

**Disembedding Self from Kin Relations**

In the beginning, the methods of promoting cremation involved disseminating printed campaign materials throughout hospitals, police stations, alleys, neighborhood communities, charity organizations, and funeral parlors. After 1955, the FIA expanded its propaganda tools in a slideshow promoting cremation that was shown in all movie theaters in Shanghai for a whole month, setting up giant billboards in landmark areas such as the Bund and the People’s Avenue for a whole year, creating a “walkway” promoting cremation in the downtown district, and even inviting people to visit
crematoria.\footnote{Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau \textit{上海市民政局}. 2000. \textit{Shanghai minzhengzhi 上海民政志 [History of the Shanghai civil governance]}, Ch. 17, binding guanli 殡葬管理 [Funeral and interment administration], Shanghai: Shanghai shehuikexueyuan chubanshe.} In 1959, the FIA campaigned at the temple festivals of the Qibao Temple, Longhua Temple, and Jing’an Temple.\footnote{Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration \textit{上海市殯葬管理處}. 1960. \textit{Shanghai Binzang shiye de yixie qingkuang 上海殯葬事業的一些情況 [The general condition of Shanghai funeral and interment industry]}, CFIPL archive.} During the second wave, the Transforming Customs and Promoting Cremation Committee not only campaigned in temple festivals as before, but also turned the month of the Sweep Tomb Festival (April) into a “Campaign for Cremation Month” in 1964. This time six more crematoria were built in rural Shanghai and each funeral home was to compete against the others to see which one had the highest cremation rate at the end of the month.\footnote{Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau \textit{上海市民政局}. 2000. \textit{Shanghai minzhengzhi 上海民政志 [History of the Shanghai civil governance]}, Ch. 17, binding guanli 殡葬管理 [Funeral and interment administration], Shanghai: Shanghai shehuikexueyuan chubanshe.}

While the above methods were important in promoting state sanctioned ideas about funeral and interment, this did not mean that people who actually needed to arrange funerals at that time would accept these ideas. Therefore, within funeral homes, state practitioners were tasked with persuading those bereaved who went to the funeral homes of the superiority of cremation. One informant told me that one of her first jobs after starting work on a case at a funeral home was to do “thought work” with the bereaved to promote cremation. Another informant told me that it was not an easy job to persuade the bereaved to accept cremation. He said that some bereaved became so upset that they threw shoes at him.
In addition to my own interviews with older practitioners, I also have some documents describing the actual process of persuading the bereaved to agree to cremate their beloved. They give us a unique partial look at how persuasion was actually carried out. What I want to get at from these descriptions is how state practitioners persuaded the bereaved. I argue that the key technique used here was to identify and isolate the chief mourners in their decision making so that the state formed a direct bond (mainly through state practitioners) with chief mourners that could transcend other relational and kinship relationships.

I: As long as you are willing to stand up, the Party and the Masses all support you:75

[...] The deceased lived with his wife and his parents. When they came to our funeral home to organize the funeral, over 20 people came (even though these people did not in general circumstances have social interaction). The deceased's wife was thinking about cremating her husband, yet she was not sure yet. This possibly open attitude, compared with the objections from the parents-in-law [of the deceased’s wife] and other relatives, stood in large contrast to the other people. The Comrades working in the memorial meeting halls were not discouraged. On the one hand, Comrade Zhu Xifu went to invite the Public Security Bureau to assist [in their persuasion work]. On the other, Comrade Qiu Genchu and other comrades went to talk to the deceased's wife several times respectively. They analyzed the intentions of those relatives for her. They encouraged her to stick to the truth and stand firmly on her position. They told her, “as long as you are willing to stand up, the Party and the masses all support you.” Then funeral practitioners went to talk to all those relatives together to explain the Party’s policy and tell them that they [the relatives] had no right to stop other people’s progress—they [the relatives] were politically criticized. Among these relatives, one woman was particularly bad. She kept talking to the wife telling her not to. So we had an individual meeting with [this woman] to

74 One thing that needs pointing out is that these state practitioners wrote these documents as work reports to their superiors who then collected them for use in their own annual reports and other documents.

75 Funeral Service Team 服務組. N.d. […] missing p.1 “shi bu dong yuan de) jiazhong youqi qi ji sizhi fu yu mu...” (不動員的）家中有其妻及死者父與母… [not mobilized) the household has the wife and the deceased father and mother...], CFIPL archive.
pressure her more so her bad influence would not work. As soon as we found one man among these relatives who seemed to change his mind a little bit, we took the chance to encourage him to help us by doing an inside job from within in order to turn things around into a good direction. After using this method many times we succeeded.

II: Three Catches: Catch the organizer; Catch the major conflict; Catch the thought
August 30. The deceased was Zhang Aidi. Female. 60 years old. Her husband Xu Jiji is a petty capitalist. Unemployed. He had planned to buy a coffin [meaning using body burial]. He originally intended to have her funeral at his house. However, his lilong [neighborhood community] did not allow this [as doing this has a very bad influence] so he came to us [a funeral home]. Xu Jiji insisted on transporting her body back home to be buried. His oldest son also insisted on this. After Comrade Kong [a funeral practitioner] learned more about the situation, he found out that the father favors his second son the most and therefore believes his [second son’s] words the most. When the second son came back from the army, Comrade Kong focused on persuading him [the second son] in order to persuade the father. Through memory contrasting methods (comparing how the second son treated his mother before and after he joined the army) and other persuasion, the father finally changed his attitude. He said, determinedly, “my good son, I will listen to you. I certainly will cremate your mother.” His other sons asked him to think seriously again. He said, “I certainly will do this. There is no way that I will change my mind.” Finally, [the bereaved family] had one request—to bury her ashes nicely [meaning to still have a nice plot in the cemetery]. We agreed and helped them return the coffin. They were also very grateful.

III: Cooperate with the Lilong Closely
April 1. The deceased Wei Gendi. Female. 31 years old. Her husband Chen Pingling. Their three kids and the mother-in-law of the husband [the deceased’s mother] who came from Wuxi live together. Since the work unit did “thought work” with the husband in advance, he had already agreed to accept cremation. The main obstacle was the mother-in-law. She said to him, “if you cremate my daughter, I will not take care of these three kids.” The husband was worried about this since he did not have parents to take care of his kids. Comrade Hua Xingshen actively persuaded the mother-in-law (because they all came from Wuxi so sharing a language made persuasion easier). Comrade Hua used himself as an example. He said, ‘when my wife died, she was cremated. According to my understanding of what is happening over in Wuxi, there were many tombs that were dug up. If you buried your daughter’s body, I'm afraid that it won’t be too long before it too is dug up. Then you'll have to spend more money to deal with it all again. What trouble. I will not lie to you. If you agree to cremate your daughter, it will be good for your son-in-law [his work unit will have a very good
impression of him]. After various persuasions and the cooperation of the work unit, the mother-in-law finally cleared up her mind. The childcare issue was solved.

As these instances show, persuading the bereaved to accept cremation was accomplished by making the chief mourner, whether the spouse of the deceased or the children of the deceased, work directly with the state practitioners so the state could move them out of the influence of their extended family. For example, the wife in the first story, the outsider of a patrilineal family, yet “the partner” of the deceased within a nuclear family, was chosen to be the target for persuasion. The state practitioner working in the meeting hall stood on the wife's side in fighting against the patrilineal family of the deceased in general and the parents of the deceased in particular. When this did not work, then the state practitioner Comrade Zhu Xifu recruited people from Public Security Bureau to persuade the patrilineal family of the deceased. Meanwhile, Comrade Qiu Genchu continued to talk to the wife to affirm her position by “analyzing the intentions of those relatives.” Although the report did not say what these intentions were, one possible reason that Qiu Genchu said probably related to how the deceased’s patrilineal family made their decision based on their lineage interests instead of the wife’s interests. Thus, as the report says, “as long as you [the wife] are willing to stand up, the Party and the masses all support you [the wife].” Moreover, one particular woman who was asserting a “bad influence” from the state practitioners' perspective and who was a moral upholder of extended family values was singled out. State practitioners had a separate and individual meeting with this woman to stop her from standing up for traditional values.
We saw this strategy of picking out a target and using a divide and conquer technique in the second and third cases as well. In the second story, state practitioners persuaded the husband of the deceased by making the second son of the deceased persuade the father. This put the second son-father in alliance against the other sons. In the third story, the state practitioners made sure that the widower was strong enough to fight against his parents in law.

All three cases not only show the divide and conquer technique, but also purposeful acts of atomizing individuals in making funeral decisions. This was done by state practitioners forcing (at least partially) a particular chief mourner to work along with them and against their other family members at the same time. While families as a group historically have rights and obligations in deciding how funerary rites and body disposal should be performed, now it is the specific individuals, backed up by the state, who have the right and obligation to make such decisions. If nationalization of funeral institutions removed the associational ties (such as native place) or ties via religious belonging, campaigns promoting cremation aimed to remove individual ties to extended kin relations at the micro level. Although the general campaign might have an impact on people’s perception of cremation, cremation was more successfully promoted in the direct interaction between the bereaved and funeral practitioners working on the front lines of the funeral parlors. What made changes to cremation possible were these negotiations between the bereaved and the lowest “rank” of people within the hierarchy of funeral governance.
III. Turning Uselessness to Usefulness and Alienating the Dead

After the first wave of cremation campaign (1954-1956) and the nationalizing project (1956-1958), Shanghai funeral governance's own objectives fell victim to the bigger wave of the movements of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) that aimed to turn unproductive cemeteries and labor forces in the death industry toward productive enterprises with technological innovation. I have excerpted and translated the following quote from a six-page document written by an unknown person in the FIA. Although the exact writing date is unmarked, it was most likely written in the first half of 1960. The document title is *Speech Notes from the Pig Raising Unit’s Meeting*:

Why is there such a high death rate for the pigs? Is it because the quality of the pigs was bad [in the first place] or is it because of the quality of our subjective management? I think it is because subjectively we did not work hard enough and this caused the pigs’ death, even though Qingpu pigs’ quality was indeed not good. From our work unit to other work units, we can all observe this. Now let’s examine this more specifically:

1. Our cleaning job is not good enough. […] The pigs are like humans. If they live in a humid environment, they get sick. Pigs die from being sick.
2. We did not find the right interval to feed the pigs so they got sick. Even when this happens to humans, such as we have a full meal this time but not enough the next meal, we too will have stomach problems in the long term.

76 Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration 上海市殯葬管理處. 1960. Zhu er yuedi siyang baogao 豬二月底飼養報告 [Reporting on raising pigs in the end of February], CFIPL archive. Page one has the Table of Contents for this speech. According to the document, the first part of the talk was meant to summarize work done in 1959. The second part is to talk about the plan for 1960. The third part is a work evaluation based on work done in January and February of 1960.

77 Mao’s vision of socialist revolution was to overcome the barriers of “objective reality” through individual, and therefore “subjective,” efforts of the masses. The difference between “subjective” and “objective,” in Chinese socialist jargon, is more similar to the difference between “social structure” and “individual agency” than that between “subjective” and “objective” in anthropology.
3. We were not attentive enough to our pigs in general. If we pay more attention to the pigs, we will know which pigs are getting sick and we can treat them the right away, then we might be able to keep them alive. However, many people in the work units did not notice the pigs were ill until they were dying. How can you treat pigs when you don’t even have enough time to diagnose them?

4. We did not protect against epidemics or quarantine pigs well so contagion caused a lot of death.

5. We failed to do a thorough examination of the pigs when we first bought them so new sick pigs lived with the old healthy ones. Contagion then brings death.

6. We did not classify the pigs and raise them accordingly. When you put big and small pigs together, the food will not be distributed evenly. […]

7. We have to admit that our bad management was the primary cause of their deaths. Subjectively speaking, it is because we did not work hard enough and lacked experience. The bad quality of the pigs was just one of the objective factors. From now on, we should use subjective factors to overcome objective factors.

Perhaps the first question this report raises is that of why it even exists. Why in the world would someone in a funeral governing institution need to write a report to explain why pigs died? How do pigs have anything to do with funerals? One of my informants who worked in a funeral home during the 1950s and 1960s described how, at that time, he was one of the younger ones in his work unit, so they always sent him to collect grass to feed the pigs—this involved two hours or more of walking with a push cart filled up with grass. I met him early on in my fieldwork. At that time my Shanghainese wasn’t very good and he did not really speak Mandarin. I had to ask him to repeat several times what he had just said in various ways to confirm that he was indeed talking about collecting pig feed as a part of his job at a funeral home. I certainly did not expect a funeral professional to need to know how to raise pigs. As I learned more about the history of governing funerals, however, I realized that pig raising is not only
intimately related to funeral and interment governance in certain periods in Shanghai, but also that it represents one of the crucial ideas of funeral governance—the desire to transform something that, to the Party, was inherently unproductive into something productive in a *literal* sense. Governing death and funerals was an effort to reverse alchemize uselessness into usefulness.

The FIA started its experiments with growing agricultural products in cemeteries at least as early as 1954.78 On March 15, 1956 the Shanghai government decided to nationalize all cemeteries (rather than adopting public-private joint management as they had for some funeral parlors). Around the same time, the FIA submitted a proposal about how to distribute profits earned from agricultural products planted in these same cemeteries. This proposal describes 80 mu (13 acres) of land that was being used to grow cotton and 30 mu (5 acres) for soybeans among the graves. The FIA even planted potatoes and fava beans (broad beans) in various places to “make sure that no land [in cemeteries] was wasted.”79 In the next year, the FIA divided the management of all 24 nationalized cemeteries into four big ones: Lianyi, Longhua, Ji'an, and Dachang Cemeteries. 80 This consolidation of ownership set up the foundation for funeral governance in the Great Leap Forward.

78 Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau 上海市民政局. 1956. “Guanyu ge gongmu yeyu nongye shengchan de baogao” 關於各公墓業餘農業生產的報告 [Regarding the amateur agricultural production in each public cemetery], CFIPL archive.
79 Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau 上海市民政局. 2000. Shanghai minzhengzhi 上海民政志 [History of the Shanghai civil governance], Ch. 17, binding guanli 殯葬管理 [Funeral and interment administration], Shanghai: Shanghai shehuikexueyuan chubanshe.
80 Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau 上海市民政局. 2005. Shanghai Tongzhi 上海通志 [Shanghai general local history], Vol. 43, shehui shenghuo [Social life], Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe.
The Great Leap Forward began in January 1958 and terminated in January 1961. This was Mao’s first attempt to move away from a Soviet style centrally planned economic model to a mass-based, self-reliance, and self-energizing model of economic development (Conrad Schirokauer 1989). Simply speaking, Mao mobilized the masses to devote themselves to rapid industrialization and modernization. Peasants were organized into communes so they could change from farming small pieces of land individually to farming big swaths collectively to make agricultural production more efficient.\(^8\) The most famous part of the Great Leap Forward was probably the efforts to set up smelting furnaces in every corner of China. People put their cookware and farming tools into backyard furnaces to produce steel (often of questionable quality) for industrial usage. The Great Leap Forward consequently brought about massive deforestation and a disastrous famine nationwide between 1959 and 1961—the so-called “Three Years of Natural Disasters” as some of my informants (as well as current official discourse) called it.

As far as funeral governance goes, the Great Leap Forward embraced the idea of turning useless land for funeral and interment into useful arable land. This idea contradicted traditional ideas that saw cemeteries and funeral related spaces as dangerous and polluted, and therefore places from which one needed to keep one’s distance. In 1958, the FIA asked its employees to grow fruits trees and commercial forests in their respective funeral institutions (including funeral parlors, crematoria, and cemeteries). In 1959, the FIA initiated a pig-raising project as a key sideline enterprise for funeral

\(^8\) Schirokauer describes some attempts to form communes in cities, but they were not as successful as those in countryside.
institutions. In 1960, the FIA focused more on revolutionizing the technology of funeral and interment and of pig raising. An internal document records some examples of such technological innovations including “the addition of an automatic cutting machine for pig feed, special canvas body bags, electronic embalming machines, pig feed mixtures” and so on. I am not sure what exactly these innovations are (or even if they were real beyond the documents they were listed in). Rather, the point here is more to give some idea of what the possible technological innovations in funeral institutions were at that time and how these were a jumbled mixture of human and pig related technologies.

When the dead were forced to share their last resting space with domestic animals, the two did not necessarily co-exist in peace. I have many reports, including the one quoted at the beginning of this section, pointing out recurrent problems with high death rates of pigs in the FIA’s properties. One internal report written in February 1960 records a 19% death rate for pigs raised in Longhua Cemetery, 0.9% in Lianyi Cemetery, 5% in Wan’an Cemetery, 12.8% in the Xijin Funeral Home, 20% in Anle Funeral Home, and 19.4% in Guohua Funeral Home. The FIA tried hard to catch up on their quotas since they only had 640 pigs and their goal was to have 1350 pigs by August 1960. These high death rates were serious business. Several of these reports, like the one quoted at length above, explore the causes of the pig's deaths through the by then classic Chinese Communist genre of self-criticism.

82 Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau 上海市民政局. 2005. Shanghai Tongzhi 上海通志 [Shanghai general local history], Vol. 43, shehui shenghuo [Social life], Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe.
83 Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration 上海市殯葬管理處. 1960. Zhu er yuedi siyang baogao 豬二月底飼養報告 [Reporting on raising pigs in the end of February], CFIPL archive.
I suggest that the FIA workers used these self-criticism reports as allegories. For example, reason two describes how pigs are like humans, how both died from unstable food sources. While these workers may be novices at pig raising, they certainly knew a thing or two about human death. To wonder why so many pigs died is, in a way, also to figure out why so many fellow human beings were dying. During the latter years of the Great Leap Forward the fate of the pigs merged with the fate of human beings and these writers, while certainly trying to redouble their efforts, did not know what they could do to keep the pigs (and themselves) alive. Moreover, given the intermixing on the technological innovation list and the parallels between the pig’s fate and the simultaneous disasters of the Great Leap Forward, it is not too far fetched to argue that pigs were an analogy for humans in this case. Emily Martin (1981) also has suggested that pigs were a key analogy for humans within a different context in Chinese popular religion.

On March 12, 1961 (when the Great Leap Forward had just been terminated), the FIA submitted a letter to the Civil Affairs Bureau and carbon copied it to the Shanghai Poultry and Eggs Company (PEC). In this letter, the FIA requested the Bureau to force the PEC to clean up the cemetery lent to it so that it would be clean prior to the April Tomb Sweeping Festival. The FIA also proposed to terminate its lending out of this cemetery to the PEC. The letter says, “according to our [the FIA’s] most recent investigation, there were 157 tombs that had lost their burial mounds. Among these, five coffins were exposed on the ground. Another 690 burial mounds are now filled with small and large holes.” This was not even to mention that many tombstones had been moved. The FIA thought that as far as future plans went, it is “inappropriate to use
cemeteries to raise chickens because when chickens scavenge, they dig at the burial mounds. Chickens scavenge the earth every day and every hour so there is no way to fix those holes in the burial mounds. There are just too many holes.”

When a funeral practitioner’s job becomes raising pigs and when the sideline enterprises of funeral institutions are agricultural production and animal husbandry, it shows how the funeral industry has moved towards being a productive site in the most literal sense. This is not to say that other Chinese ideas or practices of funeral and interment have nothing to do with increasing the material welfare of the living or fertility as commonly observed in funerals cross-culturally (Hertz 1907; Bloch and Perry 1982). Quite the opposite, traditional Chinese funeral rituals such as choosing an auspicious cemetery plot based on *fengshui*, burying the deceased at a certain time and date, and burning ritual money and other goods to the deceased all aimed to make the dead happy in return for calling on the dead to protect and bless the living with material benefits. The difference under socialist rule was the deliberate removal of the mediation and supernatural role of the dead. The magical protection and blessings from the dead did not bring wealth. Instead, it was the work of the living, quite literally on the backs of the dead, but under the CCP’s supervision, that was to increase productivity and bring wealth for the whole society.

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84 Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration 上海市殯葬管理處. 1962. “Guanyu shiqindan gongsi zai Anping Gongmu sheli de yangjichang sunhuai fenmu qingkuang” 關於市禽蛋公司在安平公墓設立的養雞場損壞墳墓情況 [Regarding the Shanghai City Poultry and Egg Company’s chicken raising in the Anping Cemetery and its damages to tombs], CFIPL archive.
The exact starting time of the Cultural Revolution, or the “Ten Years of Disaster” as some people call it today, is not uniformly agreed upon. For the Shanghai death industry and funeral governance, however, it began with an exact date: August 22, 1966. On that day, the Red Guards broke into the Shanghai coffin transportation station, located in a port. They opened up all the coffins, took out their human remains, and then burned them right then and there. This incident was not only the end of coffin transportation in Shanghai, but also the dramatic turning point between the predominance of body burial and cremation as the primary form of interment. After this incident, the Red Guards started to “break the Four Olds” (破四舊) in funeral homes. The “breaking” here was both physical and metaphorical—they hoped to change habits by literally destroying the objects that were associated with the Four Olds. The Red Guards went to cemeteries to destroy tombs, crypts, and gravestones and went to funeral homes to smash coffins and unceremoniously scatter their lifeless, soulless contents. The remaining five funeral homes—Wanguo, Xieqiao, Anle, Guohua, and Xijin—that survived nationalization were shut down in the next few months.

In early December, many peasants from Jiangsu and Zhejiang (the two nearby provinces) started a one month long raid on Shanghai cemeteries. They dug up tombs,  

85 Some people suggest that the Cultural Revolution instead began when Mao had a Shanghai Press publish an article of his in November 1965.  
86 Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau 上海市民政局. 2000. Shanghai minzhengzhi [History of the Shanghai civil governance], Ch. 17, binding guanli 殯葬管理 [Funeral and interment administration], Shanghai: Shanghai shehuikexueyuan chubanshe.  
87 The Four Olds, set out in Mao's writing, were Old Customs, Old Culture, Old Habits, and Old Ideas.
broke tombstones, opened up coffins, and abandoned the remains on the grounds. By the end of 1966, it was estimated that at least 400,000 tombs were destroyed. The CCP of the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau submitted a document to the CCP of the Shanghai Municipal Committee on December 24, 1966. This report has a vivid description of these raids. It explains how:

In recent months, wave after wave of Red Guards and little Revolutionary Vanguards, especially those revolutionists in rural communes, stood up and took revolutionary acts to crush tombstones and tear down tomb mounds. According to partial statistics, excepting only those tombs of veterans, all tombstones have been pushed down or destroyed so far (half of foreigners’ tombstones have also been crushed). Tombs in the Buddhist Cemetery and Zili Cemetery [a Christian cemetery] were all or largely destroyed. Hundreds of the tombs of bloodsuckers and parasites [“enemies of the masses”] were dug out and some foreigners' tombs as well. The rural masses who are close to Dachang, Jiangwan, and Lianyi Cemetery are preparing for an even more comprehensive set of revolutionary acts. Revolutionists in the [Shanghai] Funeral and Interment Administration [FIA] are acting up too. […]

88 Digging up coffins and converting cemeteries happened before the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai, too. For example, the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau submitted a report to its supervising institution and a carbon copy to the rural committee of Shanghai on October 24, 1961. This report said that a lot of FIA’s charity cemeteries were converted to farmland by rural production brigades without the FIA’s approval as early as the mid-1950s. At the time of writing, a rural production brigade had just converted over 60 mu into farmland with only 6 mu remaining untouched. Moreover, “in the spring, peasants even dig out coffins to use them [their wood] to repair their houses, pigs houses, or sheep houses. What is even worse is that the peasants do not even bury those bodies again afterward so the bodies are left on the ground. Local residents are very upset.” See Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau 上海市民政局. 1961. “Guanyu chuanshaxian yanjiaqiao dengchu yizhongdi fenmu beijue qingkuang he chuli yijian de qingshi baogao” 關於川沙縣嚴家橋等處義塚地墳墓被掘情況和處理意見的請示報告 [A report on the damages to charity cemeteries in Yanjiaqiao in Chuansha County], CFIPL archive.

89 Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau 上海市民政局. 2000. Shanghai minzhengzhi [History of the Shanghai civil governance], Ch. 17, binding guanli 殯葬管理 [Funeral and interment administration], Shanghai: Shanghai shehuikexueyuan chubanshe.

90 Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau 上海市民政局. 1966. “Guanyu quxiao gongmu pinghui fenmu de qingshi baogao” 關於取消公墓平毀墳墓的請示報告 [A report to cancel all cemeteries], CFIPL archive.
As we can see from this description, the first targets of destruction were tombs of foreigners, religious practitioners, and class enemies. Such destruction articulates the formation of singular and collectively shared selfhood. There was now only one official way to be a person in Shanghai and in China—a socialist citizen. The Cultural Revolution pushed this singular and collective idea of self to such an extreme that all other alternatives had to be destroyed, even if these alternative sources of identification were only secondary to the socialist identification. Many Shanghai people, however, were not happy with these revolutionary developments. The report thus continues:

However, many tombs have owners [meaning that they belong to someone]. As for those owners, […] most of them have been persuaded and agree. But some people haven’t strengthened their thoughts. Recently, many family members [of the deceased] have individually or collectively filed complaints to the FIA, asking the party committee to immediately take active acts to make related units and rural communes act in organized ways, and to ask them to pick up the remains and cremate them etc. Thought work is a difficult task. In any case, we can’t wait a single second to solve the problem of cemeteries. Without immediate and active actions to handle this, it might cause internal conflict and quarrels among the masses therefore leading to unsolvable chaos.

To solve this problem, the CCP of the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau proposed to close off all cemeteries with a less devastating method. They suggested:

As far as destroying all cemeteries, we suggest the Bureau of Urban Planning, Civil Affairs, and district and county governments [of Shanghai] work together to form a work team to carry out this task in an organized way. At the same time, we should inform the owners of the tombs in order to do “thought work” right. We should also have the FIA supervise the tearing down of the tombs.
The above events were what finally accomplished universal cremation, one of the most important goals of the Funeral and Interment Reform, as all funeral homes and cemeteries were closed by the end of 1966. Shanghai already had the highest cremation rate in China prior to the Cultural Revolution. Later, the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau handed all cemeteries over to the Revolutionary Committee of the Municipality of Shanghai, the highest governing authority of Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution, on July 1, 1967. 91 After shutting down all funeral homes and cemeteries that only left two crematoria, Longhua and Baoxin, to handle all of Shanghai’s deaths. Cremation became the only possible way to inter dead bodies. These two crematoria were the predecessors of Longhua and Baoxin Funeral Parlors today.

Shanghai quickly became a pioneer of Funeral and Interment Reform that exemplified the ultimate goal of funeral governance even without having an institution to govern. The Cultural Revolution terminated the institutional life of both the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau and the FIA—the very institutions that had been promoting the Funeral and Interment Reform. 92 At the national level, the Central Committee of the CCP abolished the Ministry of Internal Affairs on December 11, 1968. 93 Funeral governance

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91 The Revolutionary Committee of the Municipality of Shanghai was the highest Party and government authority between February 23, 1967 and December 1979. Its predecessor was the “Shanghai People’s Commune” (Shanghai renmin gongshe 上海人民公社) which only lasted from February 5 to February 23, 1967.

92 The notorious January Storm for Seizing Power started in Shanghai in 1967. This movement was the Maoists’ attempt to allow the Red Guards to take over all of the old communist party organizations—such a take over was in fact the spirit of the Cultural Revolution. This “storm” was initiated in Shanghai and affected Shanghai’s government from the top all the way down. It then spread from Shanghai to other parts of China. Thus, the Revolutionary Committee established a branch in the FIA by the end of 1967. This takeover paralyzed the operations of the FIA.

93 The Draft, p.7, CFIPL archive.
work was therefore transferred to the Ministry of Finance in 1972. If there ever was one, this is one lesson that history has taught us about irony—the lifelong personal and institutional career goal of funeral governing officials was achieved through the destruction of the very institutions that carried out funeral governance.

**Conclusion: The Making of Political Subjects**

Over the last two chapters, I have delineated a process of highly politicized subject formation through an examination of how funeral governance in Shanghai was carried out based on the mundane work of public servants. The need to clean a city of corpses was a prelude for governing death and constructing citizenship in modern Shanghai. While the Health Bureau and its concerns for hygiene solved the immediate problem of body dumping, it could not change roots of the issue of dead bodies without putting into effect a more fundamental transformation that changed how people handle death. As a result, as the FIA was transferred from the Health Bureau to the Civil Affairs Bureau, governing death transformed from a matter of hygiene to one of civility. Under civil governance, and echoing back to the larger socialist project, funeral governance then turned to the nationalization of funeral institutions. This was the state’s attempt to create a particular kind of subject by eliminating certain alternative sources of being Shanghainese and Chinese through their control and ownership of funeral institutions. Specifically targeted were sources related to external others such as foreign influences, internal others such as native place associations and other forms of associational ties, and finally religious influences.
Moreover, the state’s efforts to diminish possible alternate sources of self were further accomplished by cremation campaigns. A key to this was the CCP’s attempt to destroy the foundation of both Confucian and popular religious ideas of person because these assumed that properly performed funerary rites and body burials transformed the deceased into ancestors. In the course of persuading the chief mourners to accept cremation, funeral practitioners worked on alienating specific individuals from their larger social networks (and those networks’ “bad influence”). Promoting cremation therefore became a way to remove individuals from their ties to family members, both living and dead, and to eliminate their influence as a part of who they were. In other words, the CCP attempted to politicize subject formation by eliminating previously strong intersubjective (such as links to ancestors and fellow family members) and associational ties (such as native place associations or private companies) within the world of the living and between the living and the dead through various means of civil governance.

Finally, if my discussions of the nationalization of funeral institutions and the alienation of the dead from the living in previous sections explains the CCP’s work to politicize subject formation by eradicating institutional ties and intersubjective ties leaving only direct links between the individuals and the party/state, my discussion of the radical socialist period explains how the CCP attempted to manufacture a new kind of political subject. That is, the Great Leap Forward era attempted to enact changes to funeral homes and cemeteries to transform them from places of ritual and grief to sites of production where agricultural products flourished, pigs thrived, and, eventually, where
socialist citizenship would be realized and reaffirmed. Finally, it is crucial to point out that these mid-level formal institutions and practitioners such as funeral homes and their frontline practitioners, as well as the FIA, played key roles in altering subject formation processes historically as they defined both the policy and practice of funerals. All these different aspects of funeral governance during this period set the material foundations that made “dying socialist in capitalist Shanghai” possible in the first place—something I explore in chapters that follow.
CHAPTER 4  FROM DEATH AS A MORAL PROJECT TO DEATH FOR PROFITEERING

The dead cannot afford to die. The living cannot afford to live. 死人死不起，住房住不起
- A popular saying in contemporary China

On September 9, 1976, Chairman Mao died. Two years later, Deng Xiaoping won the post-Mao struggle for state and Party power. In 1978, the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party announced the “Reform and Opening Up” (gaige kaifang 改革開放) and China entered a new era of what Deng Xiaoping called “socialism with Chinese characteristics” (zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi 中國特色社會主義), or what other people know as a socialist market economy. These economic reforms would radically transform China over the next three decades.

This chapter describes changes in Shanghai funeral governance against the backdrop of this much wider set of economic reforms. I tackle how state practitioners working in Shanghai funeral parlors changed their roles from being government officials solely responsible for making political subjects to service providers who also need to care about their personal bonuses, parlors’ profits, and customer satisfaction. I then explore some of the social and political consequences of such role changes.
Governing Funerals: Civil Governance and Market Governance

As I have documented, prior to Cultural Revolution the key funeral governing institution in Shanghai was the Funeral and Interment Administration (FIA). The institutional life (and death) of the FIA, is itself an indication of the uncertain destiny of funeral governance because of funerals' ties to the “four olds” targeted by the Cultural Revolution. The FIA was abolished in the beginning of Cultural Revolution. It then was first re-instituted as a subunit of the Business Department of the Civil Affairs Bureau in 1976. In 1978, a new FIA was finally (re)established with 20 personnel. This was the same year that China officially entered its market economy experiment. However, the newly resurrected FIA's mandate was again revoked after a year of life in 1979. This time the FIA became a part of the Third Unit of the Social Welfare Department of the Civil Affairs Bureau—a two level fall into obscurity, institutionally speaking. The FIA finally regained its independent institutional life for good in April 1981.

After resurrecting funeral governing institutions and as China moved further toward a market economy, government officials needed to decide whether Funeral Reform would be a continuing goal of funeral governance in the new era or if this had simply been a product of extreme leftism and therefore should be suspended. The Ministry of Civil Affairs held its “First National Work Conference on Funeral and Interment” in December 1981. At this conference, central government officials affirmed that funeral reform was not a product of radical leftists and that funeral reform had been

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94 Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau 上海市民政局. 2000. Shanghai minzhengzhi 上海民政志 [History of the Shanghai civil governance], Ch. 17, binding guanli 殡葬管理 [Funeral and interment administration], Shanghai: Shanghai shehuike xueyuan chubanshe.
(and therefore could/should continue to be) a long-term effort of the CCP. They affirmed that the direction of funeral governance was to continue to promote cremation, modify body burial, eradicate old funerary customs, and promote frugal funerals.

Furthermore, on October 22, 1983, the Ministry of Civil Affairs proposed to the General Office of the CCP that communist party members should be exemplars for choosing cremation and frugal funerals as well as prohibited from conducting “superstition.” The General Offices of the CCP later promulgated this proposal to all CCP institutions as the “No. 75 Document.” Part II of this document says,

CCP members should simplify their funerals. Except for the leaders in the Party and the state as well as those who are influential domestically and internationally, CCP members should not have funeral organizing committees, farewell ceremonies for their bodies, and memorial meetings. For special situations where having memorial meetings are necessary, we should control the size of them. They should not have more than 200 to 300 people. The decoration of memorial meeting halls should be as simple and frugal as possible.

Two months after the first national work conference, in February 1982, the

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95 Chinese Communist Party of the Ministry of Civil Affairs 民政部黨組.
1983. Guanyu gongchandangyuan yingjianbansangshi, daitou shixing huozang de baogao [A report regarding the Communist Party members needing to simplify funerals and adopt cremation]. The first related document was issued in 1980. The title is: Regarding Avoiding Propaganda for Individuals (zhonggong zhongyang guanyu jianchi shaoxuanchuan geren de jigewenti de zhishi 中共中央關於堅持少宣傳個人的幾個問題的指示). In Section 5, the notice suggests that high levels cadres should cancel ceremonies to bid farewell to the body, downsize the scale of memorial meetings, give less flower wreaths, reduce the number of participants, shorten memorial speeches, avoid praise and so on. Again, in 1991, the Central Committee of the CCP issued an announcement titled Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu dang he guojia gaojiganbu shishou sangshi gaige de tongzhi 中共中央關於黨和國家高級幹部逝世後喪事改革的通知 [Regarding the funeral reform for the high level cadres in the Party and the state]. Section 2 requests that high-ranking Party members and officials not have either farewell ceremonies or memorial meetings at all. The General Office of the CCP issued all three documents.
Ministry of Civil Affairs promulgated a document asking all local FIAs to improve the problem of decreasing cremation rates and of the resurgence of old funeral customs—a nation-wide phenomenon as the Cultural Revolution waned. Consequently, the Shanghai FIA held the First Shanghai Work Conference on Funeral and Internment in April 1982. It proposed that Shanghai funeral governance was meant “to break the old funeral customs, to handle funerals in an economic way, and to promote new social behaviors” to echo the Ministry of Civil Affairs’ calling.

The Shanghai FIA was “lucky,” as compared with other FIAs, because cremation was already a well-established practice in Shanghai. The Shanghai FIA’s primary task was therefore to fight against funeral related customs, especially in relation to religious and folk death ritual revival. On July 12, 1982, the Shanghai FIA made an announcement to reaffirm to the public that there should not be “superstitious activities” in crematoria. In October 1982, crematoria in both urban and rural Shanghai conducted a (new) “Changing Customs” (yifeng yisu 移風易俗) campaign (Zhu 2010). On October 5, 1982, the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau promulgated its “Provisional Measures on the Management of Crematoria of Shanghai.” This was one of the first funeral policies in post-Cultural Revolution Shanghai. This series of policies and actions (re)affirmed that civil governance would continue to be an important orientation of funeral governance in the post-Cultural Revolution Shanghai.

However, the orientation of civil governance would not be the only orientation of
funeral governance in this new era. Under the spirit of Economic Reform and Opening Up, a new competing orientation for funeral governance has also emerged—the orientation of market governance. At the end of 1983, the Ministry of Civil Affairs organized another work conference in Weifang (濰坊) City, Shandong Province (Fan 1989). There were two goals in this conference. The first task was to make sure all local FIAs understood the spirit of the No. 75 Document that reasserted a civil governance orientation toward funerals. The second task of this conference was to make local FIAs exchange their experiences with experiments in various “contract responsibility systems” (jingying chengbao zerenzhi 經營承包責任制) in funeral and interment management. This second goal was meant to allow local officials to experiment with ways of operationalizing market governance in governing funerals.

At that time, no one really knew how marketization should work in China in general and in the death industry in particular. This was why Deng Xiaoping said that developing China's market economy was a matter of “crossing the river by feeling your way from rock to rock” (mozhe shitou guohe 摸著石頭過河). This conference was essentially a place where funeral professionals from various places went to share their experiences of “initial ways of feeling for rocks.” This Weifang Conference decided that all Chinese crematoria would adopt the contract responsibility system and local FIAs went home with basic guidelines for how to operationalize the contract responsibility system.

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Later on the next year, in September 1984, the Shanghai FIA held a “Second Shanghai Work Conference on Funeral and Interment.” This conference officially approved the implementation of the contract responsibility system in all Shanghai crematoria (including both city and district crematoria). As a part of embracing the spirit of economic reform, on October 6, 1984, the Shanghai FIA announced the renaming of Longhua and Baoxin Crematoria as Longhua and Baoxin “Funeral Parlors” to show the public these governing institutions’ sensibility and capacity for a humanist touch. Officials believed that such renaming might mitigate people’s fear of crematoria and cremation. Since then, funeral governance changed from being about governing the “cremation industry” (huozang shiye 火葬事業) to being about governing the “funeral and interment industry” (binzang shiye 殯葬事業).

Finally, on November 5, 1984, the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau approved the renaming of FIA from the “Funeral and Interment Administration” to the “Funeral and Interment Business Administration” (FIBA). This one additional word, business, stands for the Shanghai government’s effort to define funeral governance not only as civil administration but also as business administration. From this moment on, funeral governance was officially shifted from being only a matter of civil governance to having a dual orientation toward both civil and market governance.

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Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration 上海市殯葬管理處. 1984. 1984. “Guanyu shiqu lianghuozangchang gengming de tongzhi” 關於市區兩火葬場更名的通知 [Regarding changing the names of the two city crematoria], CFPL archive.
Operationalizing Market Governance

It is important to emphasize the particularity of Shanghai when analyzing how Shanghai funeral governance incorporated business administration because of one critical factor: the unique, city-wide high acceptance rate of cremation. This meant that Shanghai crematoria (and thus the “parlors” they became) were financially in much better shape to begin with. As mentioned, the national decision to make all crematoria adopt a contract responsibility system was determined in the end of 1983. Two years prior to making this decision, in 1981, 85% of crematoria in China operated at a loss.\(^{101}\) In 1984, there were a total of 1,205 crematoria in China.\(^{102}\) Among them, only 280 of them (23%) were making any profit. The total amount of profit these made was RMB 9,430,000 (USD 3,367,857). The other 925 crematoria (77%) lost a total of RMB 26,740,000 (USD 9,550,000).\(^{103}\) This means the losses of the unprofitable ones were 2.8 times bigger than the profits of the profitable ones.\(^{104}\) Shanghai crematoria were among those lucky 23% that operated in the black due to the high acceptance of cremation. In 1983, Longhua and Baoxin Crematoria together made RMB 1,300,000 (USD 498,084) for the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau.\(^{105}\) Of the 15 other crematoria at county levels in Shanghai, five were making

\(^{101}\) Ministry of Civil Affairs 民政部. 1989. Fanbaojun fubuzhang zai dierci guangguo binzang gongzuohuiyi shang de baogao 范寶俊副部長在第二次全國殯葬工作會議上的報告 [The Vice Ministry Fan Baojun’s Report on Funeral and Interment Reform].

\(^{102}\) They cremated a total of 1,280,000 bodies that year.

\(^{103}\) This exchange rate is based on 1:2.8 (USD to RMB) in 1984. This rate is based on the World Bank's annual middle exchange rate for US dollar to Chinese Yuan. The chart was accessed at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_renminbi_exchange_rates


\(^{105}\) The exchange rate in 1983 was 1:2.61 (USD to RMB).
some profit and the remaining ten at least made their costs and income balance.\(^{106}\)

At the time, the FIBA identified one of the fundamental flaws of funeral parlors and their funeral practitioners as “eating from the public pot” (chidaguofan 吃大鍋飯).

At an institutional level, this meant that funeral parlors received state funds no matter whether or not they were operated efficiently. At an individual level, this meant that individual workers received more or less the same amount of salary regardless of their job performance. It is worth pointing out that the exact same discussion was going on in all state-owned enterprises at this time. In funeral parlors, job performance was tied to administrative goals of producing a certain kind of citizen (through percentage of cases accepting particular funeral reforms) rather than in terms of “sales.” Therefore, even given the financial leeway, how could the people on the ground operationalize market governance in crematoria when the entire staff had long been trained instead to privilege the implementation (without much regard for cost) of administrative orders (either through coercion or persuasion) instead of calculating cost and benefits? In the following sections describing how Longhua Funeral Parlor implemented contract responsibility based on archival materials, I show that the state used a new monetary reward system to transform state practitioners from civil servants to market servants through the cultivation of self-responsible, self-motivated, and self-regulated chief directors and employees.

As mentioned, Longhua became one of only two funeral institutions in urban Shanghai that provided funeral services when all of the former funeral homes and cemeteries were closed in the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Longhua

\(^{106}\) Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration 上海市殯葬管理處. 1984. Zhenfenjingshen, maikaigaigebufa 振奮精神邁開改革步伐 [Stepping forward to the reform], Pp.4, CFIPL archive.
Crematorium actually started as a set of primitive style of cremators within Longhua Cemetery in 1952. These cremators were built to cremate dead children, infants, and the homeless—the kind of crematable dead bodies described in Chapter 2. In 1954, the FIA approved the official establishment of the Longhua Crematorium. Four years later, with the decrease in infant mortality rates by 1958 and the growing government interest in promoting cremation, the FIA renovated this Longhua Crematorium and opened it up for public use.

At that time, Longhua Crematorium had only two coal run cremators, three body transportation cars, and one meeting hall of less than 20 square meters. In 1965, the FIA raised RMB 530,000 (USD 215,447) to rebuild the crematorium during the second wave of cremation promotion. On May 1, 1966, Longhua Crematorium gained its independence from Longhua Cemetery and became its own financial unit just in time for the Cultural Revolution.

After Longhua Crematorium became its own financial unit, the Shanghai government gave it RMB 315,000 (USD 128,048) annually to support its regular functions. Since all cemeteries and funeral homes were closed at the end of 1966, Longhua became profitable starting in 1969. In 1975, a year before the Cultural Revolution ended, Longhua already was making an annual profit of RMB 161,780 (USD 107

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107 Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau 上海市民政局. 2000. Shanghai minzhengzhi 上海民政志 [History of the Shanghai civil governance], Ch. 17, binding guanli 殡葬管理 [Funeral and interment administration], Shanghai: Shanghai shehuikexueyuan chubanshe.
109 In 1965, the exchange rate was 1:2.46 (USD to RMB). See 2000. “Chapter 17: Funeral and Interment Administration,” in the History of Shanghai Civil Governance.
110 This exchange rate was based on 1:2.48 (USD to RMB) from 1967.
By 1977, profits were up to RMB 227,080 (USD 122,745). In other words, funeral governance had gone from a drain on resources to a not insignificant source of funding for the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau's other projects and institutions even before the Opening Up.

Taking a look at specific income sources, the highest profit-generating item at Longhua was its meeting hall rentals (See Table 4.1). The rest of the profitable items included cremation fees, its cremains depositary, sales of funerary merchandise, and body transportation. Just to give a basis for understanding the meaning of these prices at that time, I can give some numbers regarding funeral practitioners’ income. In 1978, Longhua spent a total of about RMB 120,000 (USD 48,780) for personnel. This included 162 employees. Their average salary was RMB 62.69 (USD 25) per month. This means that to rent a medium sized meeting hall cost 2/3 of the monthly salary of a state practitioner working in a crematorium with average salary. It is worth pointing out that at that time, funeral parlors’ employees did not have a lower salary than others who

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111 In 1975, the exchange rate was 1:1.85 (USD to RMB).
112 In that year, Longhua’s annual income was RMB 913,200 (USD 493,621) and its total year's costs were RMB 751,490 (USD 406,210). In 1976, its profit rose to RMB 197,150 on RMB 862,740 of annual income. In 1977, its total income increased again to RMB 938,810. See Qingkuang jianjie 情況簡介 [Introduction to funeral governance], Pp. 1-2, CFIPL archive.
113 See Qingkuang jianjie 情況簡介 [Introduction to funeral governance], Pp. 3.
114 See Qingkuang jianjie 情況簡介 [Introduction to funeral governance], Pp. 1.
115 Among them, there were 37 women, 23 CCP members, 15 CCP Youth League members, and 34 administrators. See See Qingkuang jianjie 情況簡介 [Introduction to funeral governance], Pp. 1-2.
116 The lowest received RMB 41 and the highest RMB 149.8. Standard salaries followed based on the employee's rank. Level one received RMB 41-46. Level two received RMB 52-57. Level Three received RMB 63. Level Four received RMB 70. This salary range was not that different from other jobs in Shanghai at that time. See See Qingkuang jianjie 情況簡介 [Introduction to funeral governance], Pp. 3.
117 It cost 40 RMB to rent a large hall for half a day, see Table 4.1.
worked at comparable levels in other institutions under the Civil Affairs Bureaus.

Table 4.1: Longhua Crematorium Profit Distribution in 1978\textsuperscript{118}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charge Items</th>
<th>Profits (RMB/USD)\textsuperscript{119}</th>
<th>Prices\textsuperscript{a} (All in RMB)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Hall Rentals</td>
<td>96,000/39,024</td>
<td>Large hall 40/half day, Medium hall 10/1.5 hours Small hall 3/1.5 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cremation\textsuperscript{120}</td>
<td>90,000/36,585</td>
<td>Per body 10</td>
<td>Low income households exempted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cremains Depositary</td>
<td>84,000/34,146</td>
<td>10, 7, or 4 per body every three years</td>
<td>The price changes depending on the height of the spot. The higher the better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchandise Handling Fees</td>
<td>35,000/14,227</td>
<td>10% of merchandise purchased</td>
<td>Items included: cremains caskets, black armbands, and yellow flowers (a hair accessory. This is for women mourners to wear on their head)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Transportation</td>
<td>20,000/8,130</td>
<td>Per body 3/per 5 km</td>
<td>After 5 km, every 1 km charges 0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Preservation</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Per body 3/1\textsuperscript{st} day 2/per day after the 2\textsuperscript{nd} day</td>
<td>Bodies were preserved in crematorium refrigerators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{118} See Qingkuang jianjie 情況簡介 [Introduction to funeral governance], Pp. 3.
\textsuperscript{119} The exchange rate was 1:2.46 (USD to RMB).
\textsuperscript{120} The profit from cremation fees was calculated after deducting a maintenance fee for the cremators and an RMB 4 per body gas fee. The profit generated through the body transportation fee was calculated after deducting hearse maintenance fees and an average RMB 0.85 per body fuel charge.
As a part of implementing the contract responsibility system in funeral parlors, Longhua adopted a Chief Directors Contract Responsibility Based System (guanzhang chengbaozhi 館長承包制) in 1985. This operation asked the chief directors of funeral parlors to take individual responsibility for that parlor’s costs and benefits in the form of their own salaries. This meant that the chief director’s salary was first determined by whether the parlor met the pre-set annual quota. If he met the goal, he then would receive his salary plus a bonus depending on how much he surpasses his quota by. This monetary reward was supposed to give parlor leaders an incentive to innovate and execute the business plan of the parlor. This Chief Directors Contract Responsibility System eventually evolved into an Annual Salary System (nianxinzhi 年薪制). When I did my fieldwork in 2011, my informants told me that chief directors of major funeral institutions (including city funeral parlors and cemeteries) were all in this annual salary system. An annual salary system is a common employment type among chief directors and other higher up managers in large state enterprises or international companies in China. The annual salary system ties salary to the effectiveness of management and as a result, as long as they meet quotas, managers are rewarded disproportionately higher salaries than ordinary employees. This was in large contrast to the previous salary system which basically followed a fixed scale that did not make a dramatic distinction between leaders and employees.

However, creating responsible and motivated leaders was not enough to transform

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funeral governance from civil governance to market governance since it was the people on the ground who carried out the parlor's day-to-day business. There were a total of 183 employees in Longhua Funeral Parlor in 1985.\textsuperscript{122} The Shanghai government needed to introduce a new operating system so that \textit{all} of their employees would work in self-motivational and self-responsible ways.

After negotiating with the Shanghai Financial Bureau, Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau changed funeral parlors’ universal bonus distribution to one that rewarded individuals and groups of funeral practitioners based on a commission system. It also removed the maximum limit on bonuses. Specifically, this was accomplished by having FIBA assign a different basic quota to different funeral parlors and then a different ratio for calculating commissions above the quota since, for example, urban city parlors and rural district parlors were dealing with different kinds of customers and different cremation rates. Taking 1985 as an example, as long as state practitioners met their basic quota, they got a bonus. This bonus was equal to three months of the last year's salary.\textsuperscript{123} While this part of the calculation was all based on the preset basic quota, profit from sales that exceeded the basic quota were calculated differently. Specifically, for extra profit produced less than RMB 150,000 (USD 51,020), 40% of this would go to employees’

\textsuperscript{122} Among them, 23% were women and 68% were young people. See Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration 上海市殯葬管理處. 1985. Shanghai longhua binyiguan qingkuang jianjie 上海龍華殯儀館情況简介 [Introduction to Longhua Funeral Parlor], Pp. 1, CFIPL archive.
\textsuperscript{123} After deducting the total bonus to be distributed from the parlors’ annual profit, 20% of the rest of the profit was kept within the funeral parlors (17% went to sales development funds and 3% went to employees’ welfare funds) and the remaining 80% was passed to the parlors' governing bureaus above in the Civil Affairs Bureau (specifically, 20% of this was passed to the FIBA and 60% went to the sales development funds of the FIBA).
commissions. For extra profit exceeding RMB 150,000, 30% would go to employees. Within a year of adopting the contract responsibility system (by 1986), these employees as a group totally were making RMB 760,000 (USD 220,289) in profits annually.

Related to and enabling this new emphasis on sales was another organizational change within funeral parlors. Prior to marketization, Longhua had three departments: the Political Work Department (the predecessor of Human Resources Departments in all state institutions), the Business Department, and the General Affairs Department. The Business Department here included funeral services providing units such as the cremation unit, the meeting hall unit, body transportation and so on. Each department was headed by a chief and vice chief (guzhang 股長) and each sub-unit had its own head and vice head as well. As Longhua moved into the contract responsibility system, however, one of the first things it did was to restructure this internal administrative arrangement. The new organizational composition contained four departments: Political Work, Business,

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124 In 1985, the exchange rate was 1:1.94 (USD to RMB). Among this 40%, 30% was for commissions and 10% went to employees’ welfare funds. The other 60% went to the FIBA.
125 Among the 30%, 20% was for commissions and 10% for welfare funds. And the remaining 70% went to the FIBA. See Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration 上海市殯葬管理處. 1984. Zhenfenjingshen, maikaigaigebufa 振奮精神邁開改革步伐 [Stepping forward to the reform], Pp.17-18, CFIPL archive.
126 In 1986, the exchange rate was 1:3.45 (USD to RMB). See Shanghai longhua binyiguan 情況簡介 [Introduction to Longhua Funeral Parlor], Pp. 3.
127 There were a total of ten sub-units under these Departments including the Business, Body Transportation, Body Cosmetics, Cremator, Meeting Hall, Cremains Depositary, Maintenance, Gardening, Security and Miscellaneous Affairs, and Cafeteria (for employees) units. See Qingkuang jianjie 情況簡介 [Introduction to funeral governance], Pp. 1.
General Affairs, and Merchandise Management. The first three departments still had a chief and a vice chief respectively. The most significant change here was the addition of the newly established Merchandise Management Department. Instead of having a chief and a vice chief, it had a Manager (經理) and a Vice Manager. It was in charge of selling cremains caskets, mourning dress (*shouyi* 帽衣, literally meaning longevity garments), wreaths (both rentals and sales), food and drink, small decorative items and other miscellaneous funerary goods.

In other words, the most important spirit of the contract responsibility system was to provide personal financial incentives to both leaders and workers so they would work for themselves instead of “serving the people.” The more a person works, the more he or she earns, and (theoretically) the better a life she or he could have. Moreover, leaders were rewarded based on the same kind of mechanism except that the potential bonus available was designed to be disproportionally higher due to the believed existence of higher “risk” at the managerial level. People’s income became the result of hard work as individuals instead of a result of being a socialist citizen-subject with both the right and obligation to work who received more or less equal payment despite administrative

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128 The Business Department contained 6 sub-units: the Sales, Body Transportation, Body cosmetics, Cremator, Meeting hall, and Cremains Depository units. 60% of employees were in this department. See Shanghai longhua binyiguan qingkuang jianjie [Introduction to Longhua Funeral Parlor], Pp. 2.

129 It had three sub-units: the business administration, funeral merchandise services, and wreath units.

130 Shanghai longhua binyiguan qingkuang jianjie 上海龍華殯儀館情況簡介 [Introduction to Longhua Funeral Parlor], Pp. 3.
ranking differences and differences in efficiency.\textsuperscript{131}

This process was what David Harvey (2005) describes as “neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics” (though it is equally important to point out that the Shanghai government has no interest at all in opening up the funeral market to free competition. I will return to this point later). Harvey sees this trend in China as paralleling the changes that have happened in advanced capitalist societies (especially in UK and US), a phenomenon he calls the rise of global neoliberalism. Moreover, from the details of how the contract responsibility system works, we can see that at the individual level, pursuing additional money is framed as pursuing self-responsibility and vice versa. The Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau and the FIBA were clearly trying to make leaders and state practitioners into a new kind of subject (“new” here just means different from the socialist governing subject) who would be self-regulated, self-responsible, and self-calculating. Foucault (1982) calls this way of governing subjects a neoliberal technology of self where power works internally through individual bodies rather than needing to be exerted from the outside.

However, with the following ethnographic vignettes, I argue that such a governing attempt at making neoliberal subjects has been only partially successful among state practitioners. Specifically, I argue that while this way of governing encouraged individuals to become individualized self-managed subjects on the one hand, it also made individuals into working class subjects with some degree of class-consciousness who could even take class action against the interests of the parlor and/or state on the other.

\textsuperscript{131} See \textit{Zhenfenjingshen, maikaigaigebufa} 振奮精神邁開改革步伐 [Stepping forward to the reform], Pp.5.
Envisioning Self as a Working Class Subject

Ma Haiming was a senior state practitioner at Huangpu Funeral Parlor. I asked him what the parlor looked like when he first started to work there in the 1970s. Instead of giving me an answer about the past, though, he told me about the present:

Ma: “Funeral parlors have changed so much since I started in the late 1970s. Today, many leaders in funeral parlors are “tuochan” (脫產). Not just leaders, but also other people such as accountants and cashiers. All they do is sit in their offices and have meetings. They do not produce (shengchan 生產), but they get a salary. A lot of salary. In fact, more salary than we who produce...”

I: “Tuochan? What is that?” I interrupted Haiming before he kept going. “How do you write those two characters?” I wasn’t sure if I didn't understand due to his strong Shanghainese accent or something else, but I couldn't figure out what he meant.

Ma: “Oh, of course, you don’t know this. You’re from Taiwan. I think tuochan is a Communist Party thing. Tuo is the tuo for tuoyifu (脫衣服, meaning taking off clothes) and chan is the chan from shengchan (production). If someone touchan it means that they have left production.”

I had never heard of tuochan being used in this way before. In Taiwan, tuochan describes the act of selling property in order to avoid liability (more along the lines of “shedding property”). Though the word still uses the same “chan” (產) character as in “production” (shengchan 生產), in this meaning, the chan takes its meaning more from caichan (財產) or property. From an online (mainland) Chinese-English dictionary, on the other hand, tuochan means “to be released from production or from one’s regular work to take on other duties; to be disengaged from work; to divorce oneself from one’s
work.”132 Another (mainland) Chinese-English dictionary lists three meanings: 1) to transfer (production to other duties), 2) to take leave (for study or another job), 3) to dispose of property, 4) to transfer assets (to avoid liability).133

In practice, in China, *tuochan* is actually an employment category that describes a person who has stopped receiving salary from his or her work unit because she or he does not work there at that moment even though he or she still remains on the books as tied to that work unit.134 *Tuochan* usually is a temporary stage and is often associated with going back to school.135 It is necessary because urban workers were all supposed to have a work unit responsible for them (not just for work related things, but also for housing rights and numerous other permissions). Several Chinese scholars told me that when they stopped their jobs to pursue their doctoral degrees, their employment records showed that they were then “*tuochan*.” In other words, students in China are not engaged in production.

However, when Ma talked to me, he told me that leaders and accountants were *tuochan*. To better understand Ma’s “misuse” of this term, we can examine the usage of *tuochan* in rural China. Yarong Jiang and David Ashley's 2013 work illustrates the life of a cadre in rural China. This cadre told them how his promotion to the Party Secretary position of a commune did not release him from field labor. “In those days, cadres were

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132 See [http://cidian.xpcha.com/98568ebdu4u.html](http://cidian.xpcha.com/98568ebdu4u.html) (last accessed July 8, 2014)
134 A laid off worker might still have her or his work unit affiliation. In today’s China, some work units allow employees to “buy off” (*maiduan* 買斷) their work unit ties in exchange for a lump sum of money. The work unit is then no longer responsible for that worker.
135 For example, I met an exchange scholar from China in Boston. She belongs to an academic institution as her work unit, but she currently is a full time PhD student at a different academic institution. Her first institution is still her official work unit, but she does not receive salary from there while she studies at the second academic institution.
'not-relieved-from-production' (*bu tuochan*)” even as they took on administrative duties (2013:57). In this quote, this rural cadres clearly associated production with field labor rather than administrative work (and his promotion to Party Secretary did not allow him leave production).

I suggest that Ma’s perception of how leaders and accountants came to be *tuochan* is a reflection of Chinese cultural concepts of class distinction that associated physical labor with the working class. In my earlier work on the relationship between substance use, class, and gender among Taiwanese men (Liu 2008), I discuss a concept of class based on a distinction between people who “work with their minds” (*laoxi 劳心*) and those who “work with physical force” (*laoli 勞力*). For Ma, to “marketize” meant the creation of class distinctions within funeral parlors. In this process, since parlor leaders and other white collar workers now only work with minds instead of with physical force, they can be said to not only have gotten raises, but also to have gotten to *tuochan*, even while the rest of the parlor's employees had to stay in production.

Let me give a brief description of Ma’s life in the crematoria to shed some light on what he, as a state practitioner, perceived counted as production. Ma graduated from junior high school in 1977 in Shanghai. This was the same year all the sent-down youths from all over China desperately tried to return to the cities they came from.\

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136 Sent-down youths were a group of urban youths who were either forced or volunteered to leave their home cities and be relocated in rural areas during the “Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside” (*shangshan xiaxiang* 上山下鄉) movement. The movement of urban youth to the countryside started as early as the 1950s. In 1962, this movement became nationally organized. Once in rural areas, due to the country's household registration system and perceived overcrowding in the cities, it became nearly impossible for these youths to go home. This massive urban to rural migration reached a peak between 1966 and 1968. With the death of Mao in 1967...
was home for many of these youths, which made job assignments particularly difficult for anyone in Shanghai at that time. After two years of waiting at home, Ma finally got his job assignment. He was told that he had two choices—he could either work on a farm or in a crematorium. Ma had long been living in urban Shanghai. His family members had always had an urban household registration and had therefore never done any farm work before. Ma felt that farming was too “bitter” so he therefore chose to work in the crematorium.

When Ma first started work, he was assigned to work in the cremator unit (luzijian 爐子間). At the time, there were five cremators in his crematoria and his unit had a total of six employees. Back then, cremators relied on coal for their fuel. When they worked, they worked in pairs. They therefore could only keep three cremators working on normal days. Ma’s job was to keep adding coal to maintain the fire. Ma said that it took about a week for someone to learn when to add coal and how much was needed. Working in the cremator unit was very hard, hot work. Not so much because of the psychological aspect, though Ma said he was well-aware that he was burning dead bodies and even more aware of how other people might think of him. Rather, it was hard because it took a lot of physical strength to shovel the coals up high enough to put bodies in the cremator.

and the reopening of college entrance exams in 1977, these sent-down youths made a series of petitions and other actions calling for permission to go home, including going on strike briefly. For example, sent-down youths in Yunnan organized a strike at the end of 1978.

At this point, nearly all jobs in China were assigned by the state, there was no way to “apply” for just any job. While theoretically this meant that everyone was assigned a position, sometimes positions did not open up for quite some time and, in the meantime, you would be administratively assigned within your family's work unit.
This was not even mentioning the equally unbearable heat and smoke. Winter was the “death” season in Shanghai, especially around the Winter Solstice due to its humid coldness (in fact, this is one reason that many Shanghai people believe that Winter Solstice is when ghosts come out to wander around amongst the living). On these kinds of days, the cremator unit needed to have four or even five cremators running full-time without any boost in employees.\textsuperscript{138} Ma was sweaty in Shanghai winters where the temperature often hovered just around freezing. Meanwhile, the smoke always left him with a layer of dust coating his skin. Ma recalled that he did not have a single piece of clothing that was white between 1979 and 1988 while he worked in the cremator unit.

Aunt Wang, another senior state practitioner, told me that she remembered how the chief director of her crematorium himself went into the cremator unit to test things out in the 1960s. Whereas today all directors wear white shirts and ties while sitting in their air-conditioned offices and have “meetings.” In fact, this feeling was very strong among workers, especially the older generation who had been through funeral parlors’ transition from a purely administrative government bureau to also being an office for business administration. Whenever I asked senior or retired state practitioners about funeral parlors in the past, they told me how funeral parlors had changed so much up to the present and how they felt that people today were treated unjustly. Even though they all agreed that their own economic situation was better today, the most obvious change,

\textsuperscript{138} Ma’s work choice affected his marriage prospects. He did not get married until 1988 when he was 28. For men in Shanghai at the time, this counted as very late. His problem finding a spouse was caused directly by the fact that he worked in a crematorium. In the end, Ma’s wife came from rural Shanghai. Her parents were quite open minded, and decided that Ma’s stable job and regular salary was much better than a livelihood that depended solely on Heaven’s will (meaning be a farmer). They therefore agreed to marry their daughter to him.
they told me, was that some people now earned a lot more money than others without much legitimate basis.

Ma’s description of how leaders no longer participate in production and Aunt Wang’s description of how managers in funeral parlors only have meetings instead of doing actual funeral-related work were more than idiosyncratic sentiments. For the majority of state practitioners, working in crematoria/funeral parlors was to be immersed in the physical labor of dealing with decaying corpses. For Ma and his generation of state practitioners, merchandise sales and business administration were not a part of “production” within funeral parlors. Dressing dead bodies, shoveling coal, and cleaning up meeting halls were production. Or, to use this within a Chinese concept of class, working with hands was production while working with minds is not. In this sense, by describing some people in funeral parlors as no longer in production, what these state practitioners were articulating was the emergence of class distinction formed through the economic reforms.

To be clear, I am not saying that hierarchy was somehow new. Quite the opposite, hierarchy had always existed in funeral parlors. However, before the Opening Up, hierarchy was built on political domination since funeral parlors were part of the government. The relationship between leaders and other civil servants was defined administratively through their positions in the bureaucracy. Moreover, this politically dominating relationship was tempered by a general sense of “economic” equality since all workers received relatively equal pay and leaders were not exempt from physical labor (this was in addition to the fact that state practitioners rotated jobs every few years at that
time). However, when funeral governance changed from civil governance to market governance, income inequality grew.

When individuals came to be rewarded for being self-motivating and self-managing, these leaders lost their legitimacy because workers did not see leaders’ privileges in pay scale as the result of their individual successes in market competition in the first place. Another senior state practitioner, Master Kao put this point to me in a rather direct and succinct way. He told me that when the then chief director of Huangpu called a meeting to announce that he was going to take a “personal risk” and implement the contract responsibility system back then, Kao felt strongly that he was lying. Kao said, there was no “risk” there because Shanghai funeral parlors are a state monopoly and everyone dies eventually. This meant that Huangpu would always have business and, given the high cremation rates, it always would make money no matter how poorly the leader performed in Shanghai. What kind of “risk,” exactly, was he taking? Kao half jokingly said to me, “I would love to take that ‘personal risk’ as well if I had a chance.”

This general suspicion about rewarding certain individuals for imaginary risk not only existed between state practitioners and leaders, but also between senior and junior state practitioners, between junior state practitioners and leaders, and between practitioners working in the sales unit and the other state practitioners. Another of my younger informants, Lin Wu, said,

The older generation often accuses the younger generation of state practitioners of being profiteers because there are now so many extra service items we charge for. I think that we need to understand profiteering from various perspectives though. First off, the average cost of having a funeral in our parlor is RMB 7,500 (USD 1,200). Yes, this is not a small amount of money. However, as employees, we
gain nothing from this "profiteering." All of the prices are determined by leaders in the parlor and these profits do not trickle down to us. The parlor's increased profit does not correlate with our income level. What's "worse" is that when funeral parlors are making more money, the customers also are demanding higher quality service. In other words, the more money the funeral parlors make, the more and better work we have to offer despite us not earning any extra. In this sense, don't Shanghai cosmeticians make less money than those outside Shanghai such as in Anhui or Xi'an? We both may earn about RMB 4,000-5,000 per month. However, considering the number of bodies that we have to handle every month and the kind of quality of service demanded here in Shanghai, we actually earn so much less.

Furthermore, Lin Wu also saw the formation of class distinction between leaders and practitioners in the sales unit on the one hand and the rest of the state practitioners on the other. He said,

From the funeral parlors' perspective, it's a monopolized business. If you asked me to point out where competition exists, it only exists among the 16 or 17 funeral parlors [and they are not in real competition in the sense that they are generally far away from each other geographically speaking]. Among these, only three are city funeral parlors and suburban parlors simply cannot compete against the three city ones. Every year, Longhua, Baoxin and Yishan City Funeral Parlor announce their annual statistics, things like how many bodies they handled. These numbers are strange sometimes. For example, a funeral parlor might have handled fewer bodies compared with its previous year but yet the net profit still increased. Why? Because many service items are monopolized. People have no choice. They have to buy these services from the parlors.

From another perspective, monopoly might not be a bad thing. But, it is important to recognize that these profits are not the result of some individual's self-initiated hard work and achievement. Individuals did not fight to get sales done. Business comes to your door directly. Profits here thus have nothing to do with certain individuals striving to offer more or better services. This is why I think that salespeople [in the sales unit] should not have such high commissions. Their “sales” result from their “sitting and facing the south” (chao nanzuo 朝南坐 in

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139 This number is the combination of city level and district level funeral parlors.
Mandarin, shao noeshu in Shanghainese. In the past, an emperor sat on the south side to wait for his people to come to see him. In modern times, this means that our salespeople merely sit in their office and wait for the bereaved to come to them directly. This is very different from what people do in your Taiwan, for example. Taiwanese funeral professionals need to go out to find dead bodies themselves. If this was the case for us, giving salespeople high commissions makes sense. However, what they do is simply wait for dead bodies to come to them. Their "sales" are simply side expenses occurring around dead bodies. This is not "sales" (yeji 業績). Market competition in the funeral industry should be about competing for dead bodies.

Lin Wu did not see such income disparities between cosmeticians and salespeople as the result of one having worked harder. His explanation of why income disparities among state practitioners were not justifiable was purely based on the logic of the market. That is, he thought that there was no real competition (meaning free competition) so people should not be rewarded for individualized market behavior. In this sense, what we see is a mixture of self-conceptualization that is both individual and market-based as well as collective and class-based. Even though the state attempted to inculcate self-motivated and self-responsible individual state practitioners under their market governance structures, state practitioners became self-enterprising subjects while, at the same time, also becoming working class subjects with a degree of class-consciousness.

Moreover, these market-class subjects with both market sensibility and class-consciousness sometimes took class action for group interests when the conditions were right. One of the best examples was the protest organized by Lin Wu and his fellows in the cosmetics unit at Hunagpu. Lin Wu told me, “the cosmetics unit used to direct the

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140 In Shanghainese, this term is a derogatory term that describes powerful people or institutions who just sit where they are like an emperor. They wait for other people to come to them to beg for their help and they often do their jobs unwillingly.
funeral parlor as a whole and its role was replaced by the sales unit after the reforms. What's worse was that there was a sudden increase in income gap between cosmeticians and salespeople.” In other words, the body cosmeticians, who did all the dirty work, earned less than salespeople who only needed to sit in the office to persuade the bereaved to buy more. This was in addition to the fact that salespeople didn’t even need to go out to find the bereaved since funeral parlors are a state monopoly.

In the late 2000s, some people in the cosmetics unit of Huangpu posted a "big character poster" (dazibao 大字報) outside their cafeteria. These types of posters were a common genre of pro-Communist protest, self-criticism, and propaganda during the Cultural Revolution. This poster explained why cosmeticians deserved better pay. They made it clear that their requests were not targeting any "brother units" in the parlor (meaning the sales department), but that they were simply fighting for their legal rights. Finally, they stated that if Huangpu did not respond, they “would not exclude the possibility of having further and more radical actions.” Every cosmetician but two signed the poster.

The negotiation process that followed the posters’ appearance lasted less than a week. During the process, the cosmeticians at some point threatened to release the content of the poster online and to perform a "work slow down" (daigong 怠工) for half a day. As they were the ones that dealt with all of the bodies and since most funerals had a three-day turnaround from death to memorial meeting, even a half-day slow down would have had immediate repercussions. Lin Wu said that he was even offered a deal if he stepped back from the protest. Luckily and unluckily, none of these things happened. In
the end, the poster did not go online, there was no strike, and Lin Wu did not accept the bribe. Huangpu and its superiors finally caved in and announced a new pay scale. Lin Wu said,

All of the contractual laborers in the cosmetics unit got raises from receiving RMB 2,000-3,000 (USD 325-488) to 4,000-5,000 (USD 650-813). In addition to a raise, those of us who were hired as Non-profit Public Sector staff regained an extra bonus and additional commissions for handling abnormal deaths, embalming, and some other things. We used to get these extra payments for these services, but the then chief director canceled them because they said these were "grey income" (灰色收入). This cancellation took away almost half of a cosmetician's original salary.

From this incident, we can see how some state practitioners took class interest based action with classic socialist protest methods such as “big character posters” and strikes to counter neoliberal governing technologies such as transparency and individualized self-management. For example, Lin Wu and his fellow cosmeticians demanded to re-institute certain subsidies that were considered “grey income”—“an extra bonus and additional commission for handling abnormal deaths, embalming and some other things.” From the parlor’s perspective, these were “grey” because of the difficulty of having an exact way to determine what counted as an “abnormal” condition of a body. This violated the principle of transparency. Without such transparency, it would be hard to calculate the exact bonus that a worker deserved. Moreover, instead of accepting the emphasis on individualized and self-motivated ideas about being a person (you should work for yourself and the more you work the more you get), Lin Wu and his fellows

\[141\] In 2011, the exchange rate was 1:6.15 (USD: RMB).
sought for a raise for all body cosmeticians. This despite the fact that there were still differences among them since half of them were hired as Non-profit Public Sector staff and the other half as Contract Staff who already received only half of the benefits to start with. Such an act not only undermines individualized differences, but also individualized self-motivation.

However, it would be wrong to say that these cosmeticians only acted out of a socialist ethos. Let’s not forget that the very foundation for Lin Wu to justify his protest was that because there was no real market competition in funeral parlors business (since parlors are a state monopoly) it is unfair to make every state practitioner work for a personal bonus. The “revenue” generated in the sales unit of funeral parlors should not be seen as the result of individual sales people's hard work. In this sense, Lin Wu “bought into” the neoliberal logic of open and free competition as well as the logic of individuals regulating and motivating themselves in this market game more than most of the sales people did.

My point here is not to determine whether Lin Wu acted more based on neoliberal or socialist ethics. Rather, I am pointing out the complexity of being a subject and the multiple sources that are called upon in the envisioning self. In this sense, even though the Chinese state was indeed implementing a set of practices (providing monetary incentives so the state could have new types of employee-subjects who are self-motivated), this process has only been partially realized. In the case of funeral parlors, what we see was a simultaneous process of class formation and class-consciousness. Moreover, under specific situations, this class-consciousness turned to class action even
though the justification for class action was based on a belief that individuals should compete and be rewarded in a free market based on actual labor.

**From Death as a Moral Project to Death for Profiteering**

My questioning the validity of their creation of neoliberal subjectivities does not mean that funeral institutions failed to become profit making businesses. Quite the opposite, Shanghai funeral parlors and cemeteries had been doing very well. In fact, the Chinese death industry might have been doing “too well.” In early 2004, the journalist Wei Yahua (魏雅華) published an article in Gongming (共鳴) Magazine titled *The Top 10 Industries with Exorbitant Profits (baoli 暴利) in China in 2003* that immediately caught the nation's attention. The word “bao” implies that these profits were at least, very unreasonable if not outright immoral. It also implies that the people who profited from such an industry did so through unjust means. The year 2003 version (published in 2004) was actually Wei's second year to write such an article and while the funeral and interment industry escaped the 2002 version (published in 2003), this time it came in all the way at No. 3.¹⁴² In his description, Wei writes:

*No. 3 Funeral and Interment: Cemeteries are More Expensive than Apartments*

The profit of the funeral and interment industry was even higher than that of the real estate industry [Real Estate topped both the 2002 and 2003 lists]. A cremains casket that only costs RMB 20 or 30 (USD 2.41-3.62) to purchase can sell for as

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¹⁴² The 2002 list included (in order starting with the worst): real estate, publishing, pharmaceutical, highway construction, automobile, media, mobile phone, study abroad, airline, and middle school education industries. The 2003 list comprised (in order as above): real estate, elementary and middle school education, funeral and interment, publishing, automobile, glasses, telecommunication and mobile phone, pharmaceutical, study abroad, and online game industries.
much as RMB 300 or 400 (USD 36.2-48) once it is placed on the shelf of a funeral parlor. A cremains casket that costs less than RMB 100 (USD 12) could be sold for over RMB 1,000 (USD 120) or 2,000 (USD 240). A cemetery plot that is less than 2 square meters with a gravestone that may be simple or may be elaborate costs RMB 5,000 to 6,000 (USD 605-725) for the cheaper spots and RMB 10,000 to 20,000 (USD 1,209-2,418) for the more expensive places. Cemetery plots are more expensive than apartments. According to an investigation, the officially approved price for cremation was RMB 92 (USD 11). However, what people actually spent was between RMB 6,000 and 7,000 (USD 725-864) or more. [Finally,] the Bureau of Civil Affairs still holds power over administrative approvals for companies hoping to enter the funeral and interment industry.143

The funeral and interment industry has remained one of the most profitable industries in China despite the publication of this list. Every year, especially around the Tomb Sweeping Festival (in April), Chinese media outlets routinely publish new articles about profiteering in the death industry. A Chinese professor I met made a comment to me after he heard that I was doing research in Shanghai funeral parlors. He said, “Everyone in China hates funeral parlors. This is one of the worst instances of exorbitant profits.” A Shanghai person I met who has nothing to do with the death industry once said to me that the problem is that people in the death industry “make money from the pockets of dead people” (zhuan sirenpian 賺死人錢). It is not just members of the general public make such criticism against the death industry, but so too do other state officials. For example, the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and a deputy to the National People's Congress joined the national trend of criticizing the funeral and interment industry.144 This in spite of the fact

143 http://www.southcn.com/estate/jiaodian/200401090120.htm (last accessed July 8, 2014)
that the top beneficiary of the trend toward increased profits was the government’s civil affairs system itself.

It is not hard to understand public criticism of profiteering in the death industry. Profiteering has been the de facto framework that defines the public’s understanding of the death industry in America at least since Jessica Mitford (another journalist) published her provocative New York Times best seller, *American Way of Death* in 1983. While scholars have later complicated this assessment of the American funeral industry (cf. Gary Laderman 2003), profiteering has remained at the center of popular imaginations of the death industry. In America, profiteering from death is considered immoral partly because people believe that they are being taken advantage of at their most vulnerable moment (Jessica Mitford 1983).

In China, profit-making itself has always led an uncomfortable (but generally pervasive) existence within Confucian (and later CCP reform) ideology. However, profiteering from death was even more problematic. I argue that public suspicion over profiteering from death is an articulation of questioning the legitimacy of market governance of death. This is because, historically, the common people’s ability to provide for the dead has been an indicator of the rulers' Mandate of Heaven. In imperial China, the Mandate of Heaven was the primary source of (divine) political legitimacy (Hsu, Cho-yun 1965:24). Dingxin Zhao (2009) called it performance legitimation. This traditional concept of legitimacy emphasized the state’s performance in providing provisions for its people. One of the most fundamental of these was provision for the dead. Therefore, if people under a specific emperor could not afford a proper funeral “as
occurred during [those] age[s] of social and political upheaval when the old aristocracy would often be replaced by upstart commoners,” this was a clear indication that the current regime must have lost the Mandate of Heaven. This could both cause and justify uprisings calling for the end of a regime (Poo, Mu-Chou, p.28).

To be clear, I am not saying that market governance or immoral profits from funerals have led to the loss of political legitimacy for the CCP regime. Moreover, by no means was the funeral and interment industry the only industry believed to be making immoral profits. Based on Wei Yahua’s listing everything from real estate sales to study abroad agencies and baby formula producing companies were seen as making immoral profit. These ill-gotten gains do not necessarily lead to a questioning the government’s political legitimacy. What I am saying is that market governance of death, the particular combination of death and profit in governance, has led to questions arising over the political legitimacy of the government to govern death.

Death here plays a tricky role in thinking about profit in Sinophone (or Sinocultural) areas. For example, Robert Weller (personal communication) explained that it is immoral for physicians to go to temples to pray for prosperity in rural Taiwan. This is so even though physicians are a highly respected occupation in Taiwan and it is perfectly legitimate, appropriate, and indeed expected for ordinary people (such as grocery store owners or accountants) to pray for prosperity. The problem is that physicians’ prosperity is related directly to the pain, suffering, and perhaps deaths of his or her patients. For example, people often post Spring Festival Couplets (chunlian 春聯) on their doors during Chinese New Year hoping that these may bring an auspicious next
year. The discussion surrounding a set of well-circulated pictures of a Chinese hospital’s couplets shows how people were uncomfortable about hospitals hoping to achieve prosperity.145 These pictures circulated so widely and easily because people found this type of behavior to be immoral for hospitals.

With regard to market governance of death, what was unique about public concerns over profiteering from death in China was that the object of such criticism is the government itself, since it is the Civil Affairs Bureau that monopolizes the industry. As mentioned, in 1984, the Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration (FIA) became Funeral and Interment Business Administration (FIBA) and officially integrated business administration into its civil governance. However, as the range and the scale of services and products extended, the contradictions in FIBA’s dual role as both the governing administration and business administration increased. As an informant told me, “you could not be a referee and at the same time also be a player” (qiuyuan jian caipan 球員兼裁判). He said that this was not only unfair, but also created a situation where he felt it was impossible to be good at both.

Another informant said that if you do too much governing administration (xingzheng guanli 行政管理), you lose at business administration (qiye guanli 企業管理). This was particularly the case for funeral governance since the goal of governing was to promote funeral reform that honored a commitment to frugal funerals while the goal of

145 “Ridiculous Spring Festival Couplets On the Hospital’s Door” (yiyuan chunlian cheng “shengyixinglong” beizhi leiren 醫院春聯稱 “生意興隆”被指雷人), Xiaoxiang News (瀟湘晨報). http://news.sohu.com/20110215/n279339057.shtml. For pictures of this hospital, see http://www.xici.net/d142018629.htm (both sites are last accessed in June 17, 14).
market governance was to bring in revenue through a reliance on expanding and elaborating funerals. While theoretically speaking generating profits and funeral reform need not be incompatible, the reality is that most of the funerary merchandise revived since the Opening Up were exactly the same items that Funeral Reform had targeted (such as cemeteries, coffins, and other markers of status).

The Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau was well aware of the contradictions associated with the growth of the death industry. By the end of 1996, there were a total of 15 funeral parlors in greater Shanghai (three were at the city level and the rest were at district or county levels). There were a total of 46 cemeteries or columbaria, 710 companies that sold funerary merchandise (not including unregistered ones), and 81 sales centers for cemeteries. The Civil Affairs Bureau eventually ordered the formation of a separate organization directly under itself to take over the business administration functions of FIBA. This new organization was the Shanghai Funeral and Interment Service Center (FIS). The formation of FIS was meant to transfer the business administration of the FIBA to FIS. Hierarchically speaking, FIS is parallel to FIBA—both directly reported to the Civil Affairs Bureau. Institutionally speaking, while FIS is a public non-profit unit (shiye danwei 事業單位) like funeral parlors, the FIBA remains a government bureau (xingzheng danwei 行政單位).

FIS was approved in February 1998 and officially began operations in August of

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146 Among the 46 cemeteries or columbarium, 26 were cemeteries that only provided cremains burial, 14 provided cremains deposit only, and 8 provided both. A total of 48,107 bodies of cremains had been buried and 24,895 bodies as cremains were placed in columbarium. See Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau. 1996. Shanghai minzhenggongzuo fazhanbaogaoshu 上海民政工作發展報告書 [The development book of the Shanghai civil affairs work], Pp. 50-52.
the same year. However, this separation merely shifted the issue up a level to the Civil Affairs Bureau. The fundamental contradiction now primarily belongs to the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau instead of FIBA. This shift did not actually solve the original contradiction at the FIBA level either. This is because the first generation of the leadership of FIS consisted of exactly the same people who worked in the FIBA. The Civil Affairs Bureau allowed the then chief director of the FIBA (and some other people) to “retire” from their government posts and to “dive into the ocean” (xiahai 下海, meaning going into business) to become the chief directors of the quasi-private FIS.147 The interchanging of personnel between the two branches of the Civil Affairs Bureau has continued today. As a result, the establishment of a separated business managing institution (FIS) did not escape the “one crew, but two signs” (yitao renma liangkuai paizi 一套人馬兩塊牌子) trend that has characterized the so-called “privatization” of Chinese state institutions across a whole range of sectors.

Today, FIS functions like a mother company (even though it is technically a “public non-profit” unit) for the three city funeral parlors, several funerary merchandise companies, and many cemeteries. For a breakdown of these relationships, please see the organizational chart for the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau’s funeral governance reproduced below. As it shows, FIS owns a variety of kinds of organizations including everything from other public non-profits (such as funeral parlors) to wholly owned subsidiary companies, share-holding companies, and participating stock companies.

As FIS and FIBA became parallel units (and therefore the Civil Affairs Bureau’s

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147 There is some linguistic irony here. In Taiwan, xiahai means becoming a prostitute.
orders now go directly down to FIS) and all funeral parlors are administratively run through FIS, the FIBA as an institution lost much of its power. One of the few powers that the FIBA has retained today is the power to renew the licenses of funeral parlors. However, even this is more formality than real threat. While this kind of hierarchical relationship with few horizontal interaction between government bureaus and organizations (except upwards and back down through common parent bureaus) is one of the defining characteristics of Chinese government, we must also keep in mind the movement of personnel between FIS, funeral parlors, and FIBA. Finally, the fundamental problem of governing funerals remains constant. That is, the FIS is charged with both executing the ongoing funeral reform and with the often contradictory task of making a profit. Today, this ambiguity is less of an issue than in the past because profit has won out (not because the fundamental problem was resolved).

Since criticism against the government’s inability to ensure that people are properly cared for after death has always been a sign of the Chinese government's loss of legitimacy and since funeral institutions such as funeral parlors were nevertheless state institutions (even though they are managed by FIS instead of FIBA now), the public sentiment that “the dead can not afford to die” (the quote I began this chapter with) therefore should not be seen as a commonplace complaint, without greater significance. Rather it is a question that has the potential to make people wonder whether or not the socialist state that is profiteering from death still holds the Mandate of Heaven (or, at least, legitimacy to govern).
My argument on how market governance of death has potentially led to the possible public questioning of political legitimacy is not far fetched at all if we consider how the state reacts to public accusations of profiteering from death. After the increase in public concern over the funeral industry profiteering from death, there have been considerable internal debates among funeral governance leaders over whether the death industry should be further marketized or instead maintained “for the public good” (gongyixing 公益性). Han Shen, a mid-level manager of Huangpu Funeral Parlor told me,
The full marketization of Shanghai funeral parlors was really the result of trying to get ready for China’s entrance into the WTO. People were worried that foreign capital would massively flood the Shanghai funeral and interment industry therefore destroying state enterprises [even though funeral parlors were public non-profit units rather than state enterprises at that time, institutionally speaking]. This was why they decided to fully marketize the three parlors and five cemeteries we had at that time. The idea was that we monopolize the market like a trust so foreign companies would not be able to compete. However, after ten years of entering the WTO, we realized that we were wrong. This is because it turned out that the approval department [the Civil Affairs Bureaus] would in no way approve foreign capital to enter the market. This is particularly true in Shanghai. The worry about the WTO bringing open competition totally did not come true. Meanwhile, the general public is more and more unhappy with the skyrocketing prices. Therefore, FIS now is adjusting its strategy. They think the right goal is to increase “public satisfaction” (公眾滿意度).

At the national level, the reconsideration of the nature of the death industry has brought death into a new stage that emphasizes “putting humans at the core” (yiren weiben 以人為本) or “human-centered funeral and interment” (renben binzang 人本殯葬). The concept of “putting humans at the core” was actually a part of Hu Jintao’s governing philosophy built around the creation of a “Socialist Harmonious Society” (和諧社會) through a “Scientific Outlook on Development” (科學發展觀). Based on this ideology, the market economy as it exists in China today is said to lack “honesty and

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148 Increased public concern over profiteering in death in the current day has forced the FIS to respond with a campaign advocating for a “Sunny” (yangguang 陽光), “Convenient” (bianmin 便民), “Green” (luse 綠色) and “Civilized”(wenming 文明) funeral and interment industry. “Sunny” means that all products and services will be sold at marked prices based on free choice. “Convenient” means that funeral parlors (through funeral practitioners) will operate for and at the convenience of the people rather for themselves. The third term, “Green” means that parlors will follow the spirit of Funeral and Interment Reform to reduce energy waste and the production of pollution. The last, “Civilized” means parlors will provide civilized funeral practices (instead of “feudal” or “superstitious” ones) by demanding that funeral practitioners provide their services civilly and politely (Zhu 2010: 98-101). These sorts of campaign propaganda soon flooded the *Funeral and Interment Culture Research Journal* and other FIS publications after the mid 2000s.
trust” (chengxin 誠信) due to the rapid speed of development. A Scientific Outlook on Development was the means by which China, under the Hu and Wen leadership, would eventually be made into a Socialist Harmonious Society where the economy could continue to grow, but all conflicts of interest among different social groups would dissolve away. For the death industry, to develop “human-centered funeral and interment” was defined to mean increasing “public satisfaction.”

Shanghai funeral parlors (and FIS) decided that public satisfaction could be officially measured through three indexes: the general impression of funeral parlors, the impression of their services, and their honesty and trust (chengxin 誠信). For example, in order to enhance the general impression of funeral parlors and their services, funeral parlors also created a new service called “Accompaniment Service” (peitong fuwu 陪同服務). Purchasing this service would ensure that the bereaved were accompanied by the same practitioner the whole way through their funeral organizing and hosting process whether they were arranging funerals in sales unit or carrying out the funeral in the memorial meeting halls. This way, if there was any unpleasantness or doubts that came up during the process, the funeral practitioners could solve or clarify things right away.

Moreover, Shanghai funeral parlors asked funeral practitioners to make the bereaved fill out customer satisfaction questionnaires in order to know their general impression of funeral parlors’ service. However, while the intention at the top may have been to find out how the public actually felt, lower level managers asked funeral practitioners to make sure that they made the mourners write the questionnaires as self protection. That is, if the bereaved were to later file a complaint (tousu 投訴) against a
particular funeral practitioner, the practitioner could use the questionnaire that the bereaved had already filled out to refute the complaint. As for building honesty and trust, funeral parlors asked state practitioners to take classes on how to build honesty and trust in the death industry. In fact, they even had an open book test after every class.

What were the outcomes associated with this turn to a “human-centered” funeral and interment? First, there was a slight decrease in cremation rates at the national level. *The Green Book of Funerals: Report on Funeral Development of China (2013-2014)* showed that a “second return of old customs” (meaning a slight decrease in the national cremation rate) around 2006 was related to the launching of human-centered concerns with customer satisfaction.\(^{149}\) The *Green Book* said that this was a result of “funeral government officials [who] misunderstood the true meaning of human-centered funeral and interment.” Since cremation rates were not an issue in Shanghai, the influence of such a “return” was expressed rather more through a slight decrease in profits as funeral parlors reviewed their pricing policy item by item.

It is important to point out, however, that even with this slight decease in profit, Huangpu Funeral Parlor made enough in profit that the portion they passed along to the Civil Affairs Bureau in 2010 was in the region of RMB 80 to 100 million (USD $13 to $16 million). Someone high up in Shanghai’s funeral institutions once told me that Shanghai funeral parlors were still only making “minor profit” (*weili* 微利). Maybe it is my lack of business experience or my working class upbringing, but I am not quite sure how over USD 10 million in profits can be conceptualized as “minor” when funeral

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\(^{149}\) The national cremation rate dropped from 53% in 2005 to 48% in 2006. This latter rate has remained more or less steady at least up through 2011.
The central government’s concern over this loss of legitimacy pushed Hu's administration to declare the Chinese death industry an industry for the “public good” in 2011. While the market governance seems to have lost its voice at the front stage of funeral policy, it is a complete misunderstanding to think that business has lost its role in governing the death industry. If we look into the details, we find that this “public good” characterization is only limited to four aspects of funeral and interment: dead body transportation, dead body refrigeration, cremation, and cremains storage. Notice that all of these are directly related to dead bodies and all are thus a part of the funeral parlor’s state monopoly. These were originally to be operated with state subsidies since handling bodies through cremation was the goal of civil governance in governing death. But ritual and products associated with spirits and the afterlife were not associated with the immediate materiality of death and therefore the state was not responsible for regulating profiteering in the sale of these products and services. The corollary, of course, is that the state in the guise of FIS and the Parlors could therefore still profit from these other products and services.

Conclusion

This chapter started with the resurrection of funeral governance after the Cultural Revolution ended. It ended with a loss of legitimacy for the civil institutions that are meant to carry out that political process of subject making. The emergence of a competing directive, operationalized in FIBA and then FIS's business administration, to
make profit means that funeral governance now has two contradictory goals: one is a focus on civil governance and the other is on market governance. The former policy orientation extended from the pre-Cultural Revolution era and the latter was formed against the backdrop of Opening Up.

These two governing orientations aimed to formulate different kinds of subjects. As analyzed in the previous chapters, when funeral governance operated as and in terms of civil governance, it aimed to create political subjects whose sole identity was based on socialism. The ultimate goal of funeral governance as civil governance was to produce a singular defined and collectively shared socialist subjectivity among all Chinese people.

Market governance, however, aims to create “market subjects” who are self-motivated and self-regulated and who act “rationally” (in the sense of calculating costs and benefits). This market governance in governing funerals actually has two aspects. The first was to transform state practitioners from government officials to service providers who are supposed to be self-disciplined and, later, attendant to customer satisfaction since they work for their own personal interests. Yet, I argue that such market selves have only partially solidified. What some state practitioners did in this process was to simultaneously also formulate class-based ideas of self through the rhetoric of describing who is in production and who is not by recognizing how market governance has created a whole set of class distinctions. Moreover, based on such a class-based conceptualization of self, practitioners have, at times, taken class action under specific conditions. In this sense, they became “socialist” workers just as the state tried to turn them into neoliberal subjects.
This second issue is related to making the bereaved themselves become consumers (rather than citizens) who have to make choices among a set of service items when making their funeral arrangement. This aspect will be explored through an in-depth look at business sales meetings for funerals and at the (so far, failed) push by the government to get the bereaved to choose to arrange “personalized” funerals. I will return to the second aspect of creating market subjects in governing funerals in Chapter 6 when I discuss funeral parlors’ attempt to promote personalized funeral.

Nevertheless, despite the semi-successful creation of market subjects under market governance in death, this by no means indicates that funeral institutions failed to generate profit within the market economy. On the contrary, funeral institutions in China since the Opening Up have acquired an image of profiteering. I argue that such public concern over profiteering is also a public questioning of the political legitimacy of the socialist state in governing death. As a result, the contradiction between governing administration and business administration here is not because “the market” is the opposite of “the state” (if we momentarily essentialize both “market” and “state”). Quite the opposite, it is because “the state” wants to be both “the governing body” and “the market” simultaneously.

Most important of all, in the process of making death fall from moral governing project (creating political subjects) to profiteering (creating service providers and customers), the state’s domination over subject formation at the end of life was eroded. The questioning of political legitimacy I describe here was one major factor for the undermining of state domination, but not the only one. In the next chapter, I describe the
rise of funeral brokers who worked as mediators between the state (funeral parlors) and the public (the bereaved) as funeral governance moved from a civil matter to a market matter with civil goals. While funeral governing institutions (the Civil Affairs Bureau and the FIBA particular) did not at all intend to cultivate a group of self-motivated and self-managed individuals outside of state funeral institutions, their move toward market governance nevertheless created possibility for these brokers to exist. I will show that while from the state’s perspective these funeral brokers are not entirely moral, their actions in response to pressure from a variety of state and public actors has served to create a platform for the return of religious moralities in conceptualizing the dead.
CHAPTER 5  THE FRAGILE MIDDLE: FUNERAL BROKERS AS AN AGENTIVE NODE

Chen Yu was a married woman close to thirty when I met her. She grew up in rural Jiangsu Province and eventually settled in Shanghai. She started working in various factories in Suzhou after she turned 16 like most of the other young women she grew up with in rural Jiangsu. Several years later she came to Shanghai to escape her unhappy marriage to a man from her village. When I met her in Shanghai, she was a “funeral broker” working not in a state funeral parlor, but in a private funeral agency. Shanghai funeral brokers are more like American wedding planners than American funeral directors. They need to work with funeral parlors since, legally, funerals may only be held in funeral parlors. Shanghai funeral brokers are mediators who do all the necessary arrangements for the bereaved but, unlike American funeral directors, funeral brokers do not have (and can not have) their own funeral facilities.

Chen Yu’s job was to deal with office and administrative affairs in one of these funeral agencies. I came to particularly admire Chen Yu's ability to do office organizational jobs once I realized that she only had three years of elementary school education. Her parents needed her help with farm work and household chores so she had to quit school quite early. While working in factories in Suzhou, her colleagues had led her into the world of romance novels and it turned out that she loved romance so much that she eventually taught herself how to read. She was still reading romance novels when I met her. Whenever I visited her office, I noticed that her computer screen always seemed to have an Internet romance novel open on the desktop.
Chen Yu’s current husband, Tang An, also worked for the same company. His job was to hold business meetings with the bereaved to help them make their funeral arrangements. In this kind of meeting, he sold products and services to the bereaved. In fact, he has really always been in sales as he sold life insurance before becoming a funeral broker. Tang An is a local Shanghai person with a high school degree. His marriage with Chen Yu was his second one as well. Tang An’s first wife was a rural migrant like Chen Yu, but his first marriage did not end well. Chen Yu felt that Tang An’s family did not like her or trust her. This mistrust seemed to be over and above the general discrimination against and suspicion toward rural migrants that was prevalent among Shanghai people. Tang An was an outspoken and humorous guy. When he spent time at the office between sales, he liked to research the stocks trading on the Shanghai stock market. His favorite conversation topic with me was politics, especially anything concerning Taiwan (although he was probably often quite disappointed with my explanations).

The funeral agency where Chen Yu and Tang An worked belonged to Chen Yu’s sister, Chen Ting, and her husband, Du Tu. Growing up as the second child of the family, Chen Ting carried more responsibility than other second born might have because her elder sister was mentally handicapped. Chen Ting was very vague about how many years of formal education she had had. I would guess that it was less than what Chen Yu had (so, less than three years). But Chen Ting definitely could read and certainly knew enough math to run her company. In fact, I would never have guessed that Chen Ting (and Chen Yu for that matter) had very little formal education if our conversation hadn’t
accidentally stumbled into this topic in the first place.

Chen Ting always struck me as a smart, independent, and beautiful woman who knew her business very well. Underneath her entrepreneurial and sophisticated mask, she had a soft, warm, and sometimes vulnerable heart. Her intelligence and perseverance led her into a whole new world of prosperity that was beyond anything her farming parents could have ever imagined. But overall she was not happy, partly because her marriage was crumbling. Occasionally, after she had a serious fight with Du Tu, she would stand in front of a window and let her tears fall quietly in the office when other people were out doing their jobs. One of the few moments that I saw happiness on her face (rather than a friendly face that she put on for her customers) was when she held her eight-month-old baby girl. Du Tu was not involved in the daily business of the company. Yet, this did not mean that he was hesitant about enjoying its profits. He came to the office mainly when he needed to collect money earned by the hard working team that Chen Ting had put together. He rarely went home to spend time with Chen Ting and their baby girl. Instead, he spent most of his nights out drinking, gambling, carousing with other funeral broker friends at Prosperity, the restaurant that I described in Chapter 1.

Chen Ting, Chen Yu, and Tang An were the closet friends I had when I was in Shanghai. Their hospitality and friendship helped me tremendously both emotionally and intellectually. My friends were ordinary people who had struggled to achieve their moderate success in the post economic reform era in Shanghai. To do so they had to constantly negotiate their way through political pressures that both vilified and regulated them. These pressures were not so much a result of the fact that they work with the dead
(although this certainly is a factor if we consider the larger scheme of things). Instead, as I will show throughout this chapter, they were more a consequence of their peculiar structural position as brokers in the fragile middle of the funeral industry and of their feeling of being fragile. Most importantly, I argue that this fragile middle position and the actions brokers like them have taken within it is productive. Funeral brokers have been forcing funeral parlors and the death industry to change. While government officials and the bereaved might not perceive funeral brokers as entirely moral (for a variety of different reasons), funeral brokers have effectively created a platform for bringing religious ideas of person and practices to the socialist civil funeral and the Shanghai death industry.

**Fragility and Self-Enterprise**

Chen Ting was the first of her family who moved to Shanghai. About a decade ago, she left her home village, her parents, her mentally challenged older sister, her younger sister Chen Yu, and two younger brothers in the rural part of Northern Jiangsu, also known as Subei (蘇北), to find work to help her family. She started out as a waitress in a noodle shop after she arrived in Shanghai. That was the only job she could find as a young and unskilled woman with little education who did not even speak Shanghainese. When working there, she became familiar with a frequent customer who was a local Shanghai man. This man owned a photography and videography shop to which a funeral parlor outsourced part of its business. This old man liked the young, joyful, diligent waitress enough so that after he knew Chen Ting for a while, he asked her to work for
him. This was how Chen Ting entered the Shanghai funeral industry.

The old man taught Chen Ting how to operate a camera and how to film funerals. Chen Ting learned photography and videography very quickly. She also learned some easy video editing on computers. More than just knowing the technical knowledge, Chen Ting very quickly found a talent for following, maintaining, and even creating the rhythm of the funeral. The friendly relationship between the old man and Chen Ting, however, changed after Chen Ting fell in love with the man’s son. It turned out that being a diligent and good worker and being a proper daughter-in-law was not the same thing. The man liked Chen Ting enough to offer her a job and to train her to be a good funeral camera person, but refused to accept her as a daughter-in-law because her rural background made her an “unsuitable” spouse for his precious only son.

Rural immigrants in urban China are categorized as members of a “floating population” (Zhang Li 2001) without “roots” in the city and without access to many of the rights and privileges of legal urban residents. Urban residents all over China have tended to discriminate against them. The fact that Chen Ting came from Subei probably further worsened the marriage deal since Shanghai people have a long history of discriminating against Subei people in particular—one often overlooked but prominent social inequality based on native-place in (especially) urban China. Emily Honig (1989), for instance, has described long held prejudices against Subei people in Shanghai since the 19th century. The association of Subei people with the backward, untrustworthy underclass has remained strong (and perhaps grow stronger) today as contemporary social conditions have perpetuated Subei people’s previous social, economic, and legal
positions as unskilled labors and less educated, slum residents.

None of the Chen sisters lived in slums when I knew them (they both owned modern apartments in downtown Shanghai). However, Chen Ting indeed lived in a shantytown (*penghuqu* 棚戶區) for a while. Her Shanghai father-in-law did not like this marriage so he followed the common Shanghai practice of providing a place for the newly weds to live only “tacitly.” This meant that despite the fact that he owned several pieces of property in Shanghai, the living space he provided to the young couple was located in a shantytown. Most shantytowns in Shanghai are located downtown and all are waiting their turn to be demolished. Owners in the shantytowns each expect to get a new apartment as compensation when the demolitions finally comes and talk often revolves around potential compensation amounts and the price of real estate elsewhere. As a Shanghai saying goes, “The Shanghai poor count on demolition to turn the tables (*Shanghai qiongren kao chaiqian fanshen* 上海窮人靠拆遷翻身).” Owners who can afford to live somewhere else often rented their space in shantytowns to rural migrants.

I never went to Chen Ting’s shantytown housing as it had already been demolished when I met her. However, I did visit several other shantytowns when I accompanied funeral brokers to have business meetings at the bereaved’s places during my fieldwork. Shantytown housing generally did not have flush toilets or gas pipes for heating or cooking. Moreover, shantytown residents only had limited access to running

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150 The Chinese phrase *fanshen* here was a term invented and popularized by the CCP. This phrase literally means to turn the body or to turn over. The metaphorical meaning here is that socialist revolution could fundamentally change the fate of the people and bring them into a utopian world. Its use in this common phrase in terms of real estate speculation and demolishment settlements for downtown capitalist housing investment or business development as one of the only ways to improve one's lot is not without some degree of irony.
water. I was told that the living conditions in the shantytowns were often worse than life in the countryside even though most urban Shanghai people imagine rural life to be the worst.

Chen Ting knew that her father-in-law put them in a shantytown in order to break up the marriage. But she did not have much choice. It was in such an environment that Chen Ting lived through her first childbirth. The battle between “bread” (money) and “roses” (love) did not fall in Chen Ting’s favor. Chen Ting's (first) husband was used to having a relatively prosperous life and could not handle this change. He failed to be the breadwinner for their small family after they were forced to relocate to the shantytown. When Chen Ting's baby boy was four months old, she decided to send him back to the countryside to her natal home so she could go to work herself. After all, one of them had to make money. Once the baby was sent to the countryside and she began to work outside the “house,” Chen Ting and her husband lived separate lives. The long-term separation was eventually formalized as a divorce only when they wanted to remarry.

For a while, Chen Ting worked as a waitress in a coffee shop owned by a Taiwanese man. From her Taiwanese boss, she learned how to do a service job well: you had to learn to talk to your customers in a soft and feminine voice, to interact with them as if they were your boss. This kind of “emotion management” in the service industry (Hochschild 1983) was something rather foreign to people who grew up in the countryside (or under high socialism). The business of the coffee shop, however, was not very good, at least in part because the Taiwanese boss was an incompetent manager. For example, he often allowed his acquaintances to eat and drink for free without caring
about the shop’s balance sheet. Chen Ting wanted to rescue the coffee shop because she felt that the shop’s problem was managerial. She volunteered to be the manager. She told her boss that if he promoted her to be the manager and gave her authority to run the business, she promised to generate a profit for him. The boss agreed and Chen Ting did not disappoint him. It was during this time that Chen Ting learned the managerial skills she needed to run her own business including negotiating prices with suppliers, managing cash flows, building supplier and customer networks, and so on.

One day she got a phone call from a friend she knew back from when she was working in funeral photography and videography. This friend offered Chen Ting a job opportunity to work as a full time contracted funeral photographer and videographer at Huangpu Funeral Parlor. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, many Shanghai people liked to hire photographers and videographers in funerals. Chen Yu who later learned funeral photography and videography from her sister told me that filming and photographing funerals was new at that time. Many Shanghai people thought that it was modern to have such things in funerals and this was why there was a high demand in these services.¹⁵¹

Chen Ting accepted this job offer and began to work in Huangpu. This spatial proximity was how Chen Ting met her current husband, Du Tu who was a state

¹⁵¹ This preference had changed by the time I did my fieldwork. Chen Yu said that more and more people realized that they would never watch the videos or look at the pictures again because a funeral is one of the last things that Shanghai people want to remember (not just because it is a sad memory of the death of a loved one, but also because funerals and death were causes of pollution and best to be avoided, even on film). However, they also could not throw the funeral pictures and films away since this seemed like it would be disrespectful and unfilial to the deceased. These films and pictures therefore became immovable objects that took up space and could neither be watched nor thrown away due to moral reasons. As a result, the best solution was not to have funeral pictures and films in the first place. When I did my fieldwork, one of the main reasons people would still hire videographers was to document the funeral to ensure a co-paying, but not attending family member that the money they spent was, in fact, spent and spent well.
practitioner at Huangpu. She built here a solid network of connections with people at Huangpu through herself and her husband. These networks turned out to be extremely important afterward. For various reasons, after Chen Ting and Du Tu got married, Chen Ting left her parlor job. During the time when she was “between jobs,” she started to help her friends, their acquaintances, and friends’ friends’ acquaintances to arrange funerals since she knew the funeral process very well and she had all the connections needed in making the arrangements. This act of “helping” eventually turned into a real business. Chen Ting and Du Tu decided to set up the “Longevity Ritual Service Company” where the majority of my funeral broker friends such as Chen Yu, Tang An, and Lin Wan worked.

From Chen Ting’s life trajectory of becoming a funeral broker, I want to particularly pull out two characteristics. The first was her entrepreneurial skill. We can see this from her talent for learning funeral recording, specific tactics of emotion management in doing service jobs, and practical skills in running a small business through managing the coffee shop. In this process, she cultivated both a customer-oriented practicality and business sense. However, as I will elaborate later, even though this kind of practicality and sensibility is a quality needed to do service jobs, this also makes people think of such petty capitalists as “unprincipled and calculating.” Secondly, her social marginality in terms of being a young, rural, and female immigrant living in Shanghai had a Janus-face. On the one hand, it indicated a clear structural limitation. On the other, it also references her prior success and future possibility of crossing such limitations. In this particular case, being a migrant worker meant that she lacked certain
legal and moral status in Shanghai. At the same time, since she was not bound to the local moral and legal world as much as a Shanghai person might be, it would also be relatively easier for her to break the existing social norms. These two characteristics therefore worked in tandem with each other.

What led her to fully embrace her entrepreneurial skills and able to work with (or to work out) her marginality (whether to overcome her marginality or to use it) was living in a shantytown with a newborn baby and an unproductive and unsupportive husband. In that fragile moment of life, she decided to send the baby back home and go out to find a job herself. Her desire to escape was such that she “dared” to voluntarily take over the managerial job of the coffee shop. It was at that moment that we start seeing her transformed from a timid, obedient, and filial young woman to a self-disciplined entrepreneur. This was not to say that she lacked entrepreneur characteristics before. Quite the opposite, she certainly had the spark in her videographer risk-taking. But her transformation into a self-disciplined entrepreneur was a contextualized “decision.” Of course, saying that this is a decision is not to deny the fact that she was more or less forced into it. What I aim to articulate here is the importance of this affective aspect—in this case, of being fragile—in constructing a kind of identity that is self-regulated and self-motivated.

**Ambiguity in Being a Self-Managed Entrepreneur**

Funeral brokers like Chen Ting are everywhere in China today. By the time I did my fieldwork in 2010, over 80% and 60% of memorial meetings held in Baoxin and
Longhua Funeral Parlors respectively were operated through funeral brokers.\textsuperscript{152} Most people I spoke to, including both state practitioners and funeral brokers, believed that this number will continue to increase. The popularity of funeral brokers was even higher in places such as Beijing, Hunan, and Sichuan (among the places I have heard things about).

I mentioned that Chen Ting’s company name is Longevity Ritual Service Company. The title, “ritual service company,” was actually a little bit strange from the perspective of the general Shanghai public. In China, the generic label for funeral brokers or their companies is \textit{binzang zhongjie} (殯葬中介, literally meaning funeral agents) or \textit{binzang daili} (殯葬代理, literally meaning funeral representative). Sometimes people refer to funeral brokers as \textit{binzang yitiaolong} (殯葬一條龍, which literally means “funeral dragon”) because they were known for providing a comprehensive “dragon”-style service (\textit{yitiaolong fuwu} 一條龍服務) that covered everything from the time of death to cremains burial. However, Chen Ting considered \textit{yitiaolong} to be a derogatory term.\textsuperscript{153} She told me that she preferred the Taiwanese term—“ritual service company” (\textit{liyi fuwu gongsi} 禮儀服務公司) because it sounds better.

Although she was unable to articulate why this sounded better to her, I guess that she thought that the emphasis should be on ritual and service instead of the utilitarian and

\textsuperscript{152} These numbers were based on personal communications with state practitioners, including both people on the ground and at a managerial level. Baoxin is located on the North side of Shanghai Proper while Longhua is on the South side. Since the neighborhood areas around Baoxin are more working class and those around Longhua are more middle or upper middle class, there are class differences between the two parlors’ customers.

\textsuperscript{153} This was probably because state media occasionally used the term “black dragons” (\textit{heilong} 黑龍), a take-off on “black-hearted products” like melamine-laced baby milk powder that often made the news, to describe funeral brokers.
efficient aspect of business operations. This distinction is important because it expresses a large tension built into being a funeral broker in urban China. In Shanghai, funeral brokers emerged in the early 1990s. I asked many funeral brokers and state practitioners about the origin of these brokers. Among the answers I received, I would separate them into at least four versions. The first version says that there always existed a set of “good hearted people” (*haoxinren* 好心人) who liked to help their friends and relatives out in organizing funerals (or other rituals). They did not do this for a fee, but did usually receive a red envelope (with money in it) from the bereaved as a way of showing gratitude. In this sense, the kind of relationship between the bereaved and these “good hearted people” was based on gift exchange wherein both sides enter into social debt similar to how other social relations work in China. They were more like “friends.”

The second version traces funeral brokers to the fact that, historically, well-off families often hired a “grand manager” (*dazongguan* 大總管) to organize funerals. These managers were known for their skills at organizing events and they usually provided their services for a fee. In this sense, the kind of relationship between the bereaved and these grand managers was more based on commodity exchange where one side provides labor and expertise and the other side gives money in return no matter whether or not the grand managers and the bereaved were “friends” in the first place.

The third version traced the origins of funeral brokers to retired state practitioners or the close friends and relatives of state practitioners. These people often helped their acquaintances to organize funerals since they had knowledge of and better access to funeral parlors and therefore could manage to pull off “special” funeral arrangements.
Finally, the fourth version was that funeral brokers emerged when funeral parlors asked state practitioners to go out to get more business at the very beginning of the market reforms. This was a part of parlors’ effort to marketize and to bring in more profit. This consequently made more and more people realize the potential of and some methods of being a private broker in the funeral industry.

The last two versions have some interesting parallels. While both trace the origin of funeral brokers to state practitioners and (or) their friends and relatives, the former (the third version) emphasizes the helping characteristics and the latter stresses the entrepreneurial characteristics. It is probably not coincidental in that the difference between the third and fourth versions echoes the difference between the first and second. Specifically, both sets show a contrast between nice, altruistic people (the good-hearted people) and self-interested entrepreneurs (the grand managers). This was despite the fact that they were offering exactly the same services.

DJ Hatfield has observed the same kind of contradiction in thinking about opera troupes (actors and musicians) and matchmakers in Taiwan. He suggested that the same actions (whether we are talking about funeral brokers, opera troupes, or matchmakers) might implicate different truths because of “how the truth of relationships is produced in the interaction” (Hatfield, email communication, March 25 2014). When the truth of these relationships is produced as friendships such as those between the amateurs and their friends, then the actions fall into a moral realm. On the contrary, when

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154 He said that professional actors and musicians of opera troupes and matchmakers were (and still are) often considered “mean” (jian 嫌) people in Taiwan. Meanwhile, amateur troupes (zidi tuan 子弟團) and “friends” who do the very same matching making or performing were considered good people.
the truth of the relationship is produced through professionalization and professional interactions with paid grand managers, the interactions could more easily be seen as immoral or amoral.

As a result, the origin stories of funeral brokers really reveal two ways of conceptualizing the self of funeral brokers: one envisions them as a kind of relational person clearly (and necessarily) embedded in reciprocal social networks. The other sees them as self-motivated and individualistic entrepreneurs engaged in transactional relationships with their customers. The former enters friendship through gift exchange (red envelopes) and the latter enters customer relationships through commodity exchange (service fees). Both were also culturally available ways of thinking about funeral brokers (among various groups of people) before the introduction of the market economy.

While funeral brokers as individual persons are caught between these two ethical modes, funeral brokers as a specific occupational category in the contemporary death industry are also caught between two different ideas of conceptualizing “edge balls.” As mentioned briefly in Chapter one, a common representation of funeral brokers by the state is that they act as though hitting edge balls (pushing the envelope). The first time I heard the term “edge ball” was the year before I started my actual fieldwork. During my preparatory fieldwork in 2009, I interviewed Wang Fuzi (王夫子), the chair of the Funeral Department at Changsha Civil Affairs School in Hunan Province. When I asked him about a story on funeral brokers I had seen in the news, he started his explanation by telling me that funeral brokers are hitting edge balls in the death industry. I had never heard this term before so I had to ask him what, exactly, the term meant and even which
characters the expression used in the first place.

He explained to me that despite their ubiquitous existence all over China, funeral brokers are not legal in many parts of China. They are illegal because they do not (and cannot) fulfill the proper state registration requirements. Without such registration they therefore, technically, cannot provide funeral services. The Central Government's law requires any funeral related businesses to register with both the local level Administration for Industry and Commerce and the local level Civil Affairs Bureau. Recall, however, funeral brokers are partial business competitors with funeral parlors and local civil affairs bureaus themselves own funeral parlors. The more funeral brokers there are or the more they are allowed to do, the lower the profit funeral parlors earn (and therefore the smaller the cut the local civil affairs bureau will get). As a direct result of this competition then, most province (and municipality) civil affairs bureaus will not register funeral brokers. Funeral brokers thus illegally provide funeral services even though they tend to be registered with the Industry and Commerce Bureau as all other non-funeral-related businesses also must be (of course, as in other industries in China, some choose not to register at all). Their operations themselves are thus already skirting the edge of legality just to exist at all.

Originally a sports term, an edge ball is a ball that is played to touch at the very edge of the sideline of a table in table tennis. Table tennis is a very popular sport in China (it even played an important role in building diplomatic relations between the United

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155 Since funeral governance is primarily regulated at the provincial (or municipal) level, the central government only provides general guidelines on policy. It is the local government that decides the specific regulations (and their implementation).
States and the PRC in the 1970s). The *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* explains that people use “hitting edge balls” figuratively to mean “conduct that is on the borderline of legality, but not yet illegal” (Xiandai Hanyu Cidian 2005). The *New Age Chinese-English Dictionary (Xinshidai Hanying Dacidian)* (2001) explains this in English as “something almost, but not quite, illegal; circumventing the law or regulation by doing something quasi-legal.” These two definitions are consistent with Wang Fuzi’s explanation of funeral brokers playing edge balls.

Li Anxing (2008), however, criticizes these English translations as problematic because edge ball conduct in sports could be completely legal. Also, to “circumvent” implies a derogatory sense, but edge ball plays can sometimes be socially positive. As a result, Li proposes to translate “playing edge ball” as “playing by the rules even if one bends (distends or stretches) the rules to a breaking point; to push the envelope; to play by rules that are open to interpretation” (2008:155).

In order to understand this rhetorical contradiction of hitting edge balls, it is important to point out how hitting edge balls became a metaphor in the first place. The origin story of the edge ball metaphor often traces back to Qin Benli (欽本立). Qin was the founder and the editor-in-chief of the *World Economic Herald (shijie jingji daobao 世界經濟導報)*, a newspaper that was directly involved in the 1989 June Fourth

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156 This weekly newspaper was founded in 1980 and was known for advocating reform policies right from the beginning. The short-lived Herald was eventually shut down by Jiang Zemin (江澤民), the then Party-Secretary of Shanghai City and the later Secretary-General of the CCP, after it published the contents of a symposium that commemorated Hu Yaobang (胡耀邦) (Jernow 1994). The death of Hu Yaobang, a reform-minded party leader, and students’ demands to commemorate Hu in public were the immediate factors that lead to the 1989 June Fourth.
Student Movement where the CCP killed many students protesting in Tiananmen Square in Beijing. Qin used the hitting edge ball expression to illustrate his idea of running an ideal newspaper. In an interview with a New York Times reporter, Qin said, “If you hit the ball and miss the end of the table, you lose. If you hit near the end of the table, it’s too easy. So you want to aim to just nick the end of the table. That’s our policy” (Kristof 1989). To hit an edge ball in the media meant to “push our coverage to the limits of the tolerance of the government while reducing the political risks for the paper to the lowest level” (Pei 1998:175). Qin’s ultimate goal was to expand the “table” itself by constantly attacking the boundary (Shen 1991).

This righteous, morally grounded, and politically loaded concept with clearly stated rebellious intentions for press freedom has now, some thirty years later, become a popular phrase used by both the general public and government officials to instead describe behaviors that are or “should be” either illegal or legal, but are also somehow immoral. For example, after the Chinese government increased interest rates for mortgages on second (and more) apartments to regulate the real estate market, many couples filed for divorce so they could buy a second apartment with the lower “first apartment” rate.¹⁵⁷ This kind of “fake” divorce is a type of edge ball play.

In fact, hitting edge balls is observed in all kinds of economic activities in China.

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The *2012 Chinese Industry Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility Report* describes one of the biggest issues in Chinese economic activities as the popularity of hitting edge balls (Yu Na 2012). For example, the food industry is often considered a notorious player of edge balls (Li Xiangqun 2009). Instances ranging from exaggerated or false advertisements to “recycling” cooking oils, artificially coloring steamed buns, and adding ractopamine to meat (to make it appear leaner) are all commonly denounced as hitting edge balls. The most famous and probably most deadly example was the famous melamine adulterated baby formula incident. While melamine in milk was not illegal, it was clearly an adulteration that was meant to increase profitability in a price competitive industry by registering as missing protein in nutritional content tests. Hitting edge balls today, in part due to its usage by the government and official news publications, tends to be a derogatory term that describes loophole conduct, not Qin's righteous boundary-pushing and rebellion. This is also why the two dictionary definitions described above emphasize the illegality and immoral aspects as integral to hitting edge balls.

If we move beyond the negative indications of the term, we can then see a very different kind of understanding of hitting edge balls—something that is closer to Qin Benli’s idea of running his news paper or Li Anxing’s translation of the term. For example, a Kong lineage temple in Northern China was rebuilt with two halls and two

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158 This milk scandal started with one of the leading Chinese milk companies, the Sanlu Group. At least sixteen babies were diagnosed with kidney stones after drinking Sanlu’s products. It turned out that Sanlu had been adding melamine to its milk so as to increase its “protein” content. There were at least six deaths associated with this incident. What was worse was that the subsequent investigation showed that many other Chinese milk companies had been doing the same thing.
sets of ritual performances so that it could claim to have moved from being a potentially suspicious site of ancestor worship to a site of public “cultural education” (see Jun Jing 1996). Making a popular religious temple, the Dragon Temple, out to instead be a Daoist temple so that it is “legible” to the eyes of the state (who sees popular religion not as a religion, but as dangerous “superstition”) or associating it with an international NGO to legitimate its existence not only a site of religion, but also as a site for nature conservation both can also be described as clever edge ball plays (Adam Chau 2006).

In the death industry, funeral brokers are hitting edge balls in at least two senses. One is related to their institutional status and the other is related to their business practices. For the former, as mentioned, funeral brokers often illegally provided their services since they lacked proper registration. Shanghai was the first independent municipality (province), and one of only four so far, to have granted legal status to funeral brokers and their companies. Shanghai funeral brokers are now registered with the Shanghai Administration for Industry and Commerce (上海市工商行政管理局) and the Shanghai Funeral and Interment Trade Association (instead of the Civil Affairs Bureau or its Funeral and Interment Administration). This trade association has been providing annual training conferences since 2006. If funeral brokers registered as part of a funeral agency (i.e., no freelancing) and attend the conferences, then they received work permits (shanggangzheng 上崗証). Full attendance was effectively the criteria for individual funeral brokers to gain work permits. In other words, the barrier for becoming a legal funeral broker is now rather low. This policy was more or less aimed at legalizing all funeral brokers in Shanghai.
While this legalization seems to suggest that Shanghai funeral brokers no longer need to hit edge ball plays anymore, institutionally speaking at least, the reality is a little bit messier. As a kind of quasi-institution, funeral brokers and their companies are private small businesses, sometimes also known as getihu (個體戶)—self-employed households or individuals under China’s market economy. Getihu emerged generally at the beginning market reforms. Many Shanghai people today, however, use the term in a negative sense (at least slightly). This is probably because they associate getihu with petty capitalists with rural backgrounds in contrast to working in much more prestigious large state or foreign companies that dominate Shanghai's commercial landscape.

The size of funeral broker companies in Shanghai varies significantly. Based on the four broker companies that I had most contact with, they respectively had one, three, around 10 (Longevity), and around 70 brokers. While funeral brokers in the first three companies were actual employees of their respective companies, the last company, the one with 70 brokers, was more of a shell company. A funeral banquet restaurant established this company. This shell company allowed individual funeral brokers to be “nominally affiliated” (guakao 掛靠) with the company because affiliation with a registered company was a part of the criteria for retaining work permits in Shanghai. In this company, these nominally affiliated funeral brokers did not need to do any profit-sharing. The restaurant was willing to go to all the trouble, work, and cost of establishing and maintaining a company because these brokers would then persuade their customers to

159 Some other translations of guakao are: hang under, patron, supervisory or sponsoring units, attached dependency, hooking up and so on.
host their funeral banquets in that restaurant. One thing worth noting is that “nominal affiliation” is by no means an exclusive tactic used in the funeral industry. Rather, it is a commonly observed phenomenon in China for all social organizations from environmental NGOs to religious organizations as a way to deal with registration issues (cf. Kin-man Chan 2005; Kipnis et al. 2009; Yiyi Lu 2008; Jude Howell 2004; Jonathan Schwartz and Shawn Shieh 2009; Jonathan Unger and Anita Chan 1999).

In terms of the practices of funeral brokers, their hitting of edge balls is often related to how they acquire business. Before I started fieldwork, I had hypothesized that a funeral business's success would be dependent on ritual expertise and on their cultivation of a form of “commoditized compassion” that would bond the bereaved and funeral professionals. I soon realized, however, that neither of these were all that important, and certainly not crucial factors, in terms of acquiring customers (the bereaved) in Shanghai. For funeral parlors, there was no need for either because they did not need to find business at all. Only funeral parlors could handle dead bodies and only the state, meaning the Civil Affairs Bureau, could own funeral parlors. As described in the last chapter, due to the city’s high cremation rate, Shanghai funeral parlors simply “sit and face the south”—they just need to wait for business come to them.

On the contrary, funeral brokers have to go out to find the dead before they arrive at the funeral parlors. They have to persuade the bereaved to hire them as brokers even though these bereaved could just as easily go to a funeral parlor directly instead. Every funeral broker I knew told me that their business was essentially built upon “information sources” (xunxi laiyuan 訊息來源). Without steady access to information, a funeral
broker could not make her or his living from operating funerals.

In Shanghai, there were at least three kinds of information sources. The first is from a network of paid informants. Paid informants, in turn, came in several different forms. The first are “watchers” (dinggong 盯工). Being a watcher means hanging out in a hospital to see who has just died and then passing this information on to one of the funeral brokers who hired you. Someone I knew actually started his career as a watcher. He then quickly learned the necessary skills of arranging funerals himself and eventually became a funeral broker working on his own. Maybe because this is how he started his own career, he still relied on hiring watchers to gain information when I met him.

The second kind of paid informants were ambulance-drivers or people who worked for 120 (the Chinese equivalent of 911). Several brokers told me that the number of emergency line personnel who have joined teams of paid informants has increased since the Shanghai government outscored its 120 service.

The third kind of paid informants were guards at hospitals’ morgues. In fact, working with guards at morgues was actually how Tang An started his career as a funeral broker. Tang An’s father was a sent-down youth. He spent many years in rural Yunnan Province. Many years later, after he retired there and with some difficulty, he was able to move his household registration back to Shanghai. However, since living expenses were so high in Shanghai and his retirement income was based on supplementing a rural life, he wanted to continue to work. The only job that he could manage to find was to be a security guard in a hospital’s morgue since this was exactly the kind of job that anyone with other choices would not take. Soon after Tang An’s father started working in the
morgue, a funeral broker approached him and offered to pay him if he would tell the
broker when new bodies arrived. Tang An’s father soon realized the profitability of being
a funeral broker. He asked the person who hired him to hire (and to train) Tang An to be
a funeral broker (Tang An was selling life insurance at that time). This person agreed
and this was how Tang An entered the business. As he started out, Tang An then relied
on his father who worked at a morgue to be his information source.

During my fieldwork, funeral brokers generally paid their informants about RMB
500 (USD 82) for each case sent to them, regardless of whether or not the broker closed
the deal. My broker friends told me that before the 2010 World Expo, when the Shanghai
funeral brokers’ market was highly unregulated, it was not uncommon to hear that an
informant reported the same information to more than one broker since the former
receives the money even if the latter could not close the deal. As a result, occasionally,
two or more funeral brokers would end up fighting outside hospitals or outside the
deceased’s home over for the right to represent the bereaved - generally without the
bereaved knowing about the conflict.

Even though these paid informants were equally responsible for such fistfights,
the Chinese state used this kind of incident as evidence proving how all funeral brokers

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160 In fact, the need to find information sources has even changed how hospitals run their morgues
in Shanghai today. Morgues used to be one of the main money-losing units in hospitals in
Shanghai. Hospitals had to pay for the equipment and personnel (you needed at least two people).
Today, however, most hospitals in Shanghai contract out their morgues to individuals or
companies. Hospitals now not only do not need to pay for the equipment or personnel, they even
get a lump sum of money (in “management fees” 管理費) every year in return. This outsourcing
now actually brings profit into the hospitals rather than simply cutting down on costs. People who
contracted morgues were often themselves funeral brokers or had business cooperation
agreements with funeral agencies.
(as opposed to state practitioners) lacked morality or were even associated with gangsters. This type of situation had decreased significantly by the time I did my fieldwork as the industry moved away from a more frontier mode of doing business. This was because the 2010 World Expo gave the Shanghai Government an excuse (and enough capital) to “clean up” funeral brokers’ business operations. A broker friend of mine told me that her brother was arrested about a year before the 2010 World Expo without any trial or sentence. She said that the Shanghai government arrested her brother because officials thought of him as a “bad element” due to his previous record of knife fights with other funeral brokers over business competition. She said, by arresting some famous figures in the industry, the Shanghai government could “threaten the monkey by killing the chickens” (shaji jinghou 殺雞警猴, meaning punishing someone as a warming to others). My friend told me that about 10 months after the 2010 World Expo finished (meaning he was in a jail for almost two years without any trial), her brother was released. I think that the fact that her brother was in and out of jail without any trial made her point that the Shanghai government just want to “threaten the monkey” by locking up her brother even more convincing.

Another way of gaining information access was to control one of the portals for death related information. The owner of Fortunate Funeral Company told me that he gained his information access through an official contractual relationship with a telephone company. The Shanghai branch of a Chinese telecom company has a special information providing hotline. Customers can call to ask for any kind of information. While this is similar to a yellow page listing, only a few selected companies' information
will be provided in each case. As such, companies must generally pay in order to be selected, much like one of Google search’s sponsored links. Fortunate paid to be one of the first three funeral broker companies to be mentioned if someone calls the hotline to ask information about arranging a funeral (a lower, second-tier payment would have gotten them mention only if the caller, having heard the first three, asked to hear additional names). Since there were only three companies to be mentioned, not everyone who could pay and was willing to pay could receive this spot. The owner of Fortunate Funeral Company told me that “of course” he had a special under the table deal with the person who was in charge of the decision. He replied to my inquiry in a way as if I had just asked one of the stupidest questions he had ever heard. Of course he was right. Fortunate was a successful firm employing two full time brokers (in addition to its boss) with real office space. Such success required clever manipulation.

Special organizations and facilities that are death or dying related or where people have knowledge about death are another kind of death portal. For example, I have heard that some funeral brokers cultivated relationships with staff in nursing homes for the elderly. The boss of the Fortunate Funeral Agency cultivated good relationships with the “neighborhood community committees” (*juweihi* 居委會) nearby since it was not uncommon for residents to ask representatives of their committee questions regarding funeral arrangements after a loved one died. Neighborhood community committees are a grassroots governance association that links individuals to the Party-state through residence (parallel to work unit's links through work).

In fact, the funeral agencies of FIS also established their information sources
through neighborhood community committees. As mentioned, FIS was established so that the Funeral and Interment Business Administration could transfer its operation of business administration out of the government bureau in 1998. FIS is like a mother company of all three city funeral parlors. I used to think FIS’ funeral agencies and funeral parlors would work together. They did, but they work together more in the way that funeral parlors and funeral brokers work together instead of the way that funeral parlors work with each other even though they all belong to FIS. State practitioners thought about and treated funeral brokers of FIS’ funeral agencies like other funeral brokers instead of like fellow state practitioners (just in different units). Tang An told me that FIS formed its own funeral agencies to compete with other funeral brokers. However, after FIS’ funeral agencies were formed, funeral parlors realized that while FIS’ funeral brokers might indeed compete with other funeral brokers, they were also competing with funeral parlors just like all of the other funeral brokers. Moreover, profits from FIS’ funeral agencies did not need to go to the Civil Affairs Bureau. This is because while funeral parlors are a kind of “public non-profit unit” and therefore a huge portion of its revenues must be passed on up to the Civil Affairs Bureau; funeral agencies are private companies (albeit owned in the same bureaucratic chain) so their profits stay within FIS. Leaders in FIS thus have strong incentives to keep and support FIS’ funeral agencies.

Longevity represented a third kind of model in establishing information access. Their operational method was less controversial. They primarily depended on interpersonal networks. Early on in my fieldwork at Longevity, I often asked each broker there how they found the particular case they were working on. The answer was always
the same: a friend (or a friend’s friend) introduced this customer. In fact, they were quite proud that their primary information sources were “friends.” They considered themselves to be morally superior to those ambulance chaser kinds of funeral brokers who relied on paid informants to report random deaths.

Lin Wan at Longevity told me that Longevity’s model (interpersonal networks) is a more “decent” (zhengpai 正派) kind in our first conversation. Meanwhile, the ambulance chasers’ model is “walking through the side door” (走偏門 zoupianmen, meaning dishonest or indecent). I later found that this distinction was not just a matter of Longevity’s brokers “bragging” about the moral superiority of their business model. Most funeral brokers and state practitioners saw acquiring business through interpersonal networks as a much more virtuous form than that of the ambulance chaser. Such distinctions are consistent with the two ethical modes of conceptualizing funeral brokers I discussed earlier. Even though all funeral brokers are professionals (in this sense, grand managers engaged in commodity exchange), if they and the bereaved were related through interpersonal networks, this makes funeral brokers closer to being those good-hearted people (the amateurs) than grand managers. This was why funeral brokers at Longevity often told the bereaved at the end of their business that they would not charge a “service fee” (RMB 200, USD 32) since their common friends had introduced them.

Sometimes, under specific circumstances, the bereaved did not know that they were actually hiring funeral brokers. They thought that they were just “lucky” that their friends’ friend (the broker) was such a nice person who just wanted to help. I would say that in most cases, however, the bereaved were well-aware that brokers were brokers
even if they were “friends’ friends”). I did encounter one radical case wherein it seemed that the bereaved did not know that she was working with a broker the whole time (at least she pretended she did not know). After Chen Ting and I took this group to Prosperity Restaurant after the memorial meeting, the chief mourner gave Chen Ting a red packet to thank her for arranging the funeral. When we walked out of the door, Chen Ting told me that she was surprised that this chief mourner somehow was so naive that she did not know that Chen Ting was a broker.

Nevertheless, the major reason that Longevity could primarily depend on interpersonal networks was because of Chen Ting’s connection to Huangpu Funeral Parlor. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Chen Ting used to work as a contract videographer and photographer for Huangpu’s outsourcing of its visual services. Du Tu was an actual state practitioner working at Huangpu. State practitioners at Huangpu, therefore, continued to be Longevity’s primary information sources. When relatives and friends of state practitioners (or their friends’ friends or further) needed to arrange funerals, they approached these state practitioners for guidance. From the state practitioners’ perspective, if they bring these people to the parlor where they themselves worked, they gained nothing. Not to mention that many products sold in parlors (although not all of them) were more expensive than comparable options sold via brokers. As one state practitioner told me, “you should not introduce people you know to a bad deal.”

On the other hand, if state practitioners bring people to Longevity, they receive money for each case they introduce. Unlike watchers or ambulance drivers who receive $82 for each case they reported, these introducers to Longevity received 50% of the profit
of each transaction. Of course, higher-up managers at Huangpu did not like its employees to have this kind of relationship with funeral brokers. Yet, as long as the people who did this were not those who worked in the parlor's sales department, managers usually could not do anything about it.

It is important to point out that this rule of giving a cut of profits extended not just to state practitioners, but to everyone who referred a case to Longevity. In one case I saw, a family member of the bereaved had previously done business with Longevity in the past. Later on, when her friend needed to arrange a funeral, she introduced Longevity to her friend. This person then got 50% of the profit from her friend’s case. I don’t know if she gave this money to her friend afterwards (or whether she even knew that she would get a cut beforehand). Yet, from Longevity's perspective, it was their obligation to share the profit with her.

Moreover, this was a common practice among funeral brokers beyond Longevity as well. Not only brokers at Longevity, but also brokers at all the other funeral agencies, shared profits with their introducers. Tang An told me that the amount of money that went to introducers has varied over time. Earlier, when the funeral broker business was less competitive, funeral brokers in general paid less to introducers. By the time I did my fieldwork, however, business was very competitive. Tang An said that 50% was not high because, due to his boss’s (Chen Ting’s) close ties to state practitioners, their information sources were very steady. He said that brokers in other funeral agencies paid 60-80% of the profits to the introducers because “this was how desperate those brokers were” in terms of finding stable information sources or, to put it more bluntly, in terms of finding
Each funeral broker company divided its profits between introducers and brokers differently. Tang An told me that for each case he operated that involved an introducer (which was most of his cases), after the introducer received a 50% cut, Chen Ting and Du Tu split the other half. Chen Ting then split her 25% of the original total half and half with Tang An. I once asked Tang An why Du Tu qualified for such a high ratio since he practically did nothing, not even coming to the office except to pick up his check. Tang An said that state practitioners at Huangpu brought their business to Chen Ting because she was the wife of their colleague, Du Tu. This meant that, from his perspective, Du Tu had made an equal contribution to the company. In other words, the value of networks is worth so much that based on the division of profit it alone is worth just as much (if not more) than the actual labor that goes into arranging the funerals themselves. Here we see the literal meaning of Bourdieu’s “social capital” in individual networks at work.

I do not know whether most of the bereaved knew that their friends (“introducers”) received a cut from their business. While the money receivers, in theory, could decide to keep the money or give it (back) to the bereaved, funeral brokers had no choice but to give this money to the introducers so as to make sure that they would be willing to introduce business to them again in the future. While this procedure seems, at times, to run the thin borderline between commission and kickback, it is wrong to think that only the death industry operates like this. Receiving a cut for business transactions is a much broader social phenomenon. My informants told me, for instance, that when you walked out of a train station in China and a taxi driver picks you up and helps you find a
hotel, you should assume that the driver received a cut from the hotel. Or, when you bring your friend to buy a car from someone whom you just bought a car from, you should expect to receive a cut from the car salesman. The line between kickback and commission was so blurred (both in China in general and in the Shanghai funeral industry in particular) that I'm not sure if it even makes sense to make such a distinction.

Within the death industry, one of the “worst” cases of “taking a cut” that I encountered (“worst” in the sense of touching my funeral broker informants’ (as well as my own) idiosyncratic moral line) was when I heard a bereaved asking to receive a cut of her own father’s funeral. One night, Chen Ting decided to invite her employees and me to a nice restaurant. During our dinner, Chen Ting left our table several times to talk on the phone. She said that a woman was arranging the business of her father’s funeral and was quite a difficult customer. Chen Ting said that this bereaved was the only child of the deceased. Moreover, her father’s work unit was a state institute—meaning that the daughter would already receive a hefty lump sum of money to cover her father’s funeral. However, despite all of these factors that might indicate the daughter should be more likely to spend money for her father's final farewell, in reality, this daughter engaged in a very harsh drawn out negotiation and renegotiation of nearly every price.

On the way back from the dinner, we were all sitting in Chen Ting’s car, when this bereaved called again. Chen Ting was a new driver; she was not comfortable with driving one handed. So she asked us all to be quiet and let the phone call go through the car’s speaker system.

All of us sitting in the car then heard the bereaved say, “I just finished a phone
call with some people in my father’s work unit. They want to purchase 10 flower baskets from you.”

“This is great,” Chen Ting said. “I will call the flower shop as soon as we hang up the phone. What else can I do for you now?”

“I introduced my father’s work unit to buy flower baskets from you. What are you going to do?” The bereaved boldly interjected.

At this moment, I was kind of in shock. I exchanged eye contact with Chen Yu. It was so strange to hear that, at first, I wasn’t sure if I actually had heard what I thought I had heard.

“I don’t understand what you mean by this,” Chen Ting replied. “Could you please be more specific?”

“Mmm… I persuaded my father’s work unit to buy flower baskets from you. Don’t you think that you should show some gratitude?”

“Gratitude? I don’t understand what you mean. I gave you the cheapest price for these flower baskets. The reason I suggested you buy flower baskets from me was because the meeting hall looks better when all the flower baskets are the same. Plus, I can arrange the baskets [bought through me] in advance so that when the guests arrive all the baskets will already be lined up. If you think that I offered you a bad deal, you are welcome to buy flower baskets from someone else. I will still put these baskets together for you. If you think that this is not enough or my service is just not good enough, I am really sorry I made you feel this way. You are, of course, welcome to walk away from our deal. However, I really don’t know what kind of 'gratitude' you are expecting from
My intention in telling this story was not to say that this case was in any way representative. It was extremely rare to have a grieving family member ask for a cut and Chen Ting (and the other three brokers in the car), much as I, felt strongly that this case had “crossed the line.” However, despite its shocking effect, I do want to point how being a “self-entrepreneur” in different kind of structural relationship would fundamentally change as the nature of the relationship changed. This example is troublesome because the daughter was trying to be “rational” in a relationship (father and daughter) that was not supposed to be so calculating and monetary. Recall for a moment the two ethical modes of funeral brokers I discussed earlier. While I was talking about funeral brokers there, the idea that the exact same act would be understood differently based on the nature of the relationship involved is key to understanding why my funeral broker informants found this daughter’s behavior abhorrent. The daughter is related to her father through a kin relationship. However, her asking for a cut is an enactment of an entrepreneurial self. While it is rational to ask for a cut in the context of China, when the relationship involved was one of a daughter to her father, this became problematic.

**Governing the Middle**

I went to “The 2011 First and Recurrent Training for Legal Representatives of Funeral Agencies and Funeral Agents in Shanghai City.” The Chair of FIS told a story

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161 The first annual training session for Shanghai funeral agents was held in 2006. In that year, the trade association gave licenses to 17 funeral broker companies (see Xinhua News: http://news.xinhuanet.com/society/2006-12/05/content_5439254.htm. Last accessed on June 18,
in his opening presentation:

A man accidentally lost his two legs while working in a factory in Jiangsu Province. When his colleagues sent him to the hospital, they brought his legs as well thinking the doctor might be able to reconnect them. Unfortunately, this man did not make it. He passed away in the surgery room. A funeral broker was in the hospital and he saw what happened. When he found out that this man had died, the broker went to talk to a hospital employee who was in charge of medical waste. He offered a couple hundred RMB to the hospital worker in exchange for the man’s two legs. Meanwhile, the family members of the man who lost his legs were devastated when they realized that the doctor could not save him. After they cried for a while and began to accept the reality of his passing, they decided that they should at least cremate the two legs together with his body so this man could still be whole in the other world. Thus, the bereaved asked the doctor to give the deceased’s legs back to them. The doctor then told them to talk to the people who are in charge of medical waste. Since this guy had already sold the legs to someone else, he told the bereaved that, for some reason the legs were missing. He couldn’t find them. The bereaved were very upset and had a quarrel with their doctors. Just as the situation seemed to be escalating out of control, the broker approached the bereaved through the chaos. He said to them, if you give me RMB 20,000, I can find this man’s legs for you.

Before the chair of FIS told this story, he reviewed the current conditions of the Shanghai funeral industry including some statistical reports. He also commented on the market conditions of the funeral industry in Shanghai and other parts of China. He ended his talk with the stolen legs. As I had attended the conference along with brokers from Longevity, I asked Tang An after this what he thought of the session:

This story was more about an immoral man who tried to blackmail a bereaved family who only just happened to be a funeral broker. The story is not really about

14.) In 2010, 74 agencies with 848 brokers joined the training (and each received a license). When I attended the training in 2011, there were 90 companies with 978 brokers (these numbers were recorded from my notes during the conference). This was the first time that there were more licensed funeral brokers than funeral practitioners in Shanghai.
funeral broker malpractice even though he meant it as such. If that man had told
the bereaved something to the effect of “if you hire me to arrange your funeral, I
can guarantee you I will find your loved one’s legs,” then it would have been a
case of funeral broker malpractice.

While I actually agree with Tang An on this, it is important to mention that this is
the kind of representation of the truth produced by the state discourse. This is also the
kind of representation we see in the Chinese media around the Tomb Sweeping Festival
and the Winter Solstice—the primary annual times for cremains burial in Shanghai. This
despite the fact that increasing numbers of bereaved are now hiring funeral brokers
instead of going straight to funeral parlors to arrange things themselves directly with state
practitioners.

In order to regulate this ambiguous middle, one of the first steps that funeral
governing institutions in Shanghai did was to legalize the very existence of funeral
brokers. The key institution involved was the Shanghai Funeral and Interment Trade
Association. This trade association is a typical kind of government run NGO.162 At the
time of my fieldwork, the chair of the trade association was also the chief executive of
FIS, the same person who told the stolen leg story. Before the Civil Affairs Bureau
appointed this man to be the chief executive of FIS, he was the Party Secretary of the
center. Furthermore, the Vice Chair (the Secretary-General) of the funeral and interment
trade association was the former chief executive of a city funeral parlor. Finally, this

162 Governmental NGOs, also known as GONGOs, refer to NGOs that appears to be non-governmental but actually are established and run by governments and (or) under close government supervision. In China, most trade associations were GONGO. For more see Unger, Jonathan 1996. ““Bridges”: Private Business, the Chinese Government and the Rise of New Associations,” in The China Quarterly, Vol. 174: 795-819.
trade association’s office was located inside the offices of the Shanghai Funeral and Interment Business Administration. These physical and personnel overlaps show that the trade association, FIS, and the Civil Affair Bureau still work together very closely even if they sought to appear to be different institutions. This therefore gave funeral parlors a position as a sort of governing institution in relation to funeral brokers even if they were technically parallel competitors, legally speaking.

I interviewed the Secretary-General of the trade association about why they decided to legalize funeral brokers in Shanghai in the first place. He said, the existence of funeral brokers and their increased popularity shows “the demand of consumers.” And, “because Shanghai is more modern and progressive, funeral governing institutions are willing to recognize consumers’ needs.” From funeral brokers’ perspective, however, they interpreted this legal recognition as resulting from the fact that Shanghai is the leading city in China—this means that the Shanghai government is the most politically powerful government. Unlike their counterparts in other municipal cities and provinces who are weak, the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau is better at squeezing, repressing, and regulating funeral brokers. For funeral brokers, no legal status also meant no regulation. Legalization was the Civil Affairs Bureau's way of helping funeral parlors to compete with funeral brokers. In other words, legalization to them was a means to reassert the state monopoly of the death industry rather than a means to facilitate market competition.

I suggest seeing this legalization as a way to clarify and rationalize the ambiguous nature of the middle characteristics of funeral brokers. Recall here again for a moment my two ethical modes—of friendship and discreet red envelopes, on the one side, versus
professional and service fee relationships, on the other—and how these two modes project a relational self and an entrepreneur self for funeral brokers respectively. By legalizing funeral brokers, Shanghai funeral governing institutions declared that funeral brokers can no longer be both good-hearted people and grand manager at the same time. Instead, funeral brokers are now designated as only grand managers, that is, as professionals who provide service for fees. The implication of legalization was therefore to move funeral brokers out of the realm of relational persons who are “friends” with their clients and who enter into (profitable) gift exchange relations with the bereaved. After legalization, funeral brokers are (and could only be) individual entrepreneurs who are professional and who enter into commodity exchange with the bereaved. In this sense, the ethical ambiguity of kindly versus calculating broker is now turned into only a potential to be more or less calculating and money hungry as the brokers are legalized and portrayed via the state’s representation. Of course, in practice, funeral brokers still evoke this friendship model in operating business, especially if they, like Longevity’s brokers, depend on “personal” networks to be their information sources.

The trade association started an “honest and trusted file” (chengxin dang’an 誠信檔案) for each funeral broker in the middle of my fieldwork. This is a good example to show how the government’s new regulatory power rationalized and disambiguated funeral brokers’ practices. When I first started my fieldwork, all funeral brokers had to bring their work permits with them to arrange any services in funeral parlors. Without the papers (regardless of the frequency of their often daily visits) the parlors would refuse their business meeting requests. This work permit was a paper-made booklet like a
license with the brokers’ pictures. In addition to pictures, these paper work permits also showed the brokers’ names and their companies’ name.

After several months, in January 2011, the trade association came up with a new method. They changed the paper work permit into a plastic IC card that could also be used to build up and store this “honest and trusted file.” This plastic has an IC memory chip for storing data. If something went wrong in a particular funeral, then state practitioners could add notes to the IC card of the organizing broker. The more negatives marks a broker received, the less “honest and trusted” quality the broker was taken to have. Funeral parlors then could refuse to serve brokers with a bad “honest and trusted” rating or could simply tell the bereaved directly that the broker they had hired had a bad record. During my fieldwork, all funeral brokers switched to this IC card. However, by the time I left at the end of 2011, I had not yet heard of any broker being refused in funeral parlors. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that this whole set of information was also collected and stored in the funeral parlors’ own computers. This example illustrates how funeral parlors, as partial cooperators-competitors of funeral brokers, also functioned as a quasi-governing institution with fairly significant power over brokers, even if that power is only a potential threat, as is the case with the IC cards.

Under the name of transparency, the Shanghai “state” (meaning the combination of funeral parlors, the Civil Affairs Bureau, and the government-run “NGO”) monitored and regulated its partial business competitors. Since legalized brokers are, by definition, no longer a relational person embedded in social networks who might inspire trust or hatred (or evoke any other kind of emotion), their quality thus could be quantified on an
individual basis without any context based on evaluations of them made by their competitors.

Another such move toward “transparency” was the governing institutions’ attempt to institute a “Shanghai Standard Funeral Brokers’ Service Contract (shanghaishi binzang daili fuwu hetong 上海市殯葬代理服務合同)” citywide. The vice chair of the trade association told me that signing a contract was a way to protect both the brokers and the bereaved. For brokers, they could know for sure that the bereaved would pay them. For the bereaved, they would gain a legal basis for making sure that brokers followed their business agreement. I did not give much thought to it all at the time he told me. I only began to realize the implications of such a standard contract when one day Chen Yu told me that her sister went to a meeting as the legal representative for Longevity the day before. Although the name of the meeting suggested it was to “inquire” into the opinions of the funeral brokers' legal representatives on the new standard contract, in actuality, the association used the meeting instead to “inform” those representatives of the new policy on standard contracts. Unlike the vice chair who saw this as a “natural” move toward professionalization, funeral brokers saw this as yet another attempt to assert governing control. Beyond mere control, it threatened to significantly diminish the influence of funeral brokers in Shanghai.

Chen Yu told me that the standard contract was to be written in triplicate. One copy was to be given to the bereaved, one to the broker, and the other to the funeral parlor. The most controversial part of the policy is this last part. As she pointed out, it was ridiculous to force them to give a third copy to the funeral parlor because they were
business competitors. Every broker I talked to thought that giving a copy of their contract to the parlor would kill most funeral brokers’ companies. It would be just a matter of time because once the parlor has this third copy they can control the broker in so many ways. Tang An said, “For example, if the parlor thinks you earn too much (i.e., you 'steal' too much of the parlor’s own business) or you disobey their rules, they could bring a copy of all of your business transactions to the tax bureau.” Many funeral brokers pay very little tax if any at all. Or, he went on to explain, the parlor could make the tax bureau check your suppliers’ taxes. Most suppliers of funeral brokers manufactured their products in “small workshops” (xiaozuofang 小作坊) run by mom & pop petty capitalists and they, too, rarely pay taxes. Once this happened, these small suppliers would either be pushed out of the market, increase their prices, or at least never be willing to deal with you again. By controlling the suppliers, funeral parlors could control the brokers. Once the number of funeral brokers decreased, there would be less business competitors and it would all be that much easier to regulate the remaining ones (and for the parlors to increase their own profits, of course!). As Tang An said, the parlors are “using the name of the market to exert political sovereignty” (yi shichangzhiming xing zhengzhizishi 以市場之名行政治之事).

In fact, brokers’ concern over the standard contract became a full-blown drama in the middle of the 2011 training conference for funeral brokers I began to describe above. On that day, one of the morning sections was a class given by a government official from the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Quality and Technical Supervision. She presented their newly initiated policy, Procedures of the Shanghai Municipality on Funeral Brokers
(effective January 1, 2011). She talked about the content of this policy with specific emphasis on why people needed standard contracts. The standard contract, she told us, was a way to civilize (wenming 文明) business conduct and to raise the quality (suzhi 素質) of the industry. With her PowerPoint slideshow projected on the screen, for a while I thought I was in a lecture at a University's law department. The speaker definitely made no effort to accommodate her audience, most of whom did not have college degrees (and many of whom had never graduated from or even gone to high school). In some ways, the fact that the trade association made “us” (funeral brokers) all sit there to listen to something that most of us didn’t care about (perhaps precisely because it was delivered in a language that was difficult to understand) was a form of their exertion of power. Forcing people to attend the meeting in and of itself, along with this demeaning format, implied and reinforced their power and image of superiority.

After the class finished, we went to have lunch. Unlike the silence of the two lectures, everyone at the table (some were from Longevity, but there were many others as well) heatedly criticized the standard contract, asserting that this was the state’s next attempt to “kill” funeral brokers. When the afternoon lecture started, the atmosphere was suddenly quiet and lifeless again though. It was as if everyone had just had their Thanksgiving turkey meal and fallen deeply into a turkey coma. The speaker was another government official. He was from the Contract Supervision Division (hetong jiandu guanlichu 合同監督管理處) in the Shanghai Administration for Industry and Commerce. He started his talk with a legal presentation of what a contract is. For example, he said, a contract is the legal representation of an agreement between two parties. Its content
details the rights and responsibilities, duties and obligations, of each party to the other and so on. In order to further illustrate what a contract was, he used a cell phone as an example to explore under what conditions his saying that he gave his cell phone to you would constitute a contract.

Although I think his explanation was quite clear, I could see how this display of legal “expertise” was so totally detached from the brokers’ concerns. Sitting down there as one of the nine hundred or so people in the audience, I thought this lecture would pass just like the morning one—brokers just sitting and sleeping to make the time pass by faster. However, about twenty minutes into the presentation and seemingly reacting to no statement in particular, a man stood up and yelled,

“We don’t give a fuck about your cell phone or my cell phone! Our concern is this Shanghai Standard Funeral Brokers’ Service Contract!

“Why do you guys have to do this to us?” He went on. “Why can’t you leave us a means of making a living? People say that rural migrants working in cities are pitiful, but at least they can go back to their hometown if they lose their jobs. Where can we go [many brokers there were Shanghai people]? I guess we can only go to funeral parlors [meaning all they could do was die, with the added irony that even dead funeral brokers had to go through the Parlors].”

Before he finished his statement, another woman stood up to yell at the speaker and at the vice chair of the trade association who was sitting next to the speaker. These two people, especially the first man, practically hijacked the conference for at least five minutes. The man who stood up first even grabbed his chair to go and sit in between the
speaker and the vice chair of the trade association on the stage in order to force them to
talk about this contract. Although this little drama was eventually resolved, it did force
the speaker to give up on his original talk. The presenter started to talk about the content
of the actual contract and why it is “good” to have a standard contract for funeral brokers’
“self interest.” Even though the audience sat through the talk in the end, their puzzles and
worries were not in any way resolved since none of their concerns had anything to do
with the content of the legal document per se. After all, their worries were about how
these legal documents might be used, their forced distribution to a competitor, and about
the fact that their being a legal form would create a variety of outcomes that would
quickly spiral beyond the brokers’ control. All of these things went well beyond any
“legal” understanding of why a contract might be “good.”

The Fragile Middle as Productive

Funeral brokers and funeral parlors are business competitors on “folk custom
items” and are business collaborators on “civil affairs items” since the former is open to
market competition and the latter is a state monopoly. Although what counts as a “civil
affairs item” as opposed to a “folk custom item” seems rather arbitrary, the categorization
makes sense when seen in relation to distance from the dead bodies themselves. That is,
all services and products that are directly related to dead bodies are civil affairs items.
From body transportation (hearse and driver), body handling (embalming, make up, body
dressing, and so on) to body display (from cremation coffins to memorial meeting halls),

163 This policy did go into effect on January 1, 2012 right as I was about to leave the field.
funeral parlors monopolize all of these. Any other product such as cremains caskets, flower baskets, banquet services, and religious goods belong to the folk custom category. Funeral brokers at Longevity followed such a distinction when conducting their own business meetings with the bereaved. They preferred to start by going through the civil affairs items first. Then they could concentrate on the folk custom items by giving relatively more in-depth elaborations on why the bereaved might want each folk custom item.

This distinction between civil affairs and folk custom items and the restrictions that follow from it has several consequences. First, it suggests that funeral parlors were partially responsible for the fact that the bereaved tended to spend more money when hiring funeral brokers. While I do not have a way to gather average spending statistics to evaluate whether the bereaved actually spent more money if they hired funeral brokers, this “fact” was frequently told to me by people in funeral governing institutions (including funeral parlors). Assuming for the moment that this statement is true, however, this result was to some degree caused by the funeral parlors themselves. For example, Huangpu had several “welfare packages” and other package deals. However, Huangpu did not allow funeral brokers to book any of these deals for their clients. These packaged deals could only be purchased if the bereaved went to Huangpu to arrange their funeral without hiring brokers.

Moreover, for each individual item on sale, Huangpu often prohibited the funeral brokers from selling the cheap-end civil affairs items to their clients. For example, when brokers introduced cremation coffins to the bereaved, they could only introduce items
costing RMB 1,380 or more because Huangpu wouldn’t allow the funeral brokers to book cremation caskets costing less than this. From Huangpu’s perspective, when funeral brokers came in to the parlor to have their business meetings with state practitioners on behalf of the bereaved, this meant that the parlor had already lost the possibility of selling folk custom items. Huangpu’s way of making up for this loss was to force brokers to only sell the more expensive civil affairs items (even though this was done by sacrificing the economic interests of the bereaved).

Funeral brokers thought that funeral parlors were competing with them unfairly. Chen Yu said that

After people started to say that funeral parlors were profiteers, they [the parlors] decreased their prices on folk custom items. Funeral parlors’ cheapest, low-end cremains caskets are now so cheap that they are losing money on them. However, funeral parlors then increased their prices for civil affairs items! In other words, the funeral parlors lowered their prices for products that were open to market competition and increased their prices for the products they monopolized. And then they [funeral parlors] blamed the profiteering on us, that the creation of excessive profit was our [funeral brokers] fault even though the portion of that [profiteering] money that we are making is based on competition while the portion they are making is based on their monopoly.

Second, since funeral brokers only gained profit from the folk custom items (they did not add any mark-up to civil affairs items), they had to come up with new elaborate ways of selling them. At a larger, cumulative scale, this necessity eventually worked to transmit religious knowledge about funerals within Shanghai society. For example, both Huangpu and Longevity sold coarse yellow paper (huangzhi 黃紙) in squares. Shanghai people often put these papers inside the cremation coffin and underneath the body. The
same squares are also used to rub the coffin before it is ceremoniously nailed shut. Finally, the same paper is also used as spiritual money to burn to the deceased once you roll it up like an egg roll. I helped various Shanghai friends to make spiritual money out of such yellow papers for a whole range of different occasions. For example, we made them once for a Buddhist salvation ceremony that was held in a temple and again for ancestor worship on the Winter Solstice.

When state practitioners introduced this folk custom item to the bereaved, the former simply asked if the latter if they wanted some. Of course, when brokers had business meetings with state practitioners on behalf of the bereaved, the state practitioners would not bother to try to sell this yellow paper, or any other folk custom items, to the brokers. After all, brokers’ prices for buying their folk custom items from their own suppliers tended to be lower. When it was a broker selling this to the bereaved, on the other hand, they often offered an explanation (shuofa 說法) of the meaning and use of the squares. For example, Lin Wu at Longevity said to the bereaved,

Do you want to buy some coarse yellow paper? I don’t know if you know that many people like to use yellow paper to rub the coffin. There are several explanations for having these. A more traditional, more superstition, explanation says that by rubbing the cremation coffin with it this act symbolically turns the casket into a golden casket. Also, people usually put a thick layer of yellow paper underneath the body. This yellow bottom layer added to the top layer of xibo (a different kind of spiritual money made of sliver tin foil paper) on the body symbolizes “wearing gold with sliver” (chuanjin daiyin 穿金戴銀). Of course, this is a matter of personal belief. If you don’t believe these superstitions, there is another explanation that I have heard of. It was more of a scientific explanation. That is, if you put yellow papers in the coffin, it helps the body to burn better.
During the process of offering these explanations, Lin Wu would observe the bereaved’s decision in order to decide whether he should elaborate one explanation more than the other. As far as Lin Wu was concerned, why the bereaved bought these yellow coarse papers was not important at all, so long as they bought them. Yet, it is in exactly this kind of business meeting that funeral brokers transmitted (and in some cases completely created) religious interpretations and practices to the bereaved who might or might not know about them (of course, they could not know about wholly invented practices…but over time these too could become “traditional”).

Third, funeral brokers not only facilitated the transmission of religious knowledge (especially knowledge related to popular religion), but they also helped to create urban Shanghai’s religious revival by expanding the range of folk custom items on offer. Since they could make no money on civil affairs items and since they were being undercut by the parlors in other areas, edge ball plays aimed at introducing new items that could also expand the entire range of offerings as a clear path to “widen the table.” For example, funeral brokers popularized a standard set of ritual goods, now known among funeral professional as the Three Minor Things. They are a comb, a fan, and a handkerchief sold together in one package (I explain the symbolic meaning of these in Chapter 8). This is now a standard item for sale by both funeral brokers and state practitioners.

State practitioners recognized the “invented” nature of many current funerary goods and their association with funeral brokers. A state practitioner told me, “Funeral brokers are ‘messy and chaotic’ (luangi bazao 亂七八糟). They casually invent stuff and then sell them. And then the bereaved buy them because ‘it is better to believe in its
efficacy than not (ningke xinqiyou 寧可信其有).’ A lot of stuff we [Parlors] have now is all ‘the result of [funeral brokers] messing around (luangao de jieguo 亂搞的結果).’”

Many practitioners made similar comments to me when I mentioned that there seemed to be more religious rituals around in Shanghai today. Some of them tried to warn me that these were not “real” religion. Rather, they were mere invented superstitions.

Whether the current religious ritual practices were newly invented or not, however, is not the point. The point I want to emphasize here is that people in the industry attributed the rise of popular religious rituals in funerals to funeral brokers. In fact, outside Baoxin funeral parlor, there is a famous “Funeral Avenue” (binzang yitiaojie 殯葬一條街) where many small shops sell all kinds of funeral goods. All of these shops were either owned by funeral brokers or at least worked with funeral brokers. The concentration of these shops was a good indication of why more than 80% of funerals in Baoxin operated through funeral brokers (even Longhua had some 60% of funerals operated by brokers). When I did interviews with a scholar who was active in funeral governance (he was involved in drafting funeral policy in Shanghai), he told me that this Funeral Avenue was one of the centers of “superstition.”

This scholar told me about Funeral Avenue for a very different purpose. He was trying to tell me that the state should be very careful when attacking superstition. He thought that it was important to separate “superstition” (mixin 迷信) from “custom” (fengsu xiguan 風俗習慣). I asked him how one could make such a separation. He told me that a lot of products sold on this street such as “spiritual cash,” paper-made TVs, paper security guards and maids, and paper houses were superstitious items, but xibo
were not. When I tried to probe how he made such a categorization, he told me that this is because *xibo* is traditional. Meanwhile, spiritual cash and other things are “invented” since they look like modern money. While these sorts of debates over what counted as religion and what superstition were key to policy debates at the level of governance, at the level of practice, the fact that funeral brokers offered items that gained in popularity pushed the parlors to also begin to offer them. As they began to also be offered by the Parlors, a state institution, the practices were, to some extent legitimized – thus quite overturning the parlor’s original state-mandated mission to demystify death.

As a result, the degree to which these religious explanations and practices were invented or fake is not important. What’s important here was that funeral brokers were actively promoting and circulating both popular religious practices and multiple interpretations or improvisations of them in their operation of both funerals and business meetings as a direct result of the parlor's ongoing monopoly of civil affairs items. The rise of funeral brokers and their success in introducing new folk custom items articulated the increasing desires of the bereaved to include popular religion in their previously secular socialist funerals (I discuss this in much more detail in Chapters 7 and 8). While state practitioners in particular thought this was a negative development, almost all funeral professionals recognized the role brokers had played in this expansion of religious items in Shanghai funerals. It is in this sense that I argue funeral brokers’ structural position in the fragile middle is productive. It not only pushed funeral parlors to change, but also opened up a space for the possible return (or reinvention and even creation) of popular religious and other folk death rituals within state institutions (funeral parlors) and
socialist civil funerals (memorial meetings).

The Fragile Middle as An Agentive Node

*Q:* Why has the Chinese table tennis team always been so amazing?  
*A:* Because every Chinese citizen is an expert at playing edge balls.  
A popular joke in China

In this chapter, I used an ethnography of funeral brokers as a way to move beyond the prominent simplistic and dichotomous understandings often put out about the funeral industry divided between good and bad, vulnerable bereaved and profiteering funeral professionals, legal state practitioners and semi-legal but immoral funeral brokers. In many ways, the practices in the death industry are not that different from those in other industries in China. Once we move beyond conceptualizing funeral professionals in terms of pollution—the classic conceptual framework for analyzing funeral brokers in China (J. Watson 1988), nothing is inherently immoral in the operation of a death business. Despite scholars, media reports, and government officials (both national and local) describing funeral brokers as those who constantly and immorally play edge balls, they were by no means the sole players. Hitting edge balls is as much a part of the state practitioners' or the bereaved's game as it is a part of funeral brokers’ game.

As a result, on the one hand, hitting edge balls is now a rhetorical tool used by the center of power to delineate and define what is happening on the margins of its power, casting it in a negative light. At the same time, it is also a term used by people on the margins to describe how they themselves have strategically expanded or redefined what counts as the center. The same rhetorical tool means different things depending on the
position of the speakers in particular contexts. Moreover, although in certain specific contexts hitting an edge ball could be the sort of “heroic righteous resistance,” like Qin’s newspaper model, which anthropologists would have very little difficulty embracing, this is only rarely the case. Heroism as a form of resistance or a way to create social change has very rarely worked in China; heroes are too easily put down. Rather, hitting an edge ball not only is not always “righteous,” but at times can be downright ugly and nasty, or in some extreme cases, lethal. Edge ball plays could be entirely legal, but immoral; illegal, but moral; or maybe, legal or not, but simply ambiguously amoral.

In this sense, hitting edge balls is neither clearly resistance nor “corruption.” Rather, it is more a tango dance that requires both the state and the public (assuming we can somehow separate the two in the first place) to coordinate. A step forward on the public side means that the state is willing to not push back and vice versa. When the state decides not to push back, this does not necessarily mean the triumph of the public. It simply means that the state decided not to govern that particular thing at this particular moment – but could do so later. I argue that this collaborative and cumulative effort by funeral brokers at hitting edge balls has effectively carved out an institutional space for their business within the Shanghai funeral industry despite the industry still remaining (to a large degree) a state monopoly. These changes might entail a push toward justice or freedom based on liberal democratic values, but they might just as easily also be amoral or even immoral pushes no matter if the ball itself actually crosses the bounds of legality or not. Expanding the boundaries of state limitations in some cases means increasing personal freedom and the availability of public goods, but this is not necessarily so. “The
public” (or what “public good” means) is never an unambiguous or non-contradictory concept. I suggest here that it is this ambiguous difficulty inherent in cheering for edge ball politics that has produced significant change by carving out a space for and providing a platform for new practices within the funeral industry.

Finally, funeral brokers’ position in the fragile middle, as marginalized people (whether due to their frequent immigrant status or general class position) and as sandwiched between the bereaved and state practitioners, has established them as an agentive node where changes are created out of the struggle for survival. From this position, and largely forced by this position, they have effected changes related to both the political economy of death and subject formation. Change here comes precisely from a node without power. For the former, the rise of funeral brokers has made state funeral parlors react accordingly, adding their own broker company as well as adding new folk custom items and relaxing opposition to the performance of popular religious practices in what are still considered state spaces (all this even as funeral parlors themselves are also changing due to marketization). For the latter, funeral brokers were actively bringing religious constructions of subjectivities of dead bodies back to Shanghai funeral ritual. This effect was real even though it was largely unintentional. Most brokers were simply trying to make more money and to have a better life at a time when they were otherwise getting left behind by a rapidly increasing gap between those with and without better incomes, education, and social connections with the state in urban Shanghai. It was the government that first transformed funerals from a project of moral governance to an economic exchange. Yet, despite the funeral governing institutions proclaiming that
funeral brokers were exploiting the bereaved (and this was true to some degree), the fragile middle ground that brokers occupied only by means of their practices was also the very location where religious subjectivity reentered the Shanghai funeral industry. The manipulations and struggles of those brokers occupying the fragile middle helps to explain how religious change actually came about in urban Chinese funerals. This theoretical shift from why to how, enables us to see some of the ways that religious revival in funerals has actually been a (sometimes small) part of a much broader set of changes. This is not, then, just about the revival of religious practices, but about change more generally as well. This shift can help us to understand how changes that might not be directly related to religion and ritual have, in fact, been crucial for opening up space for exactly such religious and ritual revivals. It was the cumulative immoral and amoral actions of brokers that opened a place for religious morality within socialist state institutions.
Zhou Enlai (周恩來), the first Premier of the PRC, once said that Chinese people need two revolutions to change traditional (“feudalist”) Chinese funeral and interment customs. The goal of the first revolution is “not keeping corpses” (bubaocun yiti 不保存遺體) and the second is “not keeping cremains” (bubaocun guhui 不保存骨灰). Zhou was probably the best exemplar for the CCP of both revolutions. When Zhou died in 1976, his body was cremated (“not keeping corpses”) and then scattered into the water (“not keeping cremains”). This was in contrast to what had happened to Mao’s body, which was embalmed and is still displayed in the Mausoleum in Tiananmen Square in Beijing. This even though Mao initiated and signed the most famous statement in the history of funeral governance under the CCP, “A Proposal for Cremation” (huohua changyishu 火化倡議書), in 1956.

In Shanghai, if we take 1954 as the starting point and 1982 as the finishing line for the first revolution, it took Shanghai less than thirty years to accomplish the first revolution. From the perspective of funeral governance, Shanghai now is officially striving to complete the second revolution by persuading all Shanghai citizens to give up

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164 My funeral professional friends told me that Zhou chose cremation and scattering his cremains because he was worried about what Chairman Mao might do to his body or cremains. Some even told me that Zhou’s family secretly kept the last bit of cremains and stored them at the Zhou Enlai Memorial Hall in Huai’an (懷安), Jiangsu. Huai’an was Zhou’s hometown.

165 Shanghai FIA begun to promote cremation in 1954. From 1954 to 1956, it was the first wave of Funerary and Interment Reform in Shanghai. See more on Chapter 3. 1982 was when Duhang Crematorium was built. This was the last rural district in Shanghai that has a crematorium.
keeping cremains. In reality, though, funerary officials have been enthusiastically facilitating the dramatic blooming of columbarium and cremains cemeteries since the early 1980s—both are places for people to keep cremains.

For government officials involved in funeral governance, “not keeping cremains” entails at least two distinct policy orientations in practice. The first is to develop alternative methods of cremains disposal. This means that instead of burying or storing cremains in cemeteries or columbaria, Shanghai people are encouraged to embrace sea burials (haizang 海葬), tree burials (shuzang 樹葬), grassland burials (caopingzang 草坪葬) and so on. These alternative methods return cremains, unboxed, to the natural environment without leaving a trace of the identity and the ownership of the cremains. The ideology is that human flesh and bones will become an unidentifiable part of the eco-system that sustains all life.166

The second policy orientation in thinking about “not keeping cremains” is to find a way that “preserves a culture of life” (baocun shengming wenhua 保存生命文化). The idea behind “preserving a culture of life” is that the cremains have no meaning in

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166 Along these lines, I once attended a funeral related conference in Shanghai where one of the speakers introduced the latest and the most “environmental friendly” body disposal method developed in Germany—“water burial” (shuizang 水葬)—as a future potential alternative for China. The original German term for this is a Resomator. Resomator is the name of an airport baggage screener like device that can transform dead bodies into a white powder and a coffee colored liquid that are ready to “flush down the drain into sewerage system” (Chris Ayres 2010). The point of this presentation in the funeral conference in Shanghai was to show that human world is supposed to be for the living, not for the dead. The dead should leave the living world without a trace (or with as little as possible). While the presenter who shared this latest technology was well aware that such method violates Chinese sensibilities about death and dead bodies and therefore the impossibility of implementing water burial in Shanghai, his presentation nevertheless shows the kind of inspiration that higher up funeral officials and professionals have in mind when imagining the most “modern” ways of interment.
themselves—what is important is to preserve the meaning of the life that the cremains once embodied. In practice, “preserving a culture of life” involves developing techniques of representing the deceased in “authentic” ways such that the deceased’s life culture is “preserved” as if we were taking a picture of the deceased. One method to achieve this goal was to promote “personalized rituals” (gexinghua yishi 個性化儀式). Whenever I interviewed people in the funeral industry, so long as we were talking about rites of commemoration, they all told me that personalized funerals are (and should be) the way of the future. They said that the biggest problem with contemporary Shanghai funerals is that they are too “programmed” (chengshihua 程式化). There are no “personal characteristics” (gerentese 個人特色) in them. Interviewee after interviewee within the state affiliated funeral institutions stated that modern funerals should reflect individual difference. For them, modernity indicated a linear development from “programmed” ritual to personalized ones. This pursuit of personalized funerals is then not only because this happens to fit the goal of the second funeral revolution (“not keeping cremains”), but also because this is the believed “destiny” of modernization in funeral operations.167

This chapter starts by describing and analyzing the kinds of imaginings that go into personalized funerals and how this format works in principle. In contrast with this vision (or State's desire), I then discuss what kinds of subjectivity are actually being created in the mundane interactions between the state (vis-a-vis state practitioners) and

167 In Chapter 4, I mentioned renben binzang (human-centered funeral and interment) when I discuss Hu Jintao’s proposal to promote a Socialist Harmonious Society as a way to deal with market development issues in contemporary China. “Preserving a culture of life” was also one way to articulate a human-centered approach to funeral and interment in governing funeral.
the public (the bereaved) in funeral parlors. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of
the modality of governance and subject formation in post economic reform Shanghai.

Constructing a Neoliberal Self in a Personalized Funeral

In June 2011, I attended a national conference called the “Modern Funeral Ritual
Demonstration and Learning Conference” (xiandai binzang liyi guanmo jiaoliuhui 現代
殯葬禮儀觀摩交流會) in Changsha, Hunan Province. During the conference, funeral
professionals from all over China went to learn what a “modern funeral” might look like.
I estimate that there were several hundred representatives from funeral parlors and
cemeteries there. Conference speakers included people from Japan (representing a flower
altar design company), Taiwan (representing a large funeral service company), Sichuan
Province (representing a private funeral agency run by Taiwanese), and Shanghai
(representing a famous private cemetery). These speakers either presented or actually
demonstrated their respective versions (and visions) of modern funerals. In one of the
sessions, students from the Funeral Department of the Changsha Civil Affairs College,
the premier college for funeral professionals, also performed “modern etiquette” showing
the proper way to shake hands, bow, walk, greet the bereaved and parade in military style
goose-step.

Having two out of the five presenting institutions coming from (or associated
with) Taiwan was not accidental (this number may have been closer to 3 since the private
Shanghai cemetery mentioned above was actually started by Taiwanese as well). Taiwan
has been one of the most important sources of inspiration for the Chinese death industry
in general and for rites of commemoration in particular. This was so much the fact that many of my informants did not understand why I would study Shanghai funerals if my interests were about ritual. The speaker from Taiwan gave a thirty-minute presentation in which she shared her experiences of designing personalized funerals in Taiwan. She presented three cases. Although all three were personalized, I have transcribed only the last one in detail here:

We should imagine the personalized funeral as a graduation ceremony for the deceased. This graduation is the deceased’s last show. Therefore, she/he should be the main character (zhujiao 主角), the protagonist, of his life graduation. The bereaved are the actors and actresses who perform this show. Funeral professionals are the directors, script writers, and the people who move the stage settings during the show. We are not the stars. So make the bereaved do the front stage things, such as hosting, as much as possible. Step back and make the spotlight shine on the deceased and performers. Funeral professionals should remain behind the scenes even if you are the ones directing the show. […]

A true personalized funeral places the deceased as the center of attention and story telling. A personal funeral also shows the entirety of the deceased’s life whether we are talking about those happy and glorious moments or frustrating and sad moments. A personalized funeral is the representation of the deceased's life on a stage […]

[Not included in this excerpt: the first and second cases were about a housewife’s funeral and an ordinary businessman’s funeral respectively.]

Now I am going to talk about the third personalized funeral I designed. This one was also my favorite. However, it is worth noting that although all three cases I share today are personalized, this last one only works when the deceased’s life is full of stories. The main character of my third case, Wang Zhaofan (王昭藩), was an architect and a professor. He also owned an architectural company. He was a part of the team that designed the World Trade Center. In addition to his architectural profession, he also liked painting, calligraphy, and drawing among other things. He even liked cooking—often baking cakes for his granddaughters.

In his old age, he called himself “an old naughty boy” (laowantong 老顽童). He
hoped his funeral could represent his talents, artistic characteristics, and humor. He wanted his funeral to show who he was. He also did not want people to cry for him in his funeral. He wanted people to party and have fun. Wang hoped that all his friends who came to accompany his last journey could know each other just as they all knew Wang himself. According to these wishes, I designed a personalized funeral that suited him.

First, we rented an old warehouse for his funeral. We divided this warehouse into several sections. In the entrance where people can sign in and give gifts, we had a staff member take a Polaroid picture of every guest. We set up a “Connecting Plaza” (lianyi guangchang 聯誼廣場) in the middle of the warehouse. Light food and drinks were provided in this section. Wang felt that people today are too busy to connect with each other. He hoped that his funeral could be a place where people connect and reconnect and where people could pause for a moment in an otherwise ridiculously busy life. Whether Wang's friends wanted to visit him or simply visit each other, they were all welcome.

On the other side of Connecting Plaza, we set up a “Time Axis” (shijianzhou 時間軸) printed on a 20-meter long paper on a wall. This Time Axis was a detailed time line of Wang’s life journey from birth to death. Guests then fixed the Polaroid pictures we took of them earlier to the Time Axis to mark the intersection of the guests’ life and Wang’s own life. For example, if you were Wang’s student in 1978, then you put the Polaroid you got at the entrance at the 1978 mark. By the end of the day, Wang’s children could see that there were so many people who had accompanied their father throughout his life. This Time Axis provided an exemplar to Wang’s children for being a proper person. This was also a transcript that testified to Wang’s life achievements.

Behind the Connecting Plaza and Time Axis was a space called the “fanjian” (藩間). [Fan was the third character of Wang’s name and jian means room.] In the fanjian, we displayed eight different tables that Wang used while he was alive. They included: a blueprint drawing table, a computer table, a poker table, a calligraphy table, a painting table, and so on. We even had the work table that he used in the kitchen where he baked cakes for his granddaughters. Of course, the most important one, the mahjong table was there too. Wang had always been very proud of his mahjong skills—his most glorious moments were on mahjong table! Everything on these tables was stuff he actually had used while alive. The guests could see Wang’s preferences and tastes through these things.

Then there was an exhibition area on the left. We not only exhibited Wang’s architectural works, blueprints, paintings, and calligraphy, but also notes and drawings he had made for his family, especially his granddaughters. People who only knew his architectural side could learn about his other sides and vice versa.
Also, notice the logo and it’s design. We came up with this logo “knickknacks under rulers and compass” (juguixia de wanyier 矩規下的玩意兒). Rulers and compasses are tools used in making blueprints in architecture. Each of the 7 characters in this logo was actually Wang’s own [calligraphic] work. We found and copied an example of each character from his own work and then put them together. […]

Then we have a farewell room. We set up a wooden table in the middle of the room. On that table, there was a wine cup on the right and a teacup on the left. Guests went in to say good-bye to Wang by having a last cup of tea or wine together. Where is Prof. Wang? He was in the large screen! We made a power point slideshow of his life. We made sure that we selected at least one picture of him for every five to ten years throughout his life. We put a lot of chairs and sofas in front of the screen so that people could enjoy watching this slideshow [while drinking].

We also set up a table where female guests could give Wang a yellow rose [that we supplied] if they felt that they wanted to give flowers to him. Roses were Wang’s favorite flower. But he did not like red or pink ones because he thought that they were too feminine. He liked yellow roses. You could also give something else too. Wang’s grand daughters made an origami bird from copies of the notes that their grandfather had left to them.

This funeral was a whole-day event. We started at 10 am. I MC’d a small memorial service for Wang at 3pm. Wang wanted people say good bye to him in ways that reflected his interactions with friends. He wanted everyone to feel relaxed, free, and to be friends with each other. If you noticed [from my power point], you did not see many of our staff in this funeral. In fact, among the three personalized funerals I introduced today, this one used the least amount of staff and had a very good margin for profit. […]

This Taiwanese speaker’s presentation of personalized funerals shows a particular way of constructing the subjectivity of dead bodies. First of all, every (dead) body was first and foremost conceptualized as a unique and stand alone subject. This uniqueness gives the dead a natural right to be the main character of his/her “life graduation” (funeral). This distinctiveness is unable to be reproduced or substituted for—so while the bereaved could be the actors and actresses of the funeral, they would never become the
main characters (nor could the funeral practitioners take center stage). Consequently, this gives the (dead) subject a clear boundary that distinguishes self from other. No one can be the replica of another person no matter what kinds of biological connections they might share. This bounded sense of self assumes the dead to be an individualized person whose existence is prior to and independent from the social relationships around him or her. In other words, this kind of self is not a socially embedded person to begin with, but an individual person who meets and interacts with other people along his or her way. Finally, the dead is envisioned as an agent who is the locomotive of his/her life journey. Agency and free will are conceptualized as inherent and innate characteristics of such a person. As a result, the mere existence of an individual being is enough to be the basis for a personalized commemoration, whether the deceased was a housewife, a small business owner, or an architect. Personalized funerals are based upon (and operate through) these particular ways of constructing the subjectivity of the dead.

Specifically, Wang’s funeral visualized this idea of a unique, bounded, and coherent self in his “Time Axis.” Every guest marked the point in time that their respective timelines intersected with Wang’s. The assumption was that Wang’s timeline had its own beginning and (now) end and that it is different from yours and mine. While different timelines might cross each other, everyone is essentially a loner with their own distinct destiny. In this construction, whether or not the abstract “Universe” has its own timeline (that is supposed to be total and inclusive), Wang’s personal timeline put him at the center of his own “universe.” This idiosyncratic version was what mattered. As a result, instead of imagining a human being born into a Universe where people might
come and go but the impersonal Universe remains, the Time Axis emphasizes the creation and disappearance of many individual universes. The Time Axis is about an individual journey and the intersections of many individual journeys. Once they passed the intersection, they were already moving on in their own respective ways. The Time Axis is an ego-centered view of self, time, and existential meaning.

Moreover, Wang’s funeral constructed Wang as a *bounded* self by emphasizing the totality of his life. By working on representing various aspects of Wang’s life from the professional, such as his architectural works, to the personal, such as his artwork and cooking, and from his serious achievements, such as being a part of the building the World Trade Center, to his silly achievements, such as his mahjong skills, all these difference could be merged into one single unity. This was possible because there was assumed to be a core underneath the diversity.

Furthermore, this funeral constructs the subjectivity of Wang through space. This was probably because Wang was an architect. This spatially structured self was materialized through tables in the design of the *fanjian*. Each represented a segment of Wang’s “true” self. From tables he used to work on to the table he used to entertain, together these tables were coherent because Wang’s “true” self was moving from one space to the other and therefore unified the differences. As a result, not just time, but also space, was conceptualized through an ego-centered view.

However, this unique and bounded self who is on his own journey to somewhere did not mean that Wang was constructed as an isolated atomic subject. Quite the opposite, this unique, coherent, and bounded self was situated in a wide network of
relationships. The Taiwanese speaker described the Time Axis as an exemplar for Wang’s children because it showed that there were so many people whose life journeys intersected with that of their father. She did not describe Wang’s architectural works and artistic works as his life achievement. Whether or not the Taiwanese speaker was conscious of it, she described his accumulated social capital as the life achievement of the deceased. It was this achievement that she associated with a pre-existing cultural concept of being a proper person. In Sinophone Studies, scholars have long identified the link between being a proper person and her or his ability to maintain interpersonal and reciprocal relationships. These relationships are created and maintained through gift exchange (which is seen as proper etiquette). As a result, it was not surprising to also see food and drink being provided and given in the Connection Plaza—banquets were one of the most common ways to engage in gift exchange.

Moreover, Wang’s ability to be a proper (Han) person did not mean that other people around him had the same capacity. Quite the opposite, he worried that modern people were “too busy to connect.” After all, life in Taipei is “ridiculously busy.” The Connection Plaza thus served to solve this tendency by providing a node to facilitate interactions between individuals who might be too independent and therefore fall into anomie today. Since every participant’s own timeline at some point connected to Wang’s timeline, Wang’s funeral allowed individuals to further expand such connections so that two previously unconnected timelines could intersect.

Beyond constructing the subjectivity of Wang, the second important theme that emerged in this particular imagination of a personalized funeral was the pursuit of
authenticity. Right in the beginning of the presentation, the Taiwanese speaker pointed out that personalized funerals aim to faithfully represent the true totality of the deceased, whether it is about glory or sorrow. We can see the attempts to authentically represent Wang in the Exhibition Area and the fanjian. They needed to display eight different tables in the fanjian and both architectural works and other artistic and non-artistic works so they could cover both his professional and private life. If they had just displayed Wang’s achievements as an architect and artist but failed to show his “old naughty boy” side, this would be hypocritical and therefore morally wrong. Idealized representations of Wang (such as the attempt to disguise his naughty side) would be more embarrassing than showing the naughty side of him. Just as Wang was perceived as not ashamed of telling other people that he was naughty and good at mahjong, his funeral should not be ashamed to show these aspects as well. In this personalized funeral, authenticity was one of the highest moralities, if not the only morality, in constructing subjectivity. This pursuit of authenticity was further articulated through the Taiwanese speaker’s emphasis that all the items on the tables displayed in the fanjian were the actual possessions of Wang, in their original condition. They were not replicas nor the results of picking and choosing. This obsession with faithful representation shows a strong moral idea of valuing authenticity.

The third theme that emerged in this presentation of personalized funerals was the desire to reject social convention. People should do things because they want to, not because they have to. As a result, if a guest went to Wang’s funeral to see his old friends instead of going to see Wang, it was totally legitimate. Pretending you were not would be
worse. People should not go to a funeral because they were obligated to go. Therefore, if you are happy because you see some old friends, then you should not feel obligated to cry even if you are at a funeral. We could see this rejection of rules and formality also from the description of ways of saying goodbye to the deceased. The guests were welcome to come and go as they wanted. When they were at the funeral, they could stay in the Connection Plaza and socialize with other guests. They could have a last cup of tea or wine with Wang. They could offer yellow flowers. They could enjoy reading through Wang’s Time Axis. They could watch the PowerPoint slideshow of Wang’s life. What mattered was the spirit and the heart instead of the formality and the gesture. There was no need for ritualized acts. Based on this presentation, everyone in Wang’s funeral, including Wang himself, was constructed as autonomous individuals who have free will and should act as such instead of being constrained by formality.

Finally, let’s not forget the role of the funeral professionals and their motivation for promoting personalized funerals. First, since funeral professionals’ timeline did not have much intersection (other than arranging the death rites themselves) with the dead, they should make themselves invisible as much as possible. This works because while ritualized funerals relied heavily on experts to perform the ritual or to guide the bereaved in their performance, personalized funerals do not need ritual experts to tell them what to do at each step, since acts and feelings should be spontaneous, original, and authentic. The experts simply set the stage and allow spontaneity to flow. Once we give up ritualized performance, then it makes perfect sense to have funeral professionals stay behind the scenes as much as possible. However, being behind the scene does not mean
that there is no role for funeral professionals. On the contrary, they are there to be “directors.” Most important of all, as the Taiwanese speaker told funeral professionals attending her presentation to note, she “used the least amount of the staff” for this funeral and that it had “a very good margin for profits.” In sum, the imagination of a particular kind of self who is autonomous, bounded, and independent; the modality of a ritual that is meant to authentically represent this particular kind of self; and the capitalist effort to provide a funeral service that is highly profitable, are all deeply intertwined in the promotion of and desire for personalized funerals.

Capitalist logic at least partly explained why Shanghai funeral professionals were so eager to provide service items related to personalizing funerals. For example, Huangpu Funeral Parlor started a new service item called “A Little Movie of Life” (rensheng xiaodianying 人生小電影) several years ago. For this service item, the bereaved could choose up to twenty pictures of the deceased that were supposed to provide a narrative of the life of the deceased. Huangpu would put these pictures together into a PowerPoint slideshow and play this during the memorial meeting. My friends told me that this technique was already commonly used in weddings in Shanghai. Huangpu also created another new service item, a “personalized meeting hall” (gexinhua liting 個性化禮廰). This service allowed the bereaved to decorate the meeting hall in a way that would match the unique personality of the deceased. One example that Huangpu continually advertised was a music professor’s funeral. In his funeral, the meeting hall was decorated with flowers arranged in the shape of musical notes. This kind of decoration of the meeting hall could generate more profit compared with simply selling generic flower baskets to
the bereaved. One of the most ambitious attempts at personalization was probably the idea of “Flower Basket Literature” (hualan wenxue 花籃文學) or “cultured flower baskets” (wenhua hualan 文化花籃). The intention here was to create a new literature genre specifically for couplets on flower baskets. Instead of using generic content for couplets, people could use individualized content with various literary genres (such as poems or short essays) to commemorate the deceased. This way they could not only memorialize the deceased as an individual, but also cultivate a personalized memorial for the deceased's funeral.

Despite these efforts, personalized funerals and their related service items have, so far, not succeeded in Shanghai funeral parlors. I remember the first “Little Movie of Life” that I watched at Huangpu. This slideshow was just a collection of family gatherings and travel pictures of the deceased. Probably due to the fact that the deceased spent a large part of her life during the periods of high socialism, there were not many pictures from her early life. All the pictures obviously concentrated on the post-reform era. There was no effort to represent a coherent narrative of the totality of the deceased’s life. Moreover, I later found out that the bereaved only used this service item because it was free. This family happened to choose a special memorial meeting hall based on its size and scheduled availability. This meeting hall is “special” because, unlike other meeting halls that have flower decorations arranged in a rectangular shape surrounding the dead body, this meeting hall had flowers in a heart shape. The price of this hall is slightly higher than the other halls, but it comes with a free deal for the Little Movie of Life and, most importantly for the bereaved, it fit the scheduled time slot they wanted for
the funeral. When I went to other memorial meetings in the same meeting hall later, I noticed that many families did not have this PowerPoint slideshow. This means that, for whatever reason, some people even gave up a free service item that accompanied their meeting hall choice.

Shanghai funeral parlors’ efforts to promote personalized funerals were also evident in their recruitment efforts. A young woman I knew at Huangpu who has a college degree was hired specifically to assist a senior funeral practitioner to design personalized funerals. However, when I met her, she worked at the reception desk because personalized funerals just hadn't been a success. As a result, there was not much she could do on a daily basis. The senior funeral practitioner who was in charge of personalized funerals did most of his work arranging “special funerals.” I asked him what “special” funerals meant. It turned out that most of his work involved arranging government officials' or other important people’s funerals. His job was to make sure that he handled the politics of the memorial meetings correctly. He had to figure out the correct hierarchical relationships between units and individuals (a task made all the more complex and ambiguous when referring to parallel units, ranks, and high level people retiring from one to another. I will explore some of these issues further in Chapter 8). This was the kind of “personalization” he did. At least from his perspective, every funeral is “personalized” because each person occupied a specific hierarchical position. This specific position then links them to a set of hierarchical relationships surrounding the deceased. Everyone’s funeral is “personalized” because everyone is situated in a different position in an already established official hierarchy. Personal temperament,
preference and individual authenticity were unimportant, if not outright irrelevant, in his imagination and the operation of “personalized” funerals. If we compared what personalized funerals were in actual practice in Huangpu Funeral Parlor with the Taiwanese case, we can see how radically different they are. The former constructed the “individuality” of the deceased in terms of hierarchical rank and the latter did so in terms of personal autonomy and uniqueness of life experiences.

Of course, Wang’s personalized funeral was an exceptional case in many ways. The Taiwanese speaker described renting a warehouse for Wang’s funeral. I did some research myself after her speech for other reports of this particular funeral. The “warehouse” was not just any warehouse. It was actually a public space specifically reserved for artistic activities in Taipei. As she said in the beginning, the deceased himself was an unusual character to begin with so this model does not necessary work for everyone. Even though Wang’s funeral was rather on one extreme end, even if we imagined personalized funerals as a spectrum of tendencies this type of practice still did not work in contemporary Shanghai for several reasons.

First, there are technical limitations springing from cultural presumptions. Wang’s funeral happened several months after he passed away. In Shanghai, even though the law gives people 14 days to have their funerals, people like to and want to have memorial meetings on the third day after death. Personalized funerals, however, do not come nearly so quickly. They take time to think, to gather materials, to design, and to set up. Moreover, Shanghai people like to have open caskets for their memorial meetings. The Taiwanese speaker did not mention whether Wang’s body was present or not because this
What mattered was the “life culture” he left behind which was represented in the funeral, not the material remains. This preference for open casket funerals means that Shanghai people can only have funerals in funeral parlors because you cannot move dead bodies outside the parlors.

Shanghai people’s preference for open casket funerals was at least in part related to their association of non-open casket funerals with abnormal death. If you go to a memorial meeting in Shanghai and it is not an open casket one, this often indicates that something horrible had gone wrong with this particular death. For example, such funerals are associated with accidental deaths (from car accidents and suicide) and are therefore “abnormal deaths” (any kind of dying young is an abnormal death) carrying greater danger of pollution. Furthermore, if the deceased had a serious contagious disease (such as SARS), the state requires their immediate cremation before any funeral could be held. At a more indirect level, displaying only cremains in a memorial meeting was also associated with politically problematic deaths under high socialism. At that time, counter-revolutionaries were often cremated without the bereaved knowing about it. If the deceased could later be qualified for rehabilitation, their work unit would organize memorial meetings with cremains. For those who were rehabilitated, but whose relatives were unable to trace where the cremains were, memorial meetings would be held with just a picture of the deceased (or, lacking even that, some other things that were close to the deceased's body such as the deceased's clothing). I will discuss the relationship

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168 In my own research and bringing the story full circle, I found out that Wang had actually passed away while visiting Shanghai. He was cremated in Shanghai. His children then scattered parts of his cremains on a hill in Wang’s ancestral hometown nearby and then brought the rest of the cremains back to Taiwan to put to rest in a columbarium.
between memorial meetings and rehabilitation in detail in Chapter 7. For now, what matters is that both situations sent a message to the funeral participants that there was something wrong with a person’s death because the funeral is not open casket.

The third reason that made Wang’s funeral impossible in Shanghai was related to the kind of labor needed in organizing personalized funerals. Shanghai funeral parlors are operated more in line with Taylorism. Each funeral practitioner was in charge of a small part of handling the dead bodies that passed through the parlor each day. People in the same unit were doing more or less the same jobs. Although they were expert in their own units, generally speaking, anyone in the same unit could be easily replaced with another. The Taiwanese speaker, however, worked more like an event planner who needed to do everything and do all of it creatively. Shanghai funeral parlors have been recruiting college graduates in order to “upgrade” their labor quality. However, these graduates were still assigned jobs more based on a Taylorist style probably due to the massive amount of bodies that they have to handle each day. In Huangpu Funeral Parlor, for example, this meant a daily deluge of 60-80 bodies in the summer and 100-120 bodies in the winter. The mass production characteristics and highly industrialized operation made individualization very hard to achieve.

During my time in Huangpu, there were only two big personalized funerals that I heard about (none of the 75 funerals I attended was personalized). One of the deceased was a famous radio host. This funeral had many guests from the entertainment business. The other was an ordinary young woman who died in the 1115 Fire Incident. This fire happened in one of the richest districts in Shanghai and it took away 58 people’s lives,
eventually causing some government officials to resign. What is relevant here is that personalized funerals that address individuality are limited to artists or certain particular kinds of people and abnormal deaths (meaning dying young). So, despite the efforts of government officials, funeral business experts and scholars, and funeral professionals higher up in the parlors to promote personalized funerals that construct the deceased as unique, autonomous, bounded, independent, and coherent selves, their efforts have largely failed. Consequently, if personalized funerals and their associated kind of self are not what has been produced inside Shanghai funeral parlors, then what kinds of self of the deceased are created in the mundane interactions between funeral practitioners on the ground and the public as bereaved?

**Arranging Funerals: Business Meetings in Funeral Parlors**

The Ding family just lost their father last night. Ding Wen and Ding Jia are the brother and sister children of the deceased and are both in their forties. They are both married, have their own respective nuclear families, and live separately from their parents. After the father died in a hospital, Ding Wen and Ding Jia accompanied their mother back to her apartment to sort out what they should do next. Shanghai people had less than three days to arrange the funeral, a daunting task for the many people who have not done it before. Ding Jia made some phone calls to her friends and searched the web to find out what they should do next. She found a 962840 phone number to contact a funeral parlor—a newly established “white event hotline” (baishirenxian 白事热线) that gives

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169 The story of the Ding family is a combination of two families whose business meetings I observed with funeral practitioners.
callers direct access to any of the three Shanghai city funeral parlors 24 hours a day. This hotline was initiated in August 2010, two months after I started my fieldwork. FIS used to have 6464-4444 as their main telephone line. This older phone number played with Chinese people’s common association of the number four with death due to the similarity between the two words' pronunciation.\footnote{This phone number now is reserved for the FIS’s own “private” funeral agency. FIS established its own “funeral agency” in order to compete against private funeral brokers. For more on this see Chapter 5.}

It was late at night. A funeral practitioner, Li Shan, answered the hotline that night. He told Ding Jia that the Parlor would send a hearse to pick up her father's body from the hospital: “What type of hearse do you want to be used to take your father from the hospital to the Parlor? Do you want a RMB 240, RMB 600, or RMB 1,000 (USD 39, 97, 161) kind? The first one is a minivan, the second one is a Buick, and the third one is a Cadillac.” Ding Jia paused for a second as if she was thinking. Li Shan then continued, “I think we don’t need to have a really nice car for this trip. A minivan will do just fine. If you want to let your father enjoy a nice last ride, you can rent a nicer hearse for his departure from Huangpu Parlor to the crematorium (rather than from the hospital to the Huangpu).” Ding Jia then decided to go with a minivan.

Li Shan continued, “it is late night already. Our salespeople are off work now. If you want us to provide House Service (\textit{shangmen fuwu 上門服務}), you will have to wait until tomorrow morning. You can also come to Huangpu yourself. It all depends on you. Our newly initiated Door-Service is free of charge. Salespeople can conduct their business meeting with you at your place to make the arrangements for your father’s
memorial meeting. However, the disadvantage is that you will not be able to see our funerary products in person then. Our salespeople only carry computers and catalogs with them so you can see the products’ pictures.” Ding Jia talked to Ding Wen for a while and then decided that they would go to Huangpu Funeral Parlor in person the next day.

The next morning, Ding Wen, Ding Jia and their respective spouses got in a cab together to go to Huangpu. After they told the driver what their destination was, they closed their eyes to take a break. When they opened them again the taxi driver had stopped on the side of a road next to a park. The Dings looked out the window puzzled by the location. “Huangpu is just across the street,” the driver told them. “Since you are my first business, I don’t want to get too close to it to start my day.”

After the Dings got out of the cab, they saw a large drivable entrance on the other side of the eight-lane road. A large security guard’s booth is located on the left side of the entrance and a grand looking granite stone engraved with the name of Huangpu Funeral Parlor is on the right. After walking in, the Dings saw a grey and white, modernist style building roughly six or so floors tall on the right. There were also some other buildings on the left and some further down. Between the buildings are well paved and maintained driving and pedestrian ways surrounded by nicely trimmed trees, flowers, and shrubberies. This was actually the first time that the Dings had been to a funeral parlor. They were a little bit surprised to see how nice looking this place of death was. The

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171 This taxi incident was actually my own personal experience. This happened when I first went to visit a funeral parlor in Shanghai. Most taxis will not stop next to funeral parlors and none will actually take you through the parlor gate (though cars are allowed to enter). Though they may claim legal regulations for where they can or cannot stop, in reality this is a matter of pollution and a measure to protect their own business.
generally held stereotype of a crematorium (huozangchang 火葬場)—as all funeral parlors used to be called—is a dark, scary, ugly, and cold place.

The Dings turned right into the first large building following a security guard’s direction. Another guard in a blue uniform standing outside the automatic glass doors waved his hand to the sensor to open the door for the Dings when he saw them approaching. When they walked through the automatic doors, they found themselves in a large bright space with vaulted ceilings six stories up. This grand lobby has a very open feel to it, interrupted only by two rows of four large marble columns setting off a central area from the sides of the room (See Picture 6.1). They could see from the first floor directly up to the sixth. The marble looking tile floor of the lobby is so clean that it shines. This despite the fact that it takes a lot of effort to stop the filthy dust that fills up Shanghai’s streets and skies from building up. On the other end of the lobby (opposite the entrance) is a large reception counter. Behind this counter is a roughly four floor tall painting that that shows a person’s life cycle from birth through marriage, children, and death. At the 5 o’clock position the Dings see a baby. Then the baby becomes older and older and moves from being single to become parents and grandparents following a clockwise direction around the painting. The painting is full of color and forms a rather dramatic contrast to the bright, but gray and white stone color of the rest of the lobby. Four small offices flank each side of the lobby on the first floor. These offices look like the private consulting rooms that are commonly seen in banks in America. A digital LED screen is displayed next to each office door showing the number of the customer consulting inside.
There are four people standing behind the reception counter. They all look to be in their twenties. All of them wear uniforms that resemble flight attendants’. The female receptionists are even wearing silk scarves as a part of their uniforms. The Dings soon
find that all funeral practitioners wear these uniforms.\textsuperscript{172} The Dings approached one of the receptionists and told him that they wanted to arrange a funeral for their father. Ding Jia told him that she had called last night to arrange to pick up her father from the hospital. The receptionist checked his computer and found the record. He told Ding Jia that her father is in the Parlor already. The receptionist then took a number from an automatic number machine on the counter, and handed it to her. He told the Dings that they could sit on one of the benches in the lobby to wait. When it is their turn, the digital number display screen on the wall behind the counter will show which office number for them to go to. The screen outside each office will also show the customer’s number and there will be a voice announcement as well.

During their wait, the Dings talked to each other occasionally, but most of time they just remained silent. After 20 minutes or so, a female mechanical voice announced, “Number 56, Number 56, please go to Office Room 3.” The Dings walked straight to Room 3. “Please sit down,” Xiao Lin said, standing up as they walked in. Xiao Lin is in her mid-thirties. When she talks, she uses a lot of words such as “please” or “thank you”—a relatively rare habit among Chinese living in (mainland) China. Xiao Lin gave each of the Dings a cup of water as they sat. She told me that she believed offering water immediately would relax the bereaved, so that instead of worrying about how the funeral practitioners might be ripping them off, they are more likely to take any advice from the funeral practitioners no matter whether that advice adds to the funeral’s cost.

\textsuperscript{172} Taking one parlor as an example, its janitors, cooks, and security guards have different sets of uniforms. As far as I know, this parlor outsourced their janitorial and security guard jobs to different companies. These people therefore do not belong to this parlor and technically are not “funeral practitioners” today.
Xiao Lin’s office is equipped with a large desk, a desktop computer, and a couple of filing cabinets just like all the other office rooms in the lobby. A sign, roughly a half of a letter sized piece of paper, is displayed on her desk that describes the standard process of arranging funerals. It says,

1. Fill out an application form for funerary (bin) rites
2. Present the death certificate
3. Make a reservation for body transportation
4. Book a memorial meeting hall
5. Order funerary service items
6. Hand in the deceased’s clothes for the memorial meeting at the Clothing Collection Station
7. Pay the bill

This sign is mainly for decoration. Most bereaved don't seem to notice it and the Dings were not exceptional. Xiao Lin gave the Dings an application first. Ding Wen told Ding Jia to fill out this form since she has better handwriting. The form requests basic information such as the deceased’s name, sex, where he died, and the chief mourner’s contact phone number and address. After Ding Jia returned the form to Xiao Lin, the latter started to key in the data into her computer. Xiao Lin’s computer showed more information categories than are present on the application form such as “confidentiality level” (baomidengji 保密等級) and minzu (ethnicity) category. Salespeople usually leave these categories blank on their computers as well. Whenever Xiao Lin found a few illegible characters on the application form, she would stop typing to verify with the Dings. Things as simple as data typing needed to be done very meticulously in funeral parlors. After all, no one would be happy if funeral parlors misspell the deceased’s name
or were unable to reach the bereaved because they had the wrong contact information. During this process, Xiao Lin also asked to see the death certificate of the deceased.

Xiao Lin asked the Dings when they wanted to have their father's memorial meeting. “We want to have it the day after tomorrow,” the Dings said. Xiao Lin then asked how many guests they expected and Ding Wen suggested around 70 or 80. Ding Jia added that there might be fewer. Xiao Lin then reassured them that the exact number didn't matter. Once you have more than 50 people, you have to book a medium-sized meeting hall. Xiao Lin then tried to see which medium-sized halls were still open. She asked the Dings if they wanted to have the meeting in the morning or the afternoon. Ding Jia said the afternoon would be better, especially close to dinner time, but, that morning would work too if there were any time slots that end around lunch time. Xiao Lin checked the availability of all the medium sized halls on her computer and told the Dings that all the morning time slots were booked. All the 3:05-4:05pm time slots were booked as well. They had to book an earlier time. Ding Jia and Ding Wen exchanged a glance. They were not too happy with this.

“The Parlor has an overtime time slot between 4:25 and 5:25 pm,” Xiao Lin offered. “But you need to add RMB 100 (USD 16) more for renting that hall. Also, you are only allowed to book the overtime time slot if you purchase your funeral banquet from Huangpu’s own restaurant.” “How much does the banquet cost?” Ding Wen asked. Xiao Lin took out a menu from her folder and explained the prices there. In the Parlor’s restaurant, each table accommodates ten people. Per table costs include options from RMB 680, 880, 1,180, to 1,580 (USD 109, 141, 190, 255) depending on the choice of
different meal packages. The Dings decided to book a RMB 1,180 (USD 190) per table banquet for 5 tables. Xiao Lin told the Dings that they would prepare two extra tables for them just in case they needed them on the day.173

Once the Dings confirmed their intention to purchase a funeral banquet from the Parlor, Xiao Lin started to look at her computer to see which medium halls had the overtime time slot available. The Dings had several choices. They could choose a Chinese, Western, or Modern style meeting hall. Ding Jia asked about the differences and Xiao Lin showed them several pictures of each hall. At this point, Xiao Lin realized that this business meeting would take a while. The Dings were more meticulous than many of her customers. Xiao Lin saw plenty of Shanghai people book their memorial meeting hall without bothering to ask what the hall looked like. In the end, the Dings chose the Evergreen Hall. Xiao Lin explained that the basic charge of that room was RMB 1,600 (USD 258). The fake green plant decorations and the flower decorations that surround the plastic cover where the deceased would be displayed cost RMB 300 (USD 48) and RMB 200 (USD 32) respectively. “Do we have to use both of these sets of decorations?” Ding Jia asked. “I am sorry, but I'm afraid that they all come together when you rent a meeting hall.” (In the end of my fieldwork, FIS cancelled these extra charges and just increased the basic charge to cover the difference. People in FIS told me that when you charge for these things separately, but tell the bereaved that they have to buy them in a package deal, the bereaved felt this was profiteering. However, if you just tell them one single price that

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173 In this restaurant, if you purchase five tables, you have to pay for the full amount of five tables based on the price you choose even if you do not end up using all five. The extra tables (in this case, two extra), on the other hand, will be free if the bereaved do not use them.

includes the same things for the same overall cost, they are less likely to feel that they are being forced to buy many things.)

Xiao Lin paused briefly before beginning again. “Now that we have a meeting hall reserved, we can talk about the details of the memorial meeting. How do you want to address your father on the horizontal banner. This banner will be hung in the center of the meeting hall towards the front during the memorial meeting. The deceased is usually addressed either in kinship terms or as comrade. So, it would be either “Father” (fuqin daren 父親大人) or “comrade” (tongzhi 同志) in this case.

“Which is more common?” Ding Jia asked.

“Will you invite your father’s work unit to attend the memorial meeting?”

The Dings replied, almost in unison, “Yes, of course!”

Xiao Lin said that memorial meetings without the presence of work unit representatives at all usually used kinship terms. However, for those meetings that have work unit representatives attending, both forms of address are common. Xiao Lin emphasized that it all depends on what you want. The Dings talked amongst themselves for a while and decided to address their father as comrade because not only would their father’s last work unit send someone to attend the memorial meeting, but Ding Wen’s own work unit was also sending someone to attend his father’s funeral.

“So the horizontal banner will read 'Deeply Mourning Comrade Ding Daozhong' (chentongdaonian dingdazhong tongzhi 沈痛悼念丁大中同志) unless you want to write your own version.”

“Oh, no, we don’t need to write our own. Let’s just stick to the generic one,” Ding
Wen replied.

Xiao Lin then asked the Dings which couplets they would choose for their father's vertical banners. They could choose from the list provided by Huangpu or write their own. Either way, the Parlor’s calligrapher will hand write whatever they wanted.

Ding Wen looked at Ding Jia and said, “I don’t think we need to write our own couplets.” Ding Jia agreed, “there's no need to write our own.” Xiao Lin then passed a piece of paper that listed the following several couplets to the Dings:

1. Kindly father your kindness is as heavy as a mountain. We sons and daughters are tearful to show grief and remembrance. 
   (cifu enqing rushanzhong ernu huilei jiaisi 慈父恩情如山重，兒女揮淚寄哀思)
2. Cry for my kind father who spared no effort to devote his whole life. Mourn a decent person whose merits of simplicity and purity will last eternally 
   (kucifu xinlaoyisheng jugongjincui daohaoren shanliangchunpu gongdeyongcun 哭慈父辛勞一生鞠躬盡瘁，悼好人善良純樸功德永存)
3. My kind mother whose affection in raising us is as deep as the ocean. Us sons and daughters are tearful to show our grief and remembrance. 
   (cimu yangyu qingsihai ernu huilei jiaisi 慈母養育情似海，兒女揮淚寄哀思)
4. She labored all her life. Her affection in raising us is as deep as the ocean. She is tender, kind, and frugal. The bond between my kindly mother and us is strong. 
   (xinlaoyisheng yangyuenzhong wenhoujiejian cimuqingshen 辛勞一生養育恩重，溫厚節儉慈母情深)
5. Being peaceful, being kind, being sincere to people. Being industrious, being frugal, being hard working for the whole of life. 
   (yiheyiai zhenchengdairen keqinkejian xinlaoyisheng 亦和亦藹真誠待人，克勤克儉辛勞一生)
   (cixiangkejing yangyuenzhong qinkenmanglu xinlaoyisheng 慈祥可敬養育恩重，勤懇忙碌辛勞一生)
7. Dying so young that we haven’t had enough household warmth. 

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174 I spent time in several funeral parlors in Shanghai. They each have their own lists. For example, Baoxin Funeral Parlor provides a list of 58 couplets to choose from. Bao Shan District Funeral Parlor provides a list of 12 choices. I have translated Longhua’s Funeral Parlor’s list here.
A one day farewell becomes painful grief for eternity.
(yingnianzaoshi tianlunweijin yichaoyongbie tongsizhangyuan
英年早逝天倫未盡，一朝永別痛思長遠)
8. An exemplar of teachers that shines on future generations.
   Devoted to education and contributing merit to eternity.
   (weirenshibiao guangzhaohoushi xianshenjiaoyu gongzaiqianqiu
    為人師表光照後世，獻身教育功在千秋)
9. Being eighty-something with a smile up in the heavens.
   Your longevity is like a mountain that blesses your descendants.
   (baxungaoeling hanxiaoxianjing shoubinanshan fuzhaozisun 八旬高齢含笑仙境，壽比南山福照子孫)
10. A life long with hardships keeps the spirits true.
    A life long of simplicity keeps moral standards high.
    (yishixinlao benseyongbao yishengchunpu pindechonggao
     一世辛勞本色永葆，一生純樸品德崇高)
11. Pure and clean-handed throughout life.
    Diligent and industrious throughout life.
    (qingqingbaibai weirenzhongsheng qinqinkenken xinlaoyisheng 清清白白為人終生，勤勤懇懇辛勞一生)
12. Open, candid and righteous throughout life.
    Being diligent and law abiding keeps clean hands uncorrupted.
    (guangmingleiluo yishengzhengqi keqinfenggong liangxiuqingfeng 光明磊落一生正氣，克勤奉功兩袖清風)
13. Believe in Jesus to gain eternal life.
    Enter Heaven to enjoy eternal prosperity.
    (xinyesudeyongsheng jintiantangxiangyongfu 信耶穌得永生，進天堂想永福)

Xiao Lin explained, “Numbers 1-6 and 9-11 would all work for your father. No. 7 is for people who die around 50 or younger. No. 8 is for any deceased people who were educators. No. 12 is usually for people who work in the government. Finally, No. 13 is for Christians. You can substitute mother for father in No. 3 and No. 4. You can also substitute eighties for nineties for No. 9.” The Dings stared at the list and could not decide which one to choose. They asked Xiao Lin if she had any suggestions. Xiao Lin told the Dings that her personal suggestion was one of No. 3, 4, 5, or 6. “However,” Xiao
Lin said “I don’t know your father so it is really hard for me to give a suggestion. They are all very common. It really all depends on the kind of person your father was. You choose one that represents your father best.” Ding Wen commented that No. 9 seemed better. He asked Xiao Lin if that one was popular. Xiao Lin said that it was also very common, especially for more traditional families. Ding Jia was still staring at the list. Xiao Lin sensed that the Dings might not be able to make a decision immediately. She suggested the Dings take the list home and discuss it with their mother. “Your mother knows your father the best. Maybe she can help up make the decision. You can always confirm the couplets later by phone.” The Dings decided to follow her advice.

“Now we can talk about coffins and other funerary merchandise.” Xiao Lin suggested moving to the display room so they could see the samples in person. All of them stood up and walked across the lobby to the display room that was located in a set of rooms in the back half of the building behind the reception desk. Xiao Lin led them to the coffin display area first.

“These coffins are 'cremation coffins' (huohuaguan 火化棺). This means that the coffins will be cremated along with the deceased. Since they are for cremation, they are made of paper or bamboo. These coffins are more “environmentally friendly” (huanbao 環保).”

The Dings were quite surprised. Can't we get one that is made of wood?” Ding Wen asked.

“There are wood coffins here, but they are all for body burial (tuzang 土葬)
instead of cremation. Only Muslims,\textsuperscript{175} Macanese, Hong Kong residents, Taiwanese, or foreigners who have been legally authorized to have body burial here or whose body will be transported internationally may buy wood coffins.”

The Dings continued to look around at the coffins. Ding Wen asked about the difference between ten or so coffins displayed there. Xiao Lin said that if you want to be able to nail the coffin to ritually seal it (\textit{fengguanding} 封棺釘), you have to buy a coffin that costs RMB 980 (USD 159) or more. The Dings looked at the coffins not suitable for the nailing ritual and decided that they wanted the more expensive sort. Ding Jia asked what the more common coffins purchased for this category were. Xiao Lin pointed at the coffins that fell in the price range between RMB 1,000 (USD 161) to over RMB 2,000 (USD 322). Xiao Lin suggested to the Dings that if they want to enable their (deceased) father to “live” better, they might actually spend their money buying a more expensive cremains casket instead. They do not need to spend very much money on coffins that will just be burned. A little bit over RMB 1,000 (USD 161) will do just fine. Ding Jia then asked her brother if he liked the RMB 1,320 (USD 213) one and they settled on that one.

Xiao Lin jotted down 1,320 in her notes and then led the Dings to the cremains casket section. She said that they had a very wide range of prices from two hundred to several thousand yuan. Xiao Lin pointed out a few that cost around RMB 300, 1,000, and 2,000 (USD 48, 161, 322) respectively.

“What price do the majority of people arrange for? Ding Jia asked.

“People usually spend about a thousand or two thousand something.”

\textsuperscript{175} Muslim in China actually did not use coffins when doing body burials. This incorrect information was repeated frequently when I did my fieldwork in funeral parlors.
Each cremains casket has a tag that explains the kind of wood it's made of and its price. The kinds of wood include sandalwood, rosewood, blackwood and so on. They are all decorated differently. Some have evergreen tree carvings, Buddhist texts, or red-crowned cranes (仙鹤, a bird that symbolizes prosperity and longevity). Some look like mini coffins, but some resemble the architecture of traditional Chinese palaces. Some are wood inlaid with jade flowers or other patterns. In the end, the Dings chose one costing RMB 2,288 (USD 369) because they liked the symbol of the red-crowned crane.

Xiao Lin then led the Dings over to the other part of the display room where all sorts of funeral outfits for the deceased were displayed. She asked the Dings to first decide whether they wanted Chinese or western style outfits. The latter is a black suit. The former is a set of garments that contain “five tops and three bottoms” (五领三腰). The “five tops” include four shirts and one cloak while the three bottoms refer to three different types of pants. The idea behind the “five tops and three bottoms” is to make sure that the deceased has enough different types of clothes to help him go through seasonal changes. The Dings, almost without hesitation, chose the Chinese style even though this did not at all resemble the kinds of clothes people wear in their daily lives. Xiao Lin explained, depending on the materials (cotton or silk), funeral outfits can cost anywhere from several hundred to several thousand RMB. There are also different colors and patterns in each material such as red (and several shades of red for that matter), yellow, pink, white, purple, blue, and brown.

Ding Wen was interested in a red outfit, but Xiao Lin said, “People usually buy red only if the deceased died around 80 since this kind of death counts as a “happy death”
(xisang 喜喪). Your father might be a little bit too young for the red color. But, of course, this is all just custom (fengsu xiguan 風俗習慣). You don’t have to follow.” Meanwhile, a staff member brought several bedding sets out for them to consider as well. Xiao Lin explained that there are Chinese and Western styles of bedding. The main difference is the pillow. The Chinese style pillow looks like an ingot and comes with another ingot-like pillow for the deceased's feet as well. The Western style only has one pillow for the head. Both sets have a blanket. As for the color and pattern, they are similar to the shrouds. While waiting for the Dings to make up their minds, Xiao Lin brought out a set of one handkerchief, one fan, and one wooden comb (in one package), several pairs of shoes and some pairs of socks (that could match the funeral outfits) for the Dings to consider. Xiao Lin said that the handkerchief and fan are to make sure that their father has something to hold in his hands and that the wooden comb is for them to comb their father's hair one last time at the funeral.

Ding Jia asked Xiao Lin if they have to buy these things from Huangpu. Xiao Lin said, “No, you can buy these things outside. You just need to bring the clothing and bedding set to us the day before the memorial meetings so funeral practitioners will have enough time to dress up the deceased and make his bed for him.” Ding Jia thought that it might be a good idea to go somewhere outside the Parlor due to a general impression that state stores have higher prices. However, Ding Wen felt that it was a little bit too much trouble to go out to a different place to buy the things. In the end they bought what they needed at the Parlor to save time and trouble. Before they headed back to the consulting room, Xiao Lin asked the Dings if they were thinking of buying flower baskets here and,
if they were interested to see any samples. The Dings said yes, so they all walked to the flower shop located in a different building, where most of the memorial meeting halls were. Xiao Lin introduced some basic flower baskets and told the Dings their respective prices. She told them that they did not have to make this decision right then if they were not ready. Ding Jia asked if it is OK to purchase flower baskets outside. Xiao Lin said, of course. It is just that if you buy the flower baskets from us, we can arrange them in the hall in advance to save you time. The Dings decided to hold off on the flower basket decision.

All of them walked back to Xiao Lin’s office. Xiao Lin entered onto her computer the data about the kinds of merchandise that the Dings had chosen so far. She then explained the procedure of a memorial meeting from the beginning to the end. By the end of her explanation, Xiao Lin asked the Dings what kind of car they wanted to use to send the deceased from Huangpu to the crematorium. She explained the price differences much like Li Shan did the night before when they arranged a minivan to pick their father from the hospital to the Parlor. Xiao Lin said, that a minivan is more “economical” (shihui 實惠), unless they want something nicer. Ding Wen said that this would be his father’s last ride so he wanted to give him something better. In the end the Dings decided to book a Buick.

“Huangpu Funeral Parlor’s rule is to only allow one passenger to go in the hearse with the deceased to the crematorium. However, this person is responsible for finding their own way back, and there is no subway stop at the crematorium.”

“So what do people normally do?” Ding Jia asked.
“Most people don't go to the crematorium because it is too hard to bear to see their beloved burned.”

The Dings agreed with Xiao Lin’s point and decided not to go. Xiao Lin explained that, in this case, all they would need to do is to go to pick up the cremains on the third day after the memorial meeting.

Finally, Xiao Lin explained, “There are two different ways of sending out the deceased from a meeting hall to the hearse parked in their parking lot. This is what people used to call the funeral procession. One is to have coffin carriers, a group of six men in black suits, to pick up the coffin and put it in the hearse. The other is to have special coffin carriers who wear white marine-like uniforms to carry the coffin on top of their shoulder (this higher position is more prestigious) while doing a goose-stepped march. The first costs RMB 300 (USD 48) and the second costs RMB 900 (USD 145). This latter service item is known as a “ritualized funeral procession” (liyi chubin 礼仪出殡). Either way can be combined with a marching band playing music for an additional RMB 200 (USD32). If you want to have the band stay throughout the memorial meeting, it will cost RMB 400 (USD 64).” Ding Wen said that as this funeral procession would be their father’s last journey, having special coffin carriers would give him more face (mianzi 面子). Ding Jia added, that hiring a band, in that case, might also be good so as to make the entire event more “hot and noisy” (renao 热闹). In the end, the Dings bought the “ritualized funeral procession” plus the band service.

Xiao Lin then printed out a receipt for their total cost of RMB 13,648 (USD 2,199) and verified each item with the Dings. When the verification was complete, Xiao
Lin took out a customer satisfaction questionnaire and asked the Dings to fill it out. Since this questionnaire was written in front of Xiao Lin, not surprisingly, Ding Jia’s answers were all positive. After writing up the questionnaire, Xiao Lin led the Dings to the Parlor’s cash register in person to pay their bills first and then to the reception desk to pick up a cremation license. Before the Dings left, Xiao Lin reminded them again what documents and receipts they needed to bring with them on the day of the memorial meeting as well as other pending items. Xiao Lin told the Dings to have a safe trip home and walked back to her office. The entire business meeting from The Parlor’s entrance to exit took about an hour.

**Subjectivities based on Social Convention**

Let me start my analysis by pointing out a few absences. That is, even though people who are higher up in the funeral industry (whether government officials, scholars, or business leaders) want to promote personalized funerals that construct the deceased as autonomous and unique subjects like those revealed in the Taiwanese architect’s funeral presented at the modern funeral ritual conference, the kind of subjectivity of dead bodies constructed in the mundane interaction between state funeral practitioners and the bereaved is anything but individualized. One of the best places to see this is the discussion over the vertical couplets between funeral practitioners and the bereaved. Recall that when Xiao Lin said that she can’t help the Dings because she did not know their father, she was clearly indicating a connection between who the deceased was and the chosen couplets. Of course, having custom-made couplets does not mean that a
funeral is personalized as a whole. Yet, throughout the entirety of any business meeting, this is the most obvious place, if not the only place, where we can see that funeral practitioners identify for the bereaved a chance to show individuality in the generally generic memorial meetings. During my fieldwork, what surprised me was the lack of interest on the bereaved's side in doing so. Not all salespeople mentioned to the bereaved that they could personalize couplets because many practitioners already knew that the bereaved would not be interested in doing so. Whenever practitioners did mention this, the most common response from the bereaved was that “it is not necessary” (bubiyao 不必要) or “there is no need” (buxuyao 不需要). Like the Dings the question most of the bereaved asked was not what would fit their particular deceased relative, but rather what “most people did” or what was “most popular.” This lack of interest in personalizing the couplets’ content is even more ironic considering my fieldnotes actually recorded more bereaved inquiring about the couplets’ font style than about the appropriateness of the words.

I attended countless business meetings and, as far as I could recall, there was only one time that “the bereaved's representative” wanted to write their own couplets before Xiao Lin mentioned the possibility (this happened to be her case as well). I call this person “the bereaved's representative” because he actually represented the deceased’s work unit instead of being a family member. This funeral was rather a special case. It was organized by the deceased’s work unit because the deceased died on duty. She was a schoolteacher in her forties. While she was representing her school on a visit to Taiwan she had a bike accident. After the accident, she fell into a coma for several weeks before
finally passing away. Her son, who was only a teenager, went to Taiwan (along with people from the work unit) to take care of his mother and eventually brought her cremains back to Shanghai. There were hundreds of mourners in her memorial meeting and many of them were students from her school. One female student cried so hard that she almost fainted. People had to drag her out and put her in the resting room behind the meeting hall. At her funeral, the vertical couplets used to commemorate her were:

Right Couplet:
The red cloud suddenly disappeared, but we could not stop thinking about you. This is because you are the eternal exemplar of the educational world. (彤霞忽消思難停堪稱桃園師範千秋 tongxiahxiao sinanting kancheng taoyuan shifan qianqiu)

Left Couplet:
The red candle (dawn) is suddenly blown out, but the light is still on. This is because of your heartfelt loyalty to education. (絳燭匆罷光不滅只因杏壇丹心一片 jiangzhu congba guangbumie zhiyin xingtandanxin yipian)

The color red and dawn were not a random choice of words. The deceased’s name literally meant “red dawn”. This funeral was not personalized as a whole probably because it was organized by her work unit, but people commemorated her in personalized vertical couplets. My description is meant to point out the uniqueness of this death and how this explains the existence of the personalized couplets. This unfortunate death has all three common ingredients that established a higher likelihood of having a personalized funeral in Shanghai—she died young, died in an accident, and was an intellectual/celebrity (as a teacher). Overall, asking for and composing personalized
couplets was rare.

Why the lack of interest in personalizing the poetic narratives of the deceased? A case I witnessed might answer this question. One day I went with a (private) funeral broker from Longevity to have a business meeting at the apartment of an old man who had died at home. His body was still in the apartment when we arrived. This was because his oldest daughter was a very devout Buddhist, she insisted on having “zhunian” (助念), meaning “assisted recitation of the Buddha’s name,” for 24 hours before moving her father to a funeral parlor.

My broker friend conducted the business meeting with the deceased’s other daughters and sons in the hallway while the eldest daughter (with her friends) recited the Buddha's name next to the deceased in the bedroom. Just as the business meeting group talked about couplets, the eldest daughter passed by. Her friend had just bought some live fish for her so she could have a fangsheng (放生, meaning “free the captive animals”) ritual and she needed to pick them up. Many Buddhists believe that performing fangsheng on behalf of the deceased could create merit (gongde 功德) for the deceased and therefore smooth his/her transition to the other world and perhaps even enhance her/his chances for a better eventual reincarnation. The son and other daughters had different opinions about the couplets so when the eldest sister passed us again the second time on her way back to the bedroom (with a bucket full of fish in her hands), they asked her opinion. The eldest daughter glanced at the couplet lists while listening to her brother’s explanation of their discussion over the couplets so far. The eldest daughter interrupted the explanation and said, “this [couplet] does not matter. They are all just
formalities (xingshi 形式). They don’t mean anything.”

Considering the fact that she was in the middle of Buddhist rituals that are no less formal than couplets, this comment only makes sense if we can reason through how she sees rituals. For her, her Buddhist rituals of reciting the Buddha’s name or freeing an animal caught or raised for the purpose are meaningful because (according to her beliefs) these rituals have efficacy to actually help her father in the afterlife. This makes her Buddhist ritual not mere formality. However, choosing a couplet that represents her father, even if one represents him more truthfully than another, is meaningless because it does nothing for him. Couplets therefore become mere formality for her.

So, despite the fact that funeral practitioners often introduce couplets as something that would represent who the deceased was in life, the majority of Shanghai people made decisions on couplets during business meetings without too much thinking. And the vast majority of people chose couplets from the set lists the parlors provided, apparently encouraged by the knowledge that these couplets are ‘popular.’ These show that the bereaved did not consider vertical couplets representing the deceased as an individualized subject except in the most generalized way – by age, gender, religion. The denotative meanings of couplets are not important. Instead of searching for individualized ways of representing the deceased, Shanghai people preferred poetic narratives of the deceased based on conventional understandings of generically proper persons as provided on the lists.

Taking the list I translated as an example, No. 1, 3 and 4 are about the relationship between parents and children. They show that the deceased is understood as a person
embedded in family relationships instead of assuming an individual existed prior to the occurrence of social relationships. Moreover, the specific parent to children relationship is described in terms of debts. This feeling of indebtedness is the foundation of Chinese notions of filial piety. No. 2, 5, 6, 10, 11, and 12 emphasize the moral character of the deceased. Specifically, all stress a life long of enduring hardship. While being frugal, devoted, diligent and so on were by no means new moral values in China, they were the kind of ethics that the Chinese Communist Party has praised. The difference among them is that the first three couplets (No. 2, 5, and 6) are still more or less conceptualized in terms of parent-children relationships, while the last three (No. 10-12) have transcended family relationships. This means that no matter what the relationship between the deceased and the people who choose (or read) their couplet, these moral categorizations would make sense because they represent absolute values that are beyond relational difference. In other words, if we imagine Confucian morality and socialist morality being at the two ends of one spectrum that describes the embodied morality of the deceased, then No. 1, 3, and 4 are on the Confucian end, No. 2, 5, and 6 are in the middle, and No. 10-12 are on the socialist end. In fact, Xiao Lin once told me that “the Old Revolutionists” (laogeming 老革命) like to use No. 10-12. This comment shows that she clearly saw strong socialism in No. 10-12.

No. 7 is specific for people who die young. Of course, what age counts as “young” is rather subjective. I remember one business meeting where the bereaved said that she wanted to choose No.7 for her mother. The salespeople told her that her mother died when she was 64. He said, “of course you can use this [No.7] if you want to. But this
is usually for people who die in their fifties or even younger. Dying in her sixties usually does not count as ‘dying young.’” This lady then decided to choose No. 3 to stress her “debt” to her mother by raising her. From this conversation, we can see that she clearly felt that her mother died young. Choosing No. 7 would represent her sincere feeling of loss. However, instead of choosing a couplet that represented her sincere feelings about her mother’s death, she chose to follow the practitioner's suggestion and follow convention.

No. 9 and No. 13 are the only two that are obviously religious in nature. The former refers to popular religion while the latter is about Christianity. For the former, there are two important concepts at play. The first is the idea of a happy death (xisang 喜喪). In Chinese popular religion, when someone dies at an old age, this is a good thing because the deceased has proven his longevity. In Shanghai, funeral professionals generally defined this as above 80 years of age. Of course, the idea behind this is that even though death is unavoidable, the deceased has shown his/her luck (or good fate) by living for a long time. The second related concept is that this longevity can be transformed into prosperity for the living and contribute to the living’s own potential for longevity. This is why the second half of the No. 9 couplet is “your longevity is like a mountain that blesses your descendants.”

If the deceased is qualified for this couplet, funeral professionals often asked the bereaved if they wanted to buy “longevity bowls”—a rice bowl that has the Chinese character, longevity (shou 壽) printed in red color. The bereaved then will give away this bowl (along with other small gifts including a towel and often a Dove chocolate bar or
something else sweet) to every guest who attends the funeral. People believe that by using this bowl to eat their rice they might gain a piece of the long-lived deceased's blessing and longevity. In fact, a related concept is that a person can “steal longevity” (toushou 偷壽) by begging (tao 讨) or even stealing. One day when I was in Huangpu, a funeral professional came to me and happily showed me a goody bag (with a longevity bowl inside) that he had just gotten by begging. I asked him what was so special about this funeral. Funeral professionals see longevity bowls all the time and the bereaved often gave them these bowls to express their gratitude. I did not understand why he even bothered to beg for one. He said that the deceased was a nun who had died in her one hundredth year. He said that she was one of only a very few “real” nuns (meaning that she had kept her vow of chastity) and she had lived for so long. This meant that her longevity has even more magical power than an ordinary kind of longevity. He also told me that he even saw random people trying to steal longevity bowls there.

However, despite the importance of this concept, I noticed that funeral brokers in Longevity recommended No. 9 to the bereaved much more often than Xiao Lin did. I once asked Xiao Lin why she did not recommend No. 9 as her personal recommendation whenever she conducted business meetings. She told me that it was because she thought that No. 9 was “too direct” (taibai 太白), she likes things that are more indirect (hanxu 含蓄). I asked her to elaborate, but she told me that she could not. My guess is that she meant that even if people all hope to gain prosperity from the deceased, it is seemed too vulgar to just say it out loud. Nevertheless, the comparison between (private) funeral brokers’ and (state) funeral practitioners’ preference for No. 9 is consistent with another
observation of mine: that the former are much more willing to embrace popular religion than the latter.

Finally, No. 13 is obviously for Christians since it mentions Jesus. While not all Christians chose No. 13 (a majority of them did), it would make no sense to non-Christians to choose this. This logic also applies to No. 8. This one is specifically for educators. While not all educators were commemorated with this couplet, it makes no sense to memorialize someone who is not in education with No. 8.

Despite there being only two couplets related to religious ideas of person, religious ideas of self are dominant in the business meeting as a whole. Right from the beginning, when Li Shan and the Dings discussed the hearse, Li Shan suggested the cheaper one for the first ride because he thought “if you [the Dings] want to let your father enjoy a nice last ride, you can rent a nicer hearse for his departure from Huangpu to the crematorium.” The idea of treating the dead as if they were still living is one of the most important principles in handling death traditionally. In fact, the whole discussion of choosing cremains caskets, funeral outfits, funeral processions, and hearse rides were all based on an ongoing dialogic imagination of the deceased as one who could still live, behave, and feel just like the living could in the other world. Therefore, cremains caskets were where the deceased would reside, funerary outfits were clothes for him in the next world where there also are seasonal changes (so the Dings provided “five tops and three bottom” for their father), a ride in a Buick and a “hot and noisy” ritualized funeral processions all would give their father “face” as he left this world (as well as giving face to the living Dings). All of this, therefore, was aimed not just at being proper, but also at
making the deceased happy.

Moreover, despite this being a socialist, state owned parlor, we can even see hierarchical differentiations constructed in the business meetings as they arranged funerals for the dead. Hierarchy in traditional funerals is understood as relational difference, but this is often articulated through numerical difference. For example, in imperial times, if the deceased was an ordinary person, he could have four, eight, twelve or sixteen people to carry his coffin depending on how much his descendents could afford. Sixteen carriers, also called “dragon head carriers” (longtougang 龍頭杠), was the highest treatment that an ordinary deceased (meaning someone without official title) could enjoy. People with official titles could have 32, 48, or 64 carriers depending on his ranks. Only the emperor could have 128 carriers (Shanghai Funeral Museum, n.d.: 23). This is what I mean by hierarchy being expressed through numerical difference.

Recall now Li Shen’s introduction of the hearse options to the Dings. Li Shen asked the Dings if they wanted the RMB 240, 600, or 1,000 (USD 39, 97, 161) kind. The same thing happened with Xiao Lin’s introduction to cremains casket. She asked if they want the several hundred or several thousand kind. In fact, all funeral professionals I worked with (whether they were state funeral practitioners or private funeral brokers) framed their introduction of products in terms of prices first. The content difference only came in as a secondary explanation. In some cases, the bereaved made decisions even before they found out how one product was different from the other. It was not uncommon for the bereaved to decide that they wanted to hire a RMB 1,000 (USD 161) instead of RMB 240 (USD 39) hearse (or vice versa) even before they knew that one was
a Cadillac and the other was a minivan. Or they might have decided they wanted to buy a RMB 2,000 (USD 322) something cremains casket (after they were told that most people chose to buy cremains caskets around this price) before looking at them. This lack of interest in content, or we could say the concentrated interest in hierarchies articulated through numerical difference disregarding the content, always amazed me. I saw many people making decisions about which meeting hall to use without even asking to see the difference between the Chinese, Western, or Modern styles of meeting halls. This tendency means that content does not matter so much as the message about face, social status, and hierarchy. Just like people’s preference for conventional couplets, individualizing content was not very important.

In addition to this convention-based subjectivity described above, the secondary subjectivity articulated in business meetings is that of socialist citizens as subjects. However, this socialist aspect is very subtle in business meetings, especially as compared with its overwhelming presence in memorial meetings themselves (I will discuss memorial meetings in detail along with their construction of socialist subjectivity of dead bodies in Chapter 7). One reason for this was that memorial meetings have standardized procedures that would be explained before the service so there was no need to discuss them during the business meeting. Furthermore, socialist memorial meetings were not associated with any specific products so there was nothing really to negotiate between the bereaved and funeral parlor sales representative. The socialist meeting's lack of service items to sell helps explain why frontline parlor sales employees working on partial commission were willing to push for the re-admission of religious rituals and their
associated paraphernalia into the socialist funeral as a whole. However, all these profitable religious products are related to rituals that take place either before or after, but not during the memorial meetings. I will discuss these in more detail in Chapter 8.

Nevertheless, within the process of arranging funerals (meaning during business meetings), the first and most obvious part that constructs the deceased as a socialist subject is the discussion of the horizontal couplet. Recall that Xiao Lin asked the Dings how they wanted to address their father. Did they want to address him as Father or Comrade? In my fieldwork, I estimate that half of the people I saw chose kinship terms and half chose comrade when choosing a horizontal couplet even though it was almost always the family members organizing the funerals (unless the deceased died on duty). Why would people want to address their family members as comrades when they were the organizers of the funerals? I am 100 percent sure that those people who chose “Comrade” did not actually call their parents Comrade. Shanghai people today even rarely call each other “Comrade” when they are speaking to complete strangers (this would be one of the most likely situations to call someone a comrade). Nevertheless, this clearly shows that Shanghai people die as socialist first and foremost even though they do not live socialist lives. I will explore the implications and characteristics of “dying socialist” at greater length in chapter 7.

The next place where we can see the idea of the socialist citizen at work is in the discussion over cremation coffins. When Xiao Lin introduced the “cremation coffins,” she explained that cremation coffins are made of paper or bamboo. When the Dings asked if there were any wood coffins, Xiao Lin said that only Muslim, Hong Kong,
Macau, Taiwanese, and foreign people who are allowed to have body burial are allowed to use wood coffins. This categorization marks ideas of citizenship and minzu (state ethnicity) categories and shows how these identity categories relate to the materiality of the coffins and therefore to the applicability of the law forcing cremation.

The last place that reminds us the deceased were, after all, under the state’s watch was on the funeral practitioners’ computer (something that, therefore, only the practitioners and the anthropologist could see). There were two demographic categories that were on computer system but not on the form the bereaved filled out: the “minzu” category and “degree of confidentiality.” Although the current form that the bereaved had to fill out did not contain these two categories, their presence in funeral parlors’ computer system reminds us that the deceased was nevertheless (also) conceptualized in terms of state authorized ethnic categories and political implications. “Degree of confidentiality” was related to political reliability. As I mentioned earlier, during high socialism counter-revolutionaries often died and then were cremated without their family members even knowing about it. Their deaths were often state secrets. Today, a similar situation might involve the cremation of executed inmates or, on the other end of the spectrum, the funeral of a political elite that required additional attention. Filling in this category would trigger a different set of assumptions and actions by the state practitioners. Death and knowing about death was never a personal or private matter.

To sum up, despite people higher up in the funeral industry wanting to have more profitable personalized funerals that would commemorate the deceased as unique and autonomous individuals at the end of life, in the interactions between funeral practitioners
and the bereaved in business meetings, customers consistently chose convention. In the sales focused business meeting, the deceased was primarily conceptualized within a popular religious framework and according to conventional categories of age, sex, and so on, and then, secondarily, as socialist citizen subjects (this sequence will be reversed in the actual performance of the memorial meeting itself). Individualized subjects were completely absent in such business meetings.

**Conclusion**

I asked several salespeople in Huangpu why funeral parlors wanted to promote personalized funerals and why these attempts had failed. Almost every salesperson told me that funeral parlors wanted to promote personalized funerals because they are modern and they could potentially make the parlors more money. These attempts failed because the bereaved think that personalized funerals are just one more (of many) things that funeral parlors try to sell them. Since the bereaved, by default, suspected and believed that funeral practitioners would overcharge, the latter had to try their best to gain the former’s trust during business meetings. One of the most important ways to do so was to avoid giving suggestions that might make the bereaved think that you are just trying to sell them things. As a result, most salespeople would not even mention the possibility of a personalized funeral to the bereaved when making funeral arrangements. This was because as soon as they mentioned something like this, the bereaved would start to worry about being tricked into buying too much. Salespeople told me that if the bereaved really wanted a personalized funeral, they would say it without needing the salespeople’s
suggestion. If a salesperson was stupid enough to ask the bereaved if they wanted a personalized funeral, then this person was on her way to ruining her deal.

Rather, the trick to selling more was to start off selling less. From my description of the Ding's business meeting, we can see that both Li Shan and Xiao Lin had to be very tactful in talking to the Dings when arranging their funeral. For Xiao Lin (and all the salespeople working in funeral parlors), the only way to make a sale go smoothly was to make the bereaved believe that the salesperson was on their side. One of the easiest ways to do so, in this era of associating death with profiteering, was to suggest only necessary funeral goods and services. Successful salespeople played down or recommended lower priced options for the early service items (like the hearse from the hospital to the parlor) as a way of gaining trust: “Clearly, this practitioner is not simply trying to sell me the most expensive option.” This would allow them to make more money by selling big ticket things like the cremains caskets or the procession/band options that were introduced at the end of the sales pitch.

What salespeople cared about most (and needed to accomplish) was to meet, and then exceed by as much as possible, their monthly quotas so they could get higher bonuses. As a result, no matter how people higher up envisioned the future of funeral governance, practitioners on the ground had very little incentive to offer services or items that they were not sure that they could sell or did not know how to sell. Recalling my discussion on class formation within funeral parlors since marketization in Chapter 4, one of the most important methods of marketizing state funeral parlors was to transform funeral practitioners from being responsible for funeral governance (civil governance)
into service providers who were responsible for making a profit both for themselves and, therefore, for funeral parlors (market governance). When the hierarchy within funeral parlors was transformed from one based on political domination to one based on employers/managers and workers, funeral practitioners on the ground came to see their primary task as doing business rather than governing. One consequence of changes in the regimes of governance was funeral practitioners’ unwillingness to carry out changes when they could not see how they could make any personal profit from such changes. In fact, trying to sell customers more personalized funeral services could lead to mistrust and loss rather than gain. As a result, even if personalized funerals might bring long-term profits (both in terms of earned income and the costs of governing) for the state, funeral practitioners have little or even negative incentive to push them.

Since “the state” (in this case, the “state funeral parlors”) has never been a homogeneous unit, we should not assume that what might benefit “the state” as an institution would also benefit the state as a group of actual people who are assigned to different jobs. What creates profit on the funeral parlor’s balance sheet does not necessarily also create profits on individual funeral practitioner’s balance sheets. “The state” has always been composed of actual people who are hierarchically related. These people who work for the government have different priorities based on different regimes of governance (which regulate their relationships with the public) as well as on the foundation of hierarchy (which regulates the relationships among people who work for the government).

The realization of the heterogeneity of the state as well as the relationship
between modes of governance and subjectivity are important here because they shed light on critiques of neoliberal governance and its subject formation. Wendy Brown (2003) discusses the neoliberal economy as (partially) sourced to Thatcher-Reagan economic policies that dealt with their respective financial crises by rejecting Keynesian ideas of welfare states. She further points out how neoliberalism has often come to be associated with third world countries through institutions such as the IMF which push for a boundaryless global free market. Donald Nonini (2008) working in China has already pointed out the problem of examining post-economic reform China through the lens of “neoliberal restructuring.” Even if there are parallel developments between what is happening in China and what is happening in Western Europe and America, the Chinese state has never been “neoliberal” in the sense of promoting a free market move away from state regulation. I agree with Nonini in this regard. In the case of the Shanghai funeral industry, the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau was obviously thoroughly rooted in state monopoly and state regulation.

Rather, I use “neoliberal governance” here in a very and specific limited sense. I define it as a method of governing subjects that emphasizes raising the efficiency and profitability of the government. Scholars such as Nikolas Rose (1996) point out that this new modality of governance focuses on cultivating individuals who are free and responsible. Neoliberalism as a form of governmentality here is about creating a certain kind of subject who is autonomous and self-regulating so that the state can govern its subjects more efficiently and profitably. Foucault calls this the rise of a new technology of self and argues that this often co-develops with the concept of risk societies. This
method of governance relies on power operating within individuals, what Foucault calls biopower.

The problem with this line of thought, however, is that “the state” is not a homogeneous entity. As I have shown in this case, what might appear to be efficient and profitable for the institution does not mean that it is also be efficient and profitable for people who are actually doing the governance. This is not even mentioning that empirically Shanghai people preferred their own customary values and rejected the individualized idea of self at the end of life. This point is consistent with my earlier argument that in spite of Shanghai government attempts to transform state practitioners into neoliberal subjects, such attempts have only been partially realized. In fact, these attempts sometimes have unexpected consequences that can run in directions counter to the intent.

I started this chapter by exploring what a personalized funeral might look like. I showed how such a ritual constructs the dead as autonomous and individualized subjects. I also discussed how this is indeed the officially desired direction of funeral governance in Shanghai. However, despite efforts of the Shanghai state funeral parlors, personalized funerals (and their construction of individualized subjects) have never been popular on the ground. The kind of subjectivity created in the interaction between state (via funeral practitioners) and the public (via the bereaved) was any thing but individual. From business meetings in particular, we can see that state funeral practitioners and the bereaved construct the subjectivity of dead bodies based on social convention, especially conventions associated with religion and status. This is because, for funeral practitioners
on the ground, there is nothing efficient or profitable in cultivating the bereaved as free and responsible citizen subjects. On the contrary, for them, it is more efficient and profitable if funeral practitioners could work with the bereaved to construct the dead as a Confucian or religious subject. Such discrepancies between funeral practitioners and their superiors in their notions of what is efficient and profitable occurs exactly because of the introduction of market principles.

As a result, while there is a clear trend that has changed the relationship between Shanghai funeral parlors and Shanghai citizens from one of rulers-and-subjects to one of companies-and-customers since marketization, such changes in the governing relationship did not produce autonomous and individualized subjects. In governing Shanghai funeral parlors, we see neoliberal governance fail to bring about neoliberal subjectivity because what makes funeral parlors neoliberal (again, here just meaning operating a government based on efficiency and profitability) has simultaneously diversified the meaning of efficiency and profitability. As death became an economic project, funeral parlors lost their ability to dominate subject formation. Salespeople’s primary goal is to earn their commission, which means catering to the beliefs and desires of their customers. Thus, the goal of Funeral and Interment Reform to “preserve a culture of life” through the development of personalized funerals only existed on the books and in the minds of government officials higher up. This left a lot of space for the bereaved to incorporate traditional and invented religious rituals and paraphernalia (something “the state” had long opposed) and high socialist ethics (something the state no longer wants) into funerals.
CHAPTER 7  DYING SOCIALIST: MEMORIAL MEETINGS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIALIST SUBJECTIVITY

From now on, when anyone in our ranks who has done some useful work dies, be he soldier or cook, we should have a funeral ceremony and a memorial meeting 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.

Serve the People, Mao Zedong
September 8, 1944

On September 5, 1944, a man died at the age of 29 in Yan’an, Shaanxi Province—the sacred refuge and site of the rebirth of the Chinese Communist Party. This young veteran was Zhang Si’de (張思德)—an ordinary peasant-soldier who had joined up in 1932. The official narrative describes Zhang as a dedicated communist who was injured for the revolution at least three times prior to his actual death. What took his last breath, however, was not revolution, but an accident. Zhang was working in an earthen shelter called a yaodong (窯洞), or cave dwelling, commonly seen in the Yan’an area, when a charcoal-producing kiln collapsed on him. Such a seemingly humble death did not go without notice. Not when the CCP was dependent on peasants’ support and when they were in the middle of their proselytizing expansion after their near extinction during the Long March. The Central Committee of the CCP organized a commemoration with about 1,000 mourners for this young man on September 8, 1944. On this occasion, the

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176 Zhang was Mao Zedong’s personal guard during the year of 1943. Perhaps not coincidentally, 1943 was also the year that Mao’s rise to power within the post-long march Party was formalized. He was raised to the chairmanship of the Central Committee of the CCP in March of 1943.

177 The Long March was the CCP’s extended retreat from the Nationalist Army’s attacks.
then Chair of the Politburo of the CCP, Mao Zedong, gave a memorial speech. This speech, known as *Serve the People* (*wei renmin fuwu* 為人民服务), later became one of the most famous speeches in the history of the CCP.

Recall for a moment, Prosperity, the restaurant I described in my Introductory chapter. There I told the story of how Chairmen Mao became the patron god of this funeral banquet restaurant. During my fieldwork, I saw the text of the *Serve the People* speech at least once a week when I accompanied funeral brokers taking the bereaved to Prosperity after memorial meetings because the whole speech was printed in calligraphy on the wall decorating the main hall of the restaurant. The very first time when I walked into Prosperity, I read the speech to try to figure out what it was that occupied such a conspicuous position. I did not see the title of the speech; I only saw the content on the wall. Soon after I began, Chen Ting saw me reading it. She told me that this was Mao's *Serve the People* speech. I had never actually read the content of this speech before, but knowing the slogan I knew roughly what it was about. What I did not know was why anyone would have the entire article printed out in a funeral restaurant. So I asked Chen Ting like any other anthropologist would do.

Her eyes opened wide and she replied, don’t you know that *Serve the People* is a “memorial speech” (*daoci* 悼詞) written by Chairman Mao? I explained, embarrassingly, “I knew Mao wrote this and that it’s a key text for socialist ethics, but I did not know that it was a memorial speech.” Chen Ting then told me this speech was also the first statement that asked Chinese people to have “memorial meetings” (*zhuidaohui* 追悼會) instead of traditional funerals. As she explained all of this, one of the bereaved came to
her to complain that his table did not have watermelon seeds for snacking even though all the other tables had them. So we stopped our conversation. When we finally went back to Longevity’s office, she could not wait to tell Lin Wan, the first person she saw in her office that I, someone on the road to getting a PhD, did not know that *Serve the People* was a memorial speech. Lin Wan was kind enough to save my face by reminding her that I am Taiwanese. He told Chen Ting that since the KMT did not want their people to know about Mao’s writings, I wouldn't know this. He then turned to me and explained that *Serve the People* is to modern Chinese funerals as the bible is to Christianity. “It is the sacred text for the contemporary Chinese funeral industry,” Lin Wan said.

In this chapter, I first describe what memorial meetings are today and then how they have come about under the CCP. As a particular form of modernist ritual and way of commemoration, I specifically tackle how certain narratives and bodily performances of memorial meetings evolved over the course of the funeral governing process in Shanghai. The historical contours of the formation and popularization of memorial meetings in Shanghai endowed memorial meetings with a sense of “formalism, traditionalism, invariance, rule-governance, sacral symbolism and performance”—what Catherine Bell terms “characteristics of ritual-like activities” (1997:138). I end this chapter with a discussion on the relationship between ritual and subjectivity as well as how ritually constructed subjectivity relates to lived experiences outside of ritual.

**Contemporary Memorial Meetings**

The standard procedure for a memorial meeting is as follows:
Step 1: The Master of Ceremonies (MC) verbally announces the beginning of the memorial meeting.
Step 2: All commemorate the deceased in silence while playing the funeral dirge (aiyue 哀樂).
Step 3: The work unit representative gives a “memorial speech” (daoci 悼詞).
Step 4: The representative of the bereaved gives a “thank you speech” (daxieci 答謝詞).
Step 5: All collectively bow to the deceased three times.
Step 6: “Farewell Ceremony” (gaobie yishi 告別儀式).

This procedure was posted on the wall in memorial meeting halls and displayed on the desks of the salespeople at Shanghai funeral parlors. It was also printed on the pamphlets published by the Shanghai Funeral and Interment Service Center (FIS). In fact, this text was found throughout the PRC. If you buy a Chinese language “how to” book that teaches people how to organize modern funerals in China, you would see this same procedure there as well (eg. see Lu Xiaohong 路曉紅 and Zheng Xiangdong 鄭向東 2011). This is the standard procedure for memorial meetings in China.

Furthermore, this procedure did not just exist in writing. Over the course of my fieldwork in 2010 and 2011, I saw over 75 complete memorial meetings and numerous others in part. Whether the deceased were civil servants, university professors, small business owners, housewives, CEOs, or factory workers, when they died in Shanghai, their families held memorial meetings for them. All memorial meetings I observed in Shanghai followed this procedure whether or not they also contained popular religious, Buddhist, Protestant, or Catholic rituals in addition. I will discuss some of these religious variations of memorial meetings in the next two chapters (Chapter 8 and Chapter 9). In
this chapter, I focus on explaining the core, socialist parts of the memorial meeting. I do so by describing one particular memorial meeting, one organized for Wang Dashan.

Before I proceed, however, I would like to say a few words about this particular memorial meeting. Wang Dashan’s funeral was one of Longevity’s cases. Tang An conducted the business meeting with the Wang family, but Chen Ting was the MC of the memorial meeting. Tang An usually did not do the MC part simply because this was the division of labor in Longevity. Also, since Chen Ting was the MC, she added her own “extra touch” that is absent in memorial meetings directed by other funeral brokers and state practitioners. I will specify Chen Ting’s “extra touches” when they appear in my description. Nevertheless, while every funeral MC has her or his own idiosyncratic variations, these remain quite small and all follow basic steps of the standard procedure. Of course, to a certain extent, such differences are to be expected; no funeral MC could repeat the exact same ritual just as, as Heraclitus has told us, you can never step into the same river twice. Margaret Thompson Drewal (1992) has shown that ritual is characterized by simultaneity, multifocality, contingency and indeterminacy once we see ritual actors as knowledge agents. At the same time, however, this does not change the fact that a good portion of the river, as we understand it, has indeed remained despite or in fact because of its water’s flow. Finally, unlike the story of the Taiwanese architect’s funeral described in the last chapter which was meant to be an extreme case along a spectrum of possible personalized funerals, Wang Dashan’s memorial meeting is very generic. Nothing in particular stands out that makes this funeral somehow identifiably
different from the rest of the 74 memorial meetings I observed. I could have selected any other for description and analysis.

_Wang Dashan’s Memorial Meeting_

Wang Dashan had a daughter and a son, Wang Meifang and Wang Shaoquan. Both were married and had two children respectively. On the day of Wang Dashan’s memorial meeting, Chen Ting, Chen Yu, and I arrived in the meeting hall before the Wangs, as we usually did. The state practitioner who was assigned to be in charge of the particular meeting hall for Wang Dashan’s funeral was Lu Yang. Lu Yang was a young man in his early twenties like the majority of the state practitioners who worked in the meeting hall section. I was helping Chen Yu arrange flower baskets while Chen Ting went through the logistical details with Lu Yang. About twenty minutes before the scheduled starting time, Shaoquan walked into the meeting hall holding his father’s portrait photograph (yixiang 遺像) in his arms. All of the other family members walked in behind him. Shaoquan was the first in line because his father, Wang Dashan, had now

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178 These grandchildren were all school age children. I did not see Wang Dashan’s wife and these grandchildren when Meifang, Shaoquan and their spouses had their business meeting at Longevity. This is common in Shanghai—it is the children’s responsibility to organize funerals instead of the surviving spouses’ responsibility. In general, the deceased’s spouse (assuming he or she was still alive) was often absent from business meetings during my fieldwork. Grandchildren were occasionally absent even from the memorial meetings themselves if they were younger than school age. Tang An told me that some Shanghai people think that funeral parlors are full of evil spirits and therefore that children are vulnerable there, especially if they were very young. Chen Yu, however, saw this as another example that showed how Shanghai people were in general more indifferent to their elders.

179 The relatively young age in the meeting hall section was a result of a deliberate policy. Leaders at Huangpu thought that people who work in the meeting halls were the “face” (menmian 門面, literally, the front door) of the parlor. They believed that young people were better at service work so it would be better to let young people be the face of the parlor. Many funeral professionals told me that the older generations of state practitioners were not as good at treating the bereaved as customers. Finally, it is also possible that their youth and freshness is desired because they remind people of health instead of aging and death.
been materialized in the meeting hall via the portrait photograph that was right in front of Shaoquan. The deceased had to arrive first to his funeral.

As soon as Chen Ting saw the Wangs getting close to the hall, she went out and waited in the entrance and told Shaoquan, “Let’s first invite your father in.” Chen Ting accompanied Shaoquan on his walk all the way to the other end of the meeting hall and directed him to hang the picture on the wall. After the picture was properly hung, Chen Ting told Shaoquan to bow three times to his father. This was one of her unique touches. I have never seen other state practitioners ask the bereaved to bow to the deceased after hanging the picture. Then Chen Ting took Shaoquan to see Lu Yang to verify and sign the necessary documents. One of these documents was a customer satisfaction questionnaires regarding the bereaved’s opinions about Lu Yang’s service. Shaoquan checked “satisfied” (the highest choice possible) on every question as was the case with the majority of the bereaved.

Unlike the customer satisfaction questionnaires in the sales department which were filled out at the end of business meetings (see Chapter 6), questionnaires regarding services in memorial meetings hall were filled out before memorial meetings started. Throughout my fieldwork, only once or twice did the bereaved question why they had to sign the customer satisfaction survey before receiving the service. When they did question the survey’s timing, the bereaved insisted on adding “before the memorial meeting starts” on the survey form to stress that the degree of his satisfaction was based only on service provided before the meeting began. In this regard, in the normal instance the responses to the customer satisfaction questionnaires actually do not have any
denotative meaning. We will see this lack of interests in denotative meaning throughout the whole memorial meeting.\textsuperscript{180}

Once Wang Shaoquan finished signing all the documents, Chen Ting, Wang Shaoquan and Lu Yang then talked through the procedure of the memorial meeting again briefly (Tang An already went through this once in more detail during their business meeting). When this was finished, Lu Yang led Wang Meifang, Wang Shaoquan, (myself) and Chen Ting to the body preparation room located in the back of the meeting hall to verify the identity of the body. Meanwhile, the other funeral participants had arrived and were socializing with each other in the meeting hall.

When it was about time to start the meeting, Chen Ting walked to the podium and talked on the microphone to announce that the meeting was about to start. She urged people to line up in rows.\textsuperscript{181} Chen Ting asked Wang Dashan’s wife to stand in the middle of the first row and her two children, Meifang and Shaoquan and their spouses to stand next to her, one couple on each side. Then Meifang’s two children and Shaoquan’s two children stood in the second row right behind their parents. The general rules of standing in memorial meetings are to have the family members of the deceased to stand in the first

\textsuperscript{180} In Chapter 4, I discussed how these “meaningless” questionnaires were used more like a protective weapon among state practitioners for deal with customer complains.

\textsuperscript{181} Chen Ting, rather than Lu Yang, was the MC because as long as a memorial meeting is operated through a funeral broker, the funeral broker must also be the MC. This was a kind of power game played between funeral brokers and state practitioners who worked in the meeting halls. The latter thought that since their parlors earned less money from brokers operating funerals that they did not have any obligation to be the MC. They were “entitled” to do less. Of course, this general consensus could be changed if a funeral broker and a state practitioner had a good relationship. For example, Chen Ting occasionally asked state practitioners to be the MC when she was operating big cases (meaning memorial meetings that involved over a hundred people). If the state practitioner agreed, this would give Chen Ting more flexibility to take care of important errands during the meeting. Chen Ting could do this occasionally because of her close ties with state practitioners as I explained in Chapter 5.
few rows and other distant relatives and friends to stand in the rows behind them. Chen Ting liked to articulate generational difference if the deceased had more than one child and grandchild. This was why she had the grandchildren stand in the second row. Of course, when there were fewer direct descendants, Chen Ting would ask them all to stand in the first row and made sure that on each side of the deceased’s spouse was a nuclear family member of the deceased’s children respectively. In any case, then, Chen Ting asked the work unit representative to stand on the very leftmost spot (from the deceased’s perspective) in the first row. The left was the “superior position” (shangshou 上首) in Shanghai memorial meetings.¹⁸²

Chen Ting told the rest of the participants to stand behind the bereaved family in order based on their being relatively close or more distant relatives and then being relatively close friends and colleagues. The rest of the participants then simply found a spot for themselves anywhere towards the back so long as they stood in a row. When everyone was lined up, Chen Ting announced, “We are now going to start the memorial meeting. We are here today at Huangpu Funeral Parlor to deeply commemorate Mr. Wang Dashan. First, allow me to represent the bereaved family members of Wang Dashan to thank you for your participation.” After she said this, she stepped out from behind the podium and bowed to the participants once. Doing their own bow in this manner was something that funeral brokers were more likely to do. Then Chen Ting walked back to the podium and said, “Our dear and kind Wang Dashan has left us. He

¹⁸² It is worth pointing out that for funerals that were not Longevity’s cases, funeral professionals occasionally did not assign a specific spot to the work unit representatives. In this case, work unit representatives just found a place to stand somewhere in the first three rows by themselves.
has gone to the Western Heaven to bless his children from afar. Now I announce that we are officially beginning the memorial meeting of Mr. Wang Dashan. Let’s commemorate Wang Dashan in silence. Please play the dirge.”

Lu Yang then pressed the play key on the CD player to play the dirge. During this time, everyone looked down at the floor and remained silent, including the funeral professionals and me. About thirty seconds into the dirge, Lu Yang stopped the music. When the music was done, people lifted up their heads and looked again to the front. Chen Ting continued, “We now invite the work unit representative to give a memorial speech.” Meanwhile, after playing the dirge, Lu Yang slipped out of the meeting hall without attracting any attention since Chen Ting, rather than he, was the MC.

The work unit representative then walked to the front and center of the meeting hall. He first bowed to the deceased three times and then turned around to face the participants and bowed once. Chen Ting had reminded him about this three and one rule before the meeting started. Then the work unit representative picked up a piece of paper from his pocket and started to read the speech with a flat, emotionless tone. Just like many other memorial speeches I had seen given, I suspected that he did not even bother to rehearse his speech. In my transcription of his speech that follows here, in order to highlight what would have been clear to local participants, I have italicized those turns of phrase that have particular meanings drawn from classic socialist narratives, slogans, history, or practice. Note that these italicized words were spoken in the same monotone voice as the rest of the speech and not with any additional emphasis.
Dear Comrade (tongzhi 同志) Guests:

We are here today with extreme feelings of grief to deeply commemorate the retired employee Comrade Wang Dashan. Comrade Wang Dashan, due to the failure of medical treatment of a heart attack, passed away at 10:38 pm, on December 12, 2011 in the Fifth People’s Hospital. He lived for 71 years.

Comrade Wang Dashan was born on August 8, 1941 in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province in an ordinary Peasant family (nongmin jiating 農民家庭). He was born into the Old Society (jiushehui 舊社會). He suffered and was greatly oppressed. When New China (xinzhongguo 新中國) was born, he was liberated (jiefang 解放) like thousands of other fellow Chinese. Comrade Wang Dashan joined the revolution (canjia geming gongzuo 參加革命工作) in June 1959 when he began to work for the Shanghai Textile Company. From June 1959 to May 1972, he worked in the Maintenance Department. From June 1972 to May 1990, he worked in the Warehouse Department. From June 1991, he worked in the Mail Room until he retired in May 1996. Throughout his work in revolution, he passionately loved the Homeland, Socialism, and the Communist Party. He made great contributions to the Chinese socialist textile industry!

Comrade Wang Dashan was diligent and hard working. No matter what posts he worked, he was always concentrating on working. He loved his job and was good at it. He was dedicated to his job with his full heart. Comrade Wang Dashan was an honest and frank man. He was humble and cautious as well as friendly and kindly. He was frugal and simple and had endured hardships and bitterness. He was very strict in educating his children so all his children are law abiding and studious people.

The death of Comrade Wang Dashan made us lose a good comrade. Although he has passed away, his spirit of selfless dedication to work, his bitter, hard, and diligent, as well as frugal life style, his decent, honest, and frank morality are

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183 Passionately loved the Homeland, Socialism, and Communist Party is actually from a short-lived propaganda campaign slogan: The Three Loves. The Three Loves are the Love of the Motherland, the Love of Socialism, and the Love of the Chinese Communist Party. The associated campaign aimed to fight against “spiritual pollution” after initial moves toward economic reform (Myers, James 1985:989). After Deng Xiaoping promoted “First get rich, then build socialism,” more and more people, especially intellectuals and urban youths became dissatisfied with the limits on freedom and growing corruption. Deng launched this campaign to control these critiques by describing them as spiritual pollution. However, conservative leftists soon embraced this campaign as a way to question Deng’s direction in marketization as a whole. As a result, Deng decided to let the campaign die down as soon as possible in order to ensure the continuity of his reforms. Thomas Gold (1984) explains the rise and demise of the campaign as resulting from elite power struggles and the changing state-society relationship under market reform.
examples for us all. Although human beings cannot return to life once they have died, we can transform our grief into a powerful force. Having this model, we can comfort the spirit of Comrade Wang Dashan by having even more passion to devote ourselves to the work of socialism.

Comrade Wang Dashan, please rest in peace!

After he finished reading this, the work unit representative turned around and bowed to the deceased three times and then turned around again to bow to the participants once. This replicated his actions prior to the speech. When he walked back to his position, Chen Ting announced, “Now let’s invite the bereaved to give a thank you speech.” Shaoquan then walked to the same spot where the work unit representative had stood earlier to give his speech. Before he started his speech, Shaoquan also bowed to his father three times and then bowed to the participants once. Shaoquan used the template that Tang An had given him after their business meeting as the basis of his thank you speech. With this template, the bereaved only needed to fill in the blank in the underlined places. Here I translate Shaoquan’s thank you speech with the underlining marks to show what the template looks like (as with the italicization, the underlined phrases were not spoken any differently than the rest of the speech). I will return to the template aspects of this thank you speech (as well as to the socialist aspects of the memorial speech) later in this chapter.

Dear Relatives and Friends, Seniors, Leaders, and Guests:
First, I am representing my whole family to express our sincere gratitude to all of you who came to join our Father’s memorial meeting. Today, with our painful sorrow, we are here to deeply commemorate our Father. Our Father had a heart attack. Even with the emergency treatment provided by the Fifth People’s

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184 Both state practitioners and funeral brokers gave such templates to the bereaved.
Hospital, he continued to deteriorate so much so that no medical treatment could save him. On December 12, 2011, he passed away. He lived for 71 years.

On August 8, 1941, our Father was born into a Peasant Family. Since he was young, he was filial to his parents and took care of his siblings. After our Father married our Mother and started his own family, he educated us to be people who are responsible and compassionate.

Father had endured a life long of hardship. He worked very hard and was frugal and simple. He loved his job and was very responsible. He was kind to his neighbors. He was the exemplar for us all as his children. During the time when Father was sick, many relatives and friends as well as leaders came to visit him. After Father passed away, all these relatives and friends as well as leaders came to show their condolences even though they were so busy, especially leaders from our Father’s work unit, the Shanghai Textile Company. They valued our Father and gave him a high evaluation. Here, I am representing my family. I want to thank you all to express my sincere gratitude.

Father, you have left us. No matter how hard we cry, we could never wake you up again. Yet, your voice, face, laugh, and appearance will stay in our heart forever.

Father, please go away peacefully. Our family will exist in harmony. We will take care of our aged Mother to make sure that she can enjoy her old age. We will educate our children to make sure that they will become useful people to our society as our way to repay the debt of you raising us.

Please rest in peace, Father. Please rest in peace.

Although Shaoquan started his speech like the work representative with a flat and emotionless tone, by the end of his speech, his voice started to break down. After Shaoquan finished reading the thank you speech, he turned around to face the deceased. He bowed three times and then turned around again to face the participants and bowed once. Then he walked back to his spot in the first row. Chen Ting then announced, “Now it is time for us all to bow to the deceased three times.” After saying this, she then turned around facing the deceased and started her three bows. All of the participants followed her moves, including Chen Yu and me (Lu Yang was still in the back room out of sight).
When all of us finished our three bows to the deceased in unison, Chen Ting said, “We are now going to have our farewell ceremony to say goodbye to Mr. Wang Dashan.” After making the announcement, Chen Ting stepped to the side. She used her hand to gesture and verbally told Shaoquan to bring his mother and his nuclear family forward (Chen Ting had also already instructed them about this beforehand). They then stood on the left side of the coffin facing it in a diagonal line and Chen Ting stood next to them. After everyone was situated, Chen Ting verbally said “First bow. Second bow. Third bow.” to direct Shaoquan’s group to bow as she spoke the words. Chen Ting also bowed along with them. While verbally announcing the three bows for the bereaved is not exclusive to Chen Ting, her bowing along with the bereaved was one of her extra touches.

When they finished bowing, they put the yellow flowers they had been holding the whole time on top of the plastic cover that enveloped the coffin. While everyone else simply held the flower and then put it down, Wang Dashan’s wife held the flower specifically in a way that resembles the act of holding prayer incense. She even performed the gesture of worshiping with flower before she put it down. What Wang Dashan’s wife did, though most likely not rehearsed, was not uncommon. I saw it happen quite frequently. Shaoquan’s group walked to the right side of the deceased after they performed their farewell to form a receiving line so that other people could express their condolences to the bereaved after they performed their farewell. Meifang’s nuclear family then repeated the same acts and eventually joined Shaoquan’s group to stand on the right in the receiving line.
After both Shaoquan and Meifang’s families performed their farewell ceremony, Chen Ting then directed the work unit representative to give his three bows by himself. Again, making the work unit representative bow alone was Chen Ting’s extra touch. For the rest of the funeral participants, Chen Ting made seven people at a time stand in a row to perform their farewell even if there were more than seven people in the original rows to begin with. Chen Ting did not like to have big groups performing the farewell ceremony because she felt that this indicated that people were just trying to rush through the farewell ceremony so they could be done with it. She once told me that “Shanghai funerals are already short enough. There is no need to speed things up.” Using the number seven was because, first, odd numbers are the proper numbers for funerals in Shanghai. Even numbers suggests a “doubling” and thus indicates the possibility of a second death. As for why seven exactly, it was more of Chen Ting’s arbitrary choice. She felt that five or fewer people each time would prolong the farewell ceremony too much and nine or more people each time just felt like rushing through. Wang Dashan’s memorial meeting was officially finished when the last group of funeral participants finished their farewell ceremony. This memorial meeting took about twenty minutes, like the majority of meetings I saw.

From the above description, we can clearly see that memorial meetings are composed of five ritual acts. An MC facilitates and explicitly directs participants to move from one step to the next. Instead of analyzing these acts in sequence in the following sections, I want to pull out the two most important characteristics that run throughout such memorial meetings. The first characteristic is the overwhelming importance of
socialist narratives. These socialist narratives are articulated through two different formats: musical sounds and verbal utterances. The former refers to the particular dirge that is used in all Shanghai funeral parlors (at least). The latter refers to the lexicon used in memorial speeches and thank you speeches. The second characteristic is the modernist body movements performed in memorial meetings. These are especially expressed through the act of bowing and other outward bodily expressions of grief and mourning.

**Socialist Narratives**

*I. Musical Sounds*

In Shanghai, all funeral parlors used the same dirge. Several people told me that this dirge is also used in funeral parlors in other parts of China. If the bereaved hire a band, then the band will play the dirge. Otherwise it would be played on a CD player as in Wang Dashan’s funeral.\(^{185}\) There is no rule that forces the bereaved to use this particular dirge. In fact, the Shanghai Funeral and Interment Service Center published a pamphlet, *Funeral Guide* (*baishitong* 白事通), specifically saying that bands could perform whatever song the bereaved chose. Several state practitioners also told me that if the bereaved wanted to use their own music as the dirge, they only needed to prepare their own CD. There would be no extra charge and state practitioners would be happy to play the chosen CD for the bereaved. All of these options and formal invitations are consistent with Shanghai funeral parlors’ attempts to promote personalized funerals.

\(^{185}\) Among the three city funeral parlors, people at Yishan and Baoxin hired bands more frequently than people at Longhua. Yishan’s customers are more rural and working class and Baoxin’s customers are more working class. Longhua is more middle class or higher.
However, as mentioned in the last chapter, most state practitioners working in the sales department did not even mention this option to the bereaved since they assumed that the bereaved had no interest in choosing their own music. Among the countless business meetings I sat through, I never heard one family demand their own choice of music be used as the dirge. All the memorial meetings I attended used the same dirge heard in Wang Dashan’s memorial meeting.

This particular dirge is a slow and solemn melody played by western instruments without any human voices. Yet, having no verbal description does not mean that it is devoid of meaning. On the contrary, I argue that this dirge is a form of socialist narrative. What makes this particular dirge a kind of socialist narrative relates to the perception of how the dirge came about. I found three different well-known narratives that explained the birth and popularity of this particular dirge. The first traces the dirge to Liu Chi (劉熾) (1921-1998) and his colleagues who were all musicians in the Lu Xun College of Art—later a communist propaganda art school (Wang J. 2013). At that time, China was still under KMT rule. Liu Chi and his colleagues were on a mission to collect folk music in Yan’an, Shaanxi Province. While there, they encountered a piece of folk music played with a suona horn titled fenhonglian (粉紅蓮 meaning Pink Lotus), sometimes also known as fengfengling (風鈴 meaning Wind Chimes). This version says that Liu Chi and his colleagues were so moved by its directness and bucolic overtones that they transcribed the music and then modified it for potential wider use in the future. In 1949, around the time the Communist Party took over, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CCP approved this music as appropriate for formal ceremonies. In 1956, Liu Chi
rewrote the piece for a movie, *Battle on Shanggangling Mountain*. This patriotic movie focused on the heroism of Chinese soldiers who fought against America in the Battle of Triangle Hill during the Korean War. This, I was told, was how the current dirge used in all Shanghai funerals came about.\(^{186}\)

The second origin story I collected relates the musical piece to the memorial meeting of Comrade Liu Zhidan (劉志丹) (Wang F. 2001; Wang J. 2007). Liu Zhidan was an early CCP member, a primary organizer of the CCP’s rural-based guerrilla attacks, and the founder of the Chinese Red Army. He was killed in battle in 1936. The Party later named him a communist martyr. In 1942, the Central Committee of the CCP decided to move his coffin back to his hometown. There the Party organized a big memorial meeting for Liu Zhidan. Musicians Anbo (安波), Ma'ke (馬可), and their colleagues had collected folk music in the early 1940s in Shaanxi (Wang F. 2001). When they got the order from the Party about Liu Zhidan’s memorial meeting, they decided to let Anbo write lyrics for this music and rename it “Publicly Commemorating Liu Zhidan” (公祭劉志丹). And, *this* was how the current dirge was created (Wang J. 2007).

The third versions says either that Anbo’s (or Ma'ke’s) work was later once again modified by Luo Lang (羅浪)—the first chair of the PLA’s marching band—or that Luo Lang was its original writer (Yu Ge 2011). In this version, there was no mention of folk music collected in Shaanxi. Luo Lang wrote many famous Chinese Communist musical pieces. They include “The Chinese People’s Liberation Army March,” “The Three Main

Rules of Discipline and the Eight Points for Attention,” “The East is Red,” “The Flowers,” and so on. This version reports that the dirge was first played in a collective memorial meeting for martyrs in Zhangjiakou. This music was played again in 1949 in Tiananmen Square to celebrate the establishment of the Monument of People’s Heroes after the official founding of the PRC. Then, in 1953, when Stalin died, the dirge was played on the Central People’s Broadcasting Station for the first time (Yu Ge 2011).

To some degree, which version (or part of a version) is correct does not matter much. What is important for us is the way that each story of how the dirge came to be played in memorial meetings today is deeply intertwined with the construction of the party’s desire to commemorate martyrs as model socialist citizens whether in movies (the first version) or in early memorial meetings (the second and third versions). These martyrs might be a group of anonymous soldiers (soldiers who fought against America in the Battle of Triangle Hill during the Korean War or martyrs in Zhangjiakou) or specific persons (like Liu Zhidan in the second version). Moreover, the first two versions link the dirge to the sacred site of the CCP, Shaanxi, the same place where Zhang Si’de, the main character of the Serve the People speech, died. Although this sacred site is not the birthplace of the CCP (that was actually Shanghai), Yan’an in Shaanxi marked an important shift in making the CCP into the peasant-based party that eventually carried out the revolution. Furthermore, the first and second versions both emphasize that it originated first among the people (as [rural] folk music). Locating the roots of the dirge among the ordinary folks echoes the CCP’s own narrative of how socialism came to depend on a peasant revolution. Finally, this idea reaches the highest level in the third
version by linking the dirge to the establishment of the Monument of People’s Heroes and to the early People's Liberation Army and to one of its most famous “red” song writers. Red songs were official, frequently played songs, that praised and cultivated socialist ethics. Regardless of any particular version, although nothing is spoken during the silent commemoration, the playing of this particular dirge in funeral parlors clearly shows the work of socialist narratives in its musical expression of sounds that fill the public space. The parallel histories of the dirge and the familiarity of these histories and the music to the audience helps to construct the socialist subjectivity of dead bodies by sonically memorializing the deceased as a model socialist citizen among other socialist citizens.

**II. Verbal Utterances**

The second type of socialist narrative in memorial meetings is linguistic, expressed through verbal utterances of the socialist lexicon in conceptualizing the dead. There are at least two kinds of socialist vocabulary evoked in memorial meetings. The first relates to socialist ideas of time such as Old China, New China, and Liberation. Socialist time is essential because the CCP’s legitimacy was built on promising a radical temporal disjuncture between the Old and the New. In order to create New China, however, the CCP needed to first create a specific interpretation of what China was like before the revolution: the Old China. This was done by extracting, essentializing, and re-conceptualizing certain characteristics of the past. For example, Myron Cohen (1993) points out that “[t]hrough the transformation of 'farmers' into 'peasants,' 'tradition' into
'feudalism,' and 'customs' or 'religion' into 'superstition,' there was invented not only the 'old society' that had to be supplanted, but also the basic negative criteria designating a new status group, [the Peasant,] one held by definition to be incapable of creative and autonomous participation in China's reconstruction.”

Once the concept of Old China was created, then there needed to be a rupturing process that separated the Old from the New China. This rupture was understood as “Liberation.” It was a rupturing because once China was liberated, all the old vices were gone. Even if there were practical inequalities in the new society, these were simply remnants of the old (Hinton 1966). This universal temporal shift meant that working in New China means that you are joining the revolution or contributing to the revolution no matter whether or not your labor is directly linked to politics. This is why Wang Dashan’s mundane work in the factory was described as “work for the revolution.” A person could contribute to the revolution by sweeping the streets so long as the act was conscientiously carried out in New China.

In fact, I realized this personally from a lady I met in Shanghai. She was in her late fifties and was also a sent-down youth. She spent most of her productive life in Guizhou, a mountainous province in southwestern China. We spent a night in a temple outside Shanghai together because her friend’s relative was going to have a Buddhist salvation ritual performed early in the morning the next day. It was quite a surreal night for me—I felt like I was having a slumber party with six old ladies whose ages ranged

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187 Although this constructing effort was not exclusive to the CCP (Republican modernists did the same thing), it was more forcefully carried out since the CCP’s revolution had created a significant grassroots political presence and since its legitimacy depended on it.
from 50 to 80 years old. Before we turned off the lights and proceeded to talk in the dark for the next three hours, my friend showed me her “Retirement Certificate”—a red booklet-like document. One column on the certificate indicated her “date of joining the revolution” (canjia geming gongzuo nianyue 參加革命工作年月). When I saw this, I asked her, “were you in the army before or are you a Party member?” I had assumed phrases like “join the revolution” must indicate some kind of involvement in the Party or military apparatus at that time. It took her a while to understand my question, however. Once she figured out what I had asked, she explained that the date was her first day working in a factory in Shanghai after she graduated from junior high school. Her first date of joining the work force was her first date of joining the revolution.

This is why Wang Dashan’s humble work history is interpreted as contributing to the Chinese socialist textile industry (see the last sentence of the second paragraph of the memorial speech). If you contribute to your work in textiles, then you are contributing to “the Chinese socialist textile industry.” Consequently, these socialist clichés describe Comrade Wang Dashan as born in a Peasant family of the Old Society and then liberated. This is in spite of the fact that Wang Dashan was not a farmer for the majority of his life and that his children did not call him comrade in real life. This kind of re-iteration freezes the deceased within a socialist idea of time and person regardless of how he may have lived over the last several decades.

The second set of socialist terms used in memorial meetings relates to a socialist idea of personhood. We can see this by at least two indications: status categories and personally embodied ethics. Wang Dashan was described as coming from a Peasant
family. The word “Peasant” is more than a simple description of a job in China. It was first and foremost a political status category. As his quote mentions above, Cohen (1993) pointed out that one of the most crucial creations in this New versus Old China was that of the Chinese “Peasant.” It was creative since, at least the Song Dynasty, the political and economic relations of pre-revolutionary farmers in China did not even remotely resembled the “feudal” relations of Europe. Even then the rural-urban relationship was quite different in China. The concept of “Peasant” was further complicated when it was merged with class classifications during the CCP land reform in the early 1950s. Under such class classifications, each household was assigned a class category of Landlord or Rich, Middle, or Poor Peasant. These categories became hereditary and largely remained with descendants of the household until the beginning of the reform period.\footnote{Today, class-like distinctions exist more in the form of socioeconomic income and urban versus rural residency status. See Zhang Li (2001) on the hukou system.} This was why in the thank you speech, we see an underlined blank right before the word Family (the first line of the second paragraph). Although this blank was reserved for addressing the class category of the deceased, I only ever heard people addressed by their class categories when they were Peasants or Workers during my fieldwork. I never heard a memorial speech or a thank you speech describing the deceased as a “Capitalist,” “Landlord,” or other politically incorrect categories. In these cases, people simply omitted the class category.

Other than “Peasant,” one of the most obvious elements of this socialist lexicon is the word comrade (tongzhi 同志). This is probably one of the most obvious socialist terminologies in the speech that any reader would recognize without having special
knowledge about China or socialism in general. Comrade was used as a general title to refer to anyone disregarding sex, age, and political hierarchy in the PRC well into the reform period. Although, as I mentioned in my description of choosing couplets in the last chapter the ubiquitous usage of comrade has disappeared in daily life since the reforms,\(^{189}\) nonetheless at least half of the total memorial meetings I observed addressed the deceased as comrade. In fact, memorial meetings were the only occasions I ever heard people use this term of address in Shanghai. Comrade indicates a way of conceptualizing the dead as equal and non-differentiated people whose identification directly ties to citizenship. This was in contrast to conceptualizing the deceased as embedded in kinship or other horizontal networks. As a result, no matter which status category any person belonged to, each person was conceptualized as atomized and directly linked to the state.

The second indication of the socialist idea of person relates to specific ethics that the deceased was said to have embodied. From the memorial speech quoted above, the third and fourth paragraphs narrate the idealized (if not outright imagined) merits of the deceased. These ethics include being diligent, hard working, dedicated, honest, frank, humble, cautious, frugal, simple, law abiding, and studious as well as having endured hardships and bitterness, suffered and oppression. The same kind of ethics were also repeated in the thank you speech. While these ethics are not “new,” they are those characteristics long emphasized and promoted by the CCP. For example, a famous early CCP leader, Liu Shaoqi (1952), in his article, *How to Be a Good Communist*, said:

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\(^{189}\) In popular slang stemming from its use in Taiwan, comrade (*tongzhi*) is now mostly a synonym for gay.
He will worry long before the rest of the world begins to worry and he will rejoice only after the rest of the world has rejoiced…Both in the Party and among the people he will be the first to suffer hardship and the last to enjoy himself. He never minds whether his conditions are better or worse than others, but he does mind as to whether he has done more revolutionary work than others or whether he has fought harder…He is capable of possessing the greatest firmness and moral courage to resist corruption by riches or honors, to resist tendencies to vacillate in spite of poverty and lowly status and to refuse to yield in spite of threats of force…

As we can see, the narratives of Wang Dashan’s ethics are identical to Lin Shaoqi’s propaganda work of *How to Be a Good Communist*.

Moreover, Wang Dashan was delineated as having been honest (老實 *laoshi*), simple (簡樸 *jianpu*), and frank (坦白 *tanbei*). Whether these personal traits were indexical or not, they are also desired characteristics in the CCP’s narratives because of their correlation with “Peasant” virtues (Hinton 1966). These are in contrast to the common view of business people who build their wealth with their cleverness and calculation, therefore implying they were somewhat dishonest within a Chinese cultural idiom. We can see this from the old proverb *wushang bujian* (無商不奸). This phrase means that all businesses engage in profiteering and calculation. This specific description of proper communist morality should also been seen as a critique of the group that held power before it and that the CCP defeated during the revolution, the Nationalist Party (or KMT). The Nationalist government, especially given its loose control over the nation, was known for its corruption before the CCP’s take over. Whether Wang Dashan was really a simple and frank person in real life was not important. What mattered here is that
these verbal narratives of his socialist personality traits constructed him, posthumously, as a socialist person through public acts.

Finally, the emphasis on enduring suffering, bitterness, and oppression during his life was more than a literary device to describe a personal journey in commemorating Wang Dashan. These verbal utterances were actually transformed into concrete ritualized activities during the Revolution and again during the Cultural Revolution. They were shown in the form of public gatherings known as “yiku sitian” (憶苦思甜), translated as “Remembering the Bitterness of the Past and Appreciating the Sweetness of the Present” (Liu, Xin 2004: 139-140). Through this ritualized activity, people who were born after Liberation could get a taste of past suffering by hearing the suffering narratives recited by those who had experienced the bad old days. These stories could therefore be juxtaposed with their present happiness as a person who was born and lives in New China. By rehearsing and (re)experiencing the bitterness of the past for those who were born before the Liberation through (re)constructing past memories, the young were reminded about how far China had come and how much the people had gone through. By artificially injecting an imagined past into the present, current reality is fictionalized as real and happy.

The above described socialist ethics narrated in memorial meetings entered the public discourse at the mass level historically throughout several “sacred” texts and the continued reciting of such texts during the high socialist period. For example, I began this chapter by talking about Serve the People. This along with In Memory of Norman Bethune and The Foolish Old Man who Removed the Mountains are political writings of
Mao from before the establishment of the PRC.\(^{190}\) They later became known as the *Three Old Articles (Laosanpian 老三篇)*. One of them article was written to commemorate the death of Norman Bethune, a Canadian Communist and physician who died in China from infection while treating Chinese patients.\(^{191}\) The Foolish Man article describes a fictional Chinese historical character, Mr. Fool, who wants to move the two mountains in front of his house. His neighbor, Mr. Wise, laughs at him for entertaining such a silly wish. But Mr. Fool responds that as long as all of his descendents work continuously on moving the mountains, they will eventually complete this task. Mr. Fool’s persistence moved the God of Heaven such that he granted the Fool his wish by removing the two mountains with his power. Based on an interpretation by Lin Biao, the Minister of National Defense, Mao’s moral lessons in each of the *Three Old Articles* were Serve the People; Never Selfish, Only Altruistic (*haobu liji zhuanmen liren* 毫不利己專門利人); and Painstaking Effort and Arduous Struggle (*jianku fendou* 艱苦奮鬥) respectively.

The *Three Old Articles* provided the fundamental ideals for socialist ethics throughout the revolution and were again key texts during the Cultural Revolution. In 1959, Lin Biao mandated that all People’s Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers study these three articles as part of their training. He said, “to study Mao Zedong Thought, it is enough that we read the three articles” (Li, Gucheng 1995: 225-6). In 1966 when the Cultural Revolution began, Lin lumped the three together again for the masses’ political work. The *Three Old Articles* not only became everyday must-reads for everyone's

\(^{190}\) These were published on December 21, 1939 and June 11, 1945 respectively.

\(^{191}\) Considering the link between transforming mourning into revolutionary acts in *Serve the People*, it was not too surprising that this important article is also a commemorative work.
political training, but also in June 1966, at the start of the Cultural Revolution, became one of the few pieces of endorsed educational material for the curriculum of the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades throughout China (ibid.).

To be clear, pointing out how speeches, especially memorial speeches, in memorial meetings are based on socialist verbal utterances and canonical texts does not in any way indicate that funeral speeches (whether memorial speeches or thank you speeches) are a socialist invention or something exclusive to the socialist regime. China has a long history of a wide variety of literary genres associated with death. What I mean here is to point out the specifically Chinese-socialist ideas of time and person in speeches read in memorial meetings in contemporary Shanghai. More importantly, I stress that these socialist narratives, whether in the form of musical sounds or verbal utterances, do not have any actual denotative meaning even though they are tools used to memorialize the deceased. This is the case even referring to the thank you speech given by the family members.

Many funeral professionals told me that thank you speeches serve three functions: 1) to thank people, especially the work unit leaders, who come to the memorial meeting (or who could not come in person but sent their condolences earlier), 2) to introduce the deceased to funeral participants, and 3) to express grief and mourning of loss. Even though the last two points, combined with the fact that the one who writes and reads the speech is a family member, seem to suggest it would be more likely to see denotative meanings in the thank you speech, as it turns out, however, the thank you speech is no less prescribed than the memorial speech. The fact that it comes from a family member
who intimately knew the deceased makes little difference in practice. We can see this clearly from the usage of the template. Not only were there relatively few blanks to fill in, but the literal space they gave for improvisation was miniscule and most blanks had easy, generic “answers.”

II. Modernist Bodily Movements

*Constrained Bodily Expressions of Emotions*

The first prominent bodily movement in Wang Dashan’s memorial meeting was related to the bodily expression of grief and mourning. In traditional funeral rituals, people were supposed to weep, to pull their hair, to stomp, and to perform all sorts of externalized bodily expressions of mourning in a cacophony of sound and chaos. The harder you cried, the more filial you were (R. Watson 1989). If you could not do these things yourself on cue, you could even hire someone to do them for you (or to amplify your own performance). Ritualized wailing and professional weepers were prominent parts of traditional Han Chinese funerals (J. Watson 1989). Memorial meetings, however, would be halted if someone, especially one of the chief mourners, outwardly expressed his or her grief without showing severe self-restraint. In one memorial meeting I attended, the wife of the deceased began wailing before the meeting had even started. Chen Ting pulled her and her son to the side after she realized that this lady did not seem to want to stop. She told them, “It is ok if you want to cry now. I understand. But later when we actually start the memorial meeting, you have to control yourself. Both of you want this memorial meeting to go on, right? If this is the case, then we have to control
ourselves no matter how sad we are.” Uncontrolled crying, blubbery and wailing are seen as disruptive and inappropriate for the operation of a memorial meeting. Of course, the bereaved can cry tears and sob softly during the performance, and they often did. Yet once the bereaved started to show strong outward expressions of emotion before the memorial meeting had finished, funeral professionals always spoke out to stop them.

The incompatibility of outward expressions of grief and mourning and memorial meetings is probably best described in another funeral I saw. The deceased of this memorial meeting was a man who died in his fifties—a rather young age in Shanghai. This family was originally from Heilongjiang, a province in northeast China. The direct descendants all wore a full set of traditional mourning dress. This itself already made them very noticeable in Huangpu Funeral Parlor since everyone else wore normal clothes with the addition of a black armband. A more elaborate version I saw was for people to wrap coarse (almost burlap) clothes around their waist in addition to having the black armbands. I saw this only occasionally. However, this family was the first (and also the last) time I saw people wearing traditional mourning dress at Huangpu. The outward expression of mourning in full body dress made other people at the parlor give this family second glances and sometimes even extra long sideways stares. I actually happened to walk next to this group on their way to the meeting hall from the main entrance. While walking, I saw many people (who came to join other memorial meetings) blatantly turn their heads around to look at this family even after they had passed us. At some point, I even heard three women who were passing by make a comment in Shanghainese. One said, “Oh, no wonder. These people speak Mandarin.” The unspoken meaning of this
comment was that this group was not Shanghainese. They were outsiders and therefore less modern. For these three ladies, the “backward” status of being non-Shanghai people explained the full body traditional mourning dress.

Later, after everyone finished lining up and right before the meeting started, Chen Ting went to the back room to bring the deceased in so they could actually start the meeting. However, as soon as Chen Ting and the deceased entered the meeting hall from the back, the people who stood in the first three rows (all wearing the traditional mourning dress) suddenly knelt down and started to weep loudly. It all happened so fast. Having seen emotional control over and over again, I totally did not expect I would see this kind of outburst at Huangpu. However, equally fast was Lu Yang’s reaction (he happened to be in charge of that meeting hall as well on that day). He ran to the front center of the Hall (facing the crowd) and almost yelled at the bereaved. He said, “All of you stand up! Don’t kneel down. This looks really inappropriate. Stop crying! This looks really bad. How could we have a memorial meeting when you [chief mourners] cry like this. Control yourself. We are at a funeral parlor.” Lu Yang was probably the only one who “dared” to say things like this to the bereaved. After all, he was a state practitioner in a broker-run memorial meeting. Aghast as Chen Ting was, there was no way that funeral brokers would dare to yell at their customers in this way.

Moreover, funeral professionals clearly saw a direct link between this highly constrained emotional expression and class. On another day, on the way from the meeting hall back to the office, Chen Ting and I had the following conversation.

Me: This memorial meeting was really calm.
Chen Ting: That’s because we’re in Huangpu.
Me: What do you mean by that?
Chen Ting: Well, Huangpu is like a five-star hotel, it is a five-star parlor compared with other parlors. Thus, people who have funerals here are generally those having more “culture” and better “quality” (素質). Have you ever been to other funeral parlors? If you have been there, you would see many more memorial meetings with people “crying loudly and making noise” (大哭大鬧).
Me: Do you mean that crying is bad for a proper memorial meeting?
Chen Ting: Yes, of course. Crying ruins the solemn atmosphere of a memorial meeting.
Me: What kind of memorial meeting do you think is more popular in Shanghai? The “crying loudly and making noise” one or the calm one?
Chen Ting: I think I’ve seen a lot more calm ones since most of my clients had funerals in Huangpu. I would say that six out of ten funerals I’ve seen were like this calm one.

Chen Ting’s comments on associating Huangpu with a five-star hotel, “culture,” and “quality” shows that she linked class (both in terms of economic and educational difference) with the ability of controlling emotion.

Overall, most memorial meetings I attended were calm and solemn. I am not saying that the bereaved did not cry; they did. They just cried in controlled ways. For example, it was not uncommon to see the bereaved’s representative sobbing by the end of the thank you speech (even having used a template!). However, the vast majority of the bereaved’s representatives could finish reading the speech, despite showing some grief. In fact, there was only one memorial meeting that I attended where the bereaved could not finish his speech. He did not wail in the sense of weeping. He was sobbing uncontrollably so that he could not say anything. This particular funeral was an unusual one. The deceased was a young woman, the only child of her parents, who had died at 24
years of age due to cancer.\textsuperscript{192} This funeral was actually the youngest deceased’s funeral I attended during my fieldwork. Even though traditional funerals prohibit the parents from participating in their children’s funeral (because dying before your parents is considered an extremely unfilial act), Shanghai people today generally go to their children’s funerals when such tragedies happen. They just cannot bow to their children. For this young lady’s funeral, her family decided to let the deceased’s mother’s sister’s husband read the thank you speech. This uncle (from the deceased’s perspective) was so sad that he could not finish reading his speech. Even though the speech was not that different from other thank you speeches, he barely finished reading the first paragraph. He paused many times but he still could not get the words out of his mouth. In the end he asked a state practitioner (this funeral was operated by state practitioners directly) to read the speech for him.

In other words, memorial meetings forced grieving bodies to move in a way that was calm, solemn, and restrained. Crying is tolerated only as long as people cannot really hear you. There was definitely no space for ritualized weeping sorts of bodily movements or uncontrolled bodily expressions of emotion. In this sense, the kind of “emotion regime” (Reddy 2001) present in memorial meetings is very different from that in traditional death rituals. In memorial meetings, the proper emotion regime is a more Puritan-like one that emphasizes self-control, calm, and solemnity.

\textsuperscript{192} While the uncle and the deceased might be personally close, I want to point out that the loss of a singleton child was already one of the worst kinds of death in Shanghai. In fact, I was told that dying young combined with being an only child often predicted a high potential of having a “failed” funeral (meaning that people could not and did not want to organize funerals at all.)
Bowing

One of the most prominent bodily movements described in Wang Dashan’s memorial meeting was the act of bowing. Recall how Chen Ting bowed to the participants once as she opened up the ritual. And then both the work unit representative and Shaoquan bowed three times to the deceased and one time to the bereaved right before and right after they gave their respective speeches. Later, everyone bowed to Wang Dashan in unison. Finally, when people performed the farewell ceremony in small groups they also bowed to the deceased three times. Before I discuss the act of bowing in more general terms, let me say a few words about this “three bows to the deceased and one bow to the mourners,” the three and one bowing rule. People often don’t know about this rule unless they are told about it in advance by funerary professionals (this is especially so since funeral MCs do not verbally direct the work unit and the bereaved’s representatives when they bow right before and right after giving speeches). Even the work unit representatives, who in theory have more experience in attending memorial meetings, also often have to be told what to do by the funeral professionals before the memorial meeting starts. Furthermore, not every funeral professional bothered to remind people about this rule and some do not follow it. I have seen funerals (operated by state practitioners and funeral brokers) where speech givers bowed three times to both the deceased and the bereaved. According to Chen Ting, the three and one distinction is important because “the deceased is the most important” (*sizhe weida* 死者為大) at his or her own funeral. The three bows therefore should be reserved for the deceased only. Funeral brokers in Longevity always reminded the work unit and family representatives
about this rule before the memorial meeting started. Chen Ting even felt that if any of the representatives accidentally bowed three times to the participants, it might make those few who do know the rule upset since people could interpret this act as a sort of curse.

Nevertheless, while the three and one rule is not consistently implemented in Shanghai, there is no doubt that everyone bows. The act of bowing is the most frequently repeated bodily movement in memorial meetings. Yet, bowing is not performed in traditional Han Chinese death rituals. Traditionally, prostration (also known as \textit{kowtowing}) was the proper bodily movement to show respect in funerals. Just as common people prostrate themselves to the emperor, so too must sons and daughters prostrate themselves to their parents not only in funerals, but also in all kinds of rituals. Prostration was a bodily representation of a hierarchical relationship as well as one site where performance actually produces such relationships. Andrew Kipnis (1997) argues that \textit{kowtowing} and the rules for who \textit{kowtows} to whom produces the membership of social groups and the relationships among members.

During funeral reform campaigns in 1950s and 1960s, instead of governing all the possible bodily performances by the living for the dead, state practitioners’ primary goal was to persuade the bereaved to accept five rules that were summarized in a campaign slogan called the “Five Replacements” (\textit{wuyi wudai 五以五代}) during its funeral reform campaign prior to the beginning of Cultural Revolution. They were: using cremation to replace body burial, using flowers and wax fruit to replace the burning of spiritual money and offerings of candles and incense, using black arm bands and yellow flowers to replace traditional whole body mourning garments, using three bows to replace
kowtowing, and using memorial meetings to replace old funerary rites. It was in this context that state practitioners started to urge people to bow instead of perform prostrations under the CCP.

The Communist Party’s attempt to replace prostrations with bowing was meant to transform this embodied hierarchy to a reinforcement of equality. To be clear, the CCP was not the first modernist regime to promote bowing. The Republican government announced its own reforms to replace prostration with bows as the proper way of interacting both among the living and between the living and the dead as early as 1912 (Xiang 1992: 22). However, the CCP’s removal of kowtowing in these public sacrifices (and in all other modernist family rituals) was not simply the abolishment of a “feudal” practice that honors hierarchical relationships, but also the elimination of an emphasis on the social relationships themselves (Kipnis 1997). This is consistent with the CCP’s effort to erase horizontal ties after its take over. In Chapter 3, I also discussed such attempts through an examination of the nationalization of funeral institutions. Such efforts were meant to create a direct link between atomized individuals and the state without any intermediate links such as lineages, religious affiliations, native place associations and so on. It is worth pointing out, however, that this attempt has never been completely successful in reality. The relatively easy revival of horizontal ties in the post reform era has even further proven that this attempt was more a fiction than anything real (cf. Yan 1996; Yang 1994, Kipnis 1997).
Memorial Meetings as a Site of Subject Formation

One of the Five Replacements was to promote memorial meetings. At that time, state practitioners called the kind of memorial meetings promoted in funeral parlors *gongji yishi* (公祭儀式) meaning “public sacrifices.” The Nationalist government developed public sacrifice for its civil servants, martyrs, and national heroes in its effort to promote a simple and uniform civic ceremony (Nedostup 2010: 251-253) because in a Republic no one was to be as different in stature as an Emperor and his subjects. The specific procedures of a public sacrifice ceremony in 1959 in Shanghai were as follows:

Step 1: The bereaved family members (and later, relatives and friends as well) offer wreaths and flowers.
Step 2: The bereaved family members, and then relatives and friends respectively, bow to the deceased three times and then stand to the side (the deceased’s immediate family members stand next to the body).
Step 3: Everyone stands up facing the deceased and commemorates them in silence for three minutes while playing the funeral dirge.
Step 4: The bereaved family members then introduce the life history of the deceased to the participants.
Step 5: Relatives and friends may give speeches.

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193 Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration 上海市殯葬管理處. N.d. Shanghai minzhengshi xiabian chugao 上海民政史下編初稿 [Draft of the history of the Shanghai civil governance II], pp.14, CFIPL archive.
194 Memorial meetings, the usage of black armbands, and wreaths all showed up in China even before the establishment of the Republican government in 1911. The Republicans’ new ritual guidance also suggested for men to wear black armbands and women to wear black knots on their chests, using wreaths, and replacing the photograph of the deceased with a tablet with their name. For the ceremonial part, the playing of military style music, offering flowers, and reading of an obituary were listed as new and properly modern funeral rites. Republican ritual regulation is exemplified in “Record of Bei Quan Ritual Discussion” (Beiquan Liyilu 北泉禮儀錄) published on October 3, 1943. Also, public sacrifice is still practiced in Taiwan. Taiwanese in general distinguish public sacrifice from family sacrifice (*jiaji* 家祭)—something that many Shanghai funeral professionals considered to be a better way of doing funerals.
Step 6: Everyone then walks around the body once to say goodbye to the deceased.\textsuperscript{195}

If we compare memorial meetings in 2011 with the public sacrifice ceremony from 1959, we can see that they actually appear to be very similar. The most obvious similarity is in the overall ritual procedure. Other continuities include bowing to the deceased three times, commemorating them in silence while playing a dirge, and family members giving speeches to introduce the life history of the deceased to the participants. Moreover, Step 6 in the public sacrifice that describes everyone walking around the body to say goodbye to the deceased is Step 6 in memorial meetings, now known as the farewell ceremony. Overall, bodily performances in public sacrifice and in memorial meetings are more or less the same.

However, there were also differences. For example, we can see that public sacrifice commemorates the deceased through giving offerings and narratives (see Step 1). The objects of offerings were wreaths and flowers rather than incense, spiritual money, or anything that suggests the possible needs of the deceased in an afterlife. The deceased is treated as already gone, living only in the memories of the living, rather than as co-existing with the living and still requiring money, food, and companions; who therefore needs to be pacified, transformed, and re-incorporated. This was actually still a part of 2011 memorial meetings. Mourners still gave wreaths and flowers today, but the

\textsuperscript{195} Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration 上海市殯葬管理處. N.d. Shanghai minzhengshi xiabian chugao 上海民政史下編初稿 [Draft of the history of the Shanghai civil governance II], pp.42,42, Library of the Chinese Funeral and Interment Profession, Shanghai, China.
act of giving (offering) itself was not ritualized. This part was done before the beginning of a memorial meeting.

The important change that emerged when comparing the two was the presence of work units and their reading of a memorial speech. There was no mention of work units giving speeches in the public sacrifice described above. It simply says “relatives and friends may give a speech.” This difference is crucial because the memorial speech is the most important step in memorial meetings in Shanghai today. In fact, Shanghai funeral professionals even maintained that funerals without memorial speeches are not memorial meetings. Instead, they are memorial services (zhuisihui 追思會) or merely farewell ceremonies. In Shanghai funeral professionals’ jargon, memorial services only have a thank you speech. Farewell ceremonies, on the other hand, have no formal speeches. These last two situations did not happen often. They were usually associated with abnormal deaths.

What makes a speech a memorial speech (instead of any other kind of speech) is determined by the identity of the speakers. These speakers have to represent the work unit of the deceased. If the deceased did not have a work unit, but the bereaved still wanted to have a memorial meeting, then a representative from the deceased's residential area.

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196 I was told at one point that people in Beijing did not follow this categorization. There seem to be regional differences as well. I once heard a bereaved out-of-towner family member argue with a state practitioner right before his father’s funeral. He questioned why the practitioner used the term “zhuidaohui” instead of “gaobie yishi” for the memorial meeting. The practitioner asked him if there would be a memorial speech given in the funeral. The son said yes. The practitioner then told him that in this case this is a zhuidaohui. The son replied, but in Beijing where I live, we don’t call this zhuidaohui. We called it gaobie yishi. The practitioner insisted that as long as memorial speeches and thank you speeches were involved, it was a zhuidaohui, not a gaobie yishi. This tedious quarrel was solved by an agreement that it must just be a “Shanghai” way of doing things.
committee (juweihui 居委會) could give a memorial speech. To be clear, who counts as the representative of the deceased’s work unit is not entirely unambiguous today. The default representative is the representative of the deceased’s last work unit prior to his or her official retirement. However, Chen Yu told me that today many people are hired again after their official retirement, especially those who were relatively high up in an industry. As a result, it is not uncommon for the deceased’s final work unit before death to claim the right to give the speech instead. The second complication relates to how promotion works. In state-related organizations and companies, employees could only move up or stay at the same level. It was rare to ever move down.\textsuperscript{197} However, when a leader was about to retire, his/her work unit needed to sort out their succession issues before the actual retirement without demoting this person. The usual alternative was to transfer the (now) former leader to another parallel organization and make him or her the Party leader of that new organization for the last two years of his or her career. Since Party leaders enjoy a higher status than administrative leaders (thus, for instance, the Party Secretary of the Shanghai Government is of a higher rank than the Mayor of Shanghai), this arrangement allowed for the promotion of the about-to-retire leader without endangering the succession process. When this person dies, although the last work unit before the retirement has the right to deliver a memorial speech, the work unit where the deceased actually spent most of his or her life often demanded a much bigger role in the memorial meeting. These two possibilities were further complicated in recent

\textsuperscript{197} Shanghai depends much more on a state-centered economy than their southern counterparts such as Guangzhou. In 2004, 61.6\% of Shanghai’s economy depended on state capital, 24.9\% came from foreign capital and 13.5\% from private Chinese capital. See Gong, Guo-guang and Li, Xian-li 2007.
times with the rapid changes in Shanghai's economy where many work units will have been transformed, partially privatized, or spun off into different companies multiple times. Should a former high ranking state employee be memorialized by a party representative in the now private company that her work unit became since her retirement or by someone in the bureau her state position originally reported to?

Nevertheless, only Party-state institutions such as work units could give memorial speeches. Even if the content of the speech is exactly the same, when it is given by someone else, this speech could no longer be a memorial speech. And without a memorial speech, the funeral would not count as a memorial meeting. In this sense, what had been more of a family ritual (public sacrifice in 1959) became a Party-state centered ritual afterward. As a result, one wonders what happened to memorial meetings between 1959 and today that made work units and their memorial speeches so essential that the lack of them could render a funeral in its most important sense, not a funeral?

To answer this, I would like to quote a long interview I had with Master Gao. Master Gao entered the Shanghai funeral industry in 1959 at the age of 14. He first worked in one of the only five funeral homes left after the FID’s nationalization of all funeral homes in the early 1950s. When the Red Guards shut down all funeral homes and cemeteries at the end of December 1966 as the Cultural Revolution began, Gao was transferred to Longhua Crematorium—one of the only two funeral facilities still open in Shanghai at that time. Due to construction, Longhua did not actually open to the public until July 1, 1967, six months after the closing of all funeral homes in Shanghai. Master Gao said:
Gao: No, no, the kind of funeral in 1965 was different from the current kind (memorial meetings). In 1965 when I was still at Peace Funeral Home, we still did superstitions.

Me: Do you mean that there was no work unit giving memorial speeches in 1965?

Gao: No, no work unit gave memorial speeches in 1965. […]

Our current ritual, the memorial meeting kind of ritual, originated from pingfan zhaoxue (平反昭雪, meaning “righting the wrongs and rehabilitating the disgraced”) during the Cultural Revolution. That was the Cultural Revolution. There were a lot of injustices (yuan 冤). So many people needed pingfan zhaoxue. This is how memorial meetings actually started. […]

When the Cultural Revolution began, you could not do the old stuff anymore. So in the beginning [of the Cultural Revolution], people came [to Longhua Crematorium] for funerals simply “took a look and had a cry” (kanyikan, kuyiku 看一看哭一哭). Some may have bowed once (jugegong 鞠個躬). Then they pushed the bodies to the cremation units to burn them. We did not know what to do after we could not do the old stuff anymore. […] There was no coffin. Coffins were superstition. You put dead bodies in bags and then burned them. […]

Nothing really. No ritual (yishi 儀式). Only “taking a look and having a cry.” Everything was simple. Then some work units did rehabilitation here [at Longhua Crematorium]. We [state practitioners] soon learned that this way of doing ritual was how you could do [it, then]. So later when the bereaved came to ask us how to do a funeral, we told them about this kind. I would say that memorial meetings [with memorial speeches] started to show up in Longhua in the second half of 1968.

From Master Gao’s words, we can see that the goals of Transforming Customs and Changing Habits Campaign were never fully realized in Shanghai until the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Like he said, “we still did superstitions.” First, the campaign did not last all that long. I estimate that it lasted about one year and probably no more than two. Second, it is hard to estimate how many people actually adopted public
sacrifice. One Funeral and Interment Administration internal report claims that in April and May 1960, 50% of the bereaved accepted the Five Replacements.\textsuperscript{198} Even assuming this number is plausible, this actually indicates that \textit{only} 50% of the bereaved accepted something from the Five Replacements.\textsuperscript{199} This is because several senior funeral practitioners told me that when they negotiated with the bereaved at that time, they had to negotiate the changes one by one rather than getting anyone to accept the Five Replacements as a package deal. Whether the 50% success rate is accurate or not, one thing is for sure: this was when and how modernist funeral ritual acts, for the first time, actually began to take root, albeit slowly, in funeral institutions in Shanghai. It was during this transitional process, negotiated between the bereaved and state funeral practitioners, that these modern bodily movements in death ritual were defined and enacted. However, as the Red Guards broke in to smash coffins in funeral parlors and dig up graves in the cemeteries starting from December 1966 in their attempts at “breaking of the Four Old” (destroy anything that represented superstition or rightist “feudalism”), suddenly no elements of traditional death rituals were allowed in crematoria. As a result, Shanghai people were left with no ritual. Until the popularization of work units making memorial speeches, all the bereaved had was “taking a look and having a cry” and “having a single bow”. This reference to bowing also reinforces my analysis on how bowing had become the most important bodily movement in memorial meetings.

\textsuperscript{198} Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration 上海市殯葬管理處. 1960. Shanghai Binzang shiye de yixie qingkuang 上海殯葬事業的一些情況 [The general condition of Shanghai funeral and interment industry], Library of the Chinese Funeral and Interment Profession, Shanghai, China.

\textsuperscript{199} In Chapter 3, I described this campaign for cremation in detail. Cremation is one of these Five Replacements.
The spread of the memorial meeting from the Party to become common usage among the people provided a new ritual imbued with deep new meanings and consequences for notions of socialist personhood. I once asked the Vice Chair of the Shanghai Funeral Culture Institute, Xin Bingyong (忻秉勇) about the actual popularization of memorial meetings in Shanghai. He had never worked in funeral parlors so he did not necessarily know how things evolved on the ground. But he also told me that despite Mao calling for memorial meetings as early as the 1940s (as shown in his Serve the People speech), memorial meetings did not actually emerge in Shanghai as the default ritual until the Cultural Revolution. Questions about political rehabilitation occupied the Cultural Revolution from its earliest stages (Barme 1993; Lee 1978:309-312). Most debates over political rehabilitation were about the living, but some were about the dead.

To understand how memorial meetings could rehabilitate (pingfan zhaoxue) the dead, we need to know what kinds of people qualified to have memorial meetings in the first place. Recalling Serve the People, Mao said that no matter if the deceased was a soldier or a cook, as long as he “has done some useful work” he deserves “a funeral ceremony and a memorial meeting in his honor.” Mao aimed to create a disjuncture between locating the deceased in hierarchical relationships and locating him in a new location of equal comradeship. This equality-based commemoration was to eventually become a standard practice not only among people in “our ranks” (i.e., the Party), but also among “the people” in general. As such, the only distinction allowed was to separate “the people” from those who weren’t. This distinction is determined by whether you
work for “the people” or for “the fascists, exploiters, and oppressors.” If you work for “the people” even if you die in a politically insignificant event or serve in a menial job, your death is worthy and meaningful. This is why dying in an accident as unremarkable and undistinguished as getting caught under a falling kiln can still count as “dying for the people.” However, if you work for the fascists, exploiters, and oppressors, even if you die in the middle of political duty, you die for nothing and did not deserve a memorial meeting. These latter were not “the people.” Consequently, to be a part of the people meant to be socialist, and vice versa. Being a non-socialist rendered you neither “of” the people nor “for” the people. Personhood and citizenship here coalesce; the denial of the latter also denies you the former. This is also why the word comrade is used so frequently in memorial speeches. Comrade, citizen, and person were merged into one single concept in memorial meetings.

As a result, politically problematic people, who were often labeled “ox demons and snake spirits” (niugi sheshen 牛鬼蛇神), could not have (official) funerals; their identities were obliterated. They were not people. Such identity labels themselves were ironic because, despite the CCP’s efforts to remove “superstitions,” this political vocabulary was borrowed directly from Buddhist demonology and Mao himself “was responsible for the revival of demonic symbolism as a whole” in the Chinese political lexicon (Ji 2004:195). Nevertheless, as non-people, their deaths did not deserve funerals (memorial meetings) and need not (read “could not”) be mourned because the death of the people’s enemy should be celebrated (R. Watson 1994). Some people even died without any recognition at all. They were cremated under pseudonyms and their families
did not know about it until years later. One informant told me that every once in a while she and her colleagues went to a beach outside Shanghai to “deep bury” (shenmai 深埋) unclaimed cremated remains collectively at that time. Those cremains often were cremated under a fake identity and buried in a mixture of undifferentiated ashes whose identity was completely scattered like the sand around them.

Consequently, for those who were wrongfully accused, memorial meetings were their final chance to regain personhood no matter if they were newly dead or had long gone from the living world. The mere fact of having a memorial meeting with a work unit agreeing to deliver a memorial speech already indicated that the deceased was rehabilitated. What was actually said in the memorial meeting was therefore less important than the fact of having a memorial meeting in the first place. By the same token, if your work unit did not give you a memorial speech even if you were a part of the People when you were alive, this refusal effectively removed you from humanity. You became non-human. This postmortem evaluation thus had the power to officially override whatever you had accomplished when you were alive.

It is in this sense that I argue regardless of who the deceased really were, what the bereaved believed about who the deceased were, and whether the memorial meetings transformed the deceased into an authentic socialist subject, the act of performing such ritualized, externalized, formalized, and convention based socialist rituals effectively constructs socialist subjectivity in the public domain. Death Ritual here is a site of subject formation for both the living and the dead. Catherine Bell points to this as “the simple imperative to do something in such a way that the doing itself gives the acts a
special or privileged status” (1997:166). Ritual is performative in that it does something rather than says something. What it does in this particular case is to construct socialist subjectivity for these already dead bodies by carrying out an act of public commitment that allows dead bodies to re-enter, remain, or be excluded from the social world of proper persons, meaning socialist citizen subjects.

It is equally important to point out, however, that the bereaved may in private reject the socialist subjectivity constructions that are asserted in memorial meetings. Robert Hefner (1985) has shown that public culture does not equal individual subjectivity. It is just one aspect that shapes an individual’s subjectivity. Therefore, when I say that the ritual acts of living bodies, socialism’s promise of temporal rupture, and its sacred texts encoded in verbal utterances and musical sounds construct the public aspect of (dead bodies’) subjectivity by transforming dead bodies into proper persons, I am making a much more limited claim about subjectivity. What I mean is that this public act is highly significant for societal reproduction of socialist subjectivities among the people in the public domain. Yet, this ritual need not be the only way to produce (and reproduce) socialist subjectivity. This is not even mentioning that socialist subjectivity is here by no means the only kind of subjectivity in contemporary memorial meetings. I will discuss the potential for and emergence of pluralist subject formations within socialist civil funeral in the following two chapters.

Finally, constructing dead bodies’ socialist subjectivity in memorial meetings is not merely symbolic. It had real social impact on the living. This was because bad status categories (landlord, counter-revolutionary, or capitalist) were largely inherited in China.
So if you were a counter-revolutionary, all of your nuclear family members would be classified as such as well, and their children too could be so classified. Consequently, once a dead non-person was rehabilitated, all his/her living family members would be rehabilitated as well. This is why there were so many memorial meetings for people who were already long gone.

This is rather ironic because Mao’s idea for a funeral, though memorializing the dead, was meant to be for the living only. Unlike traditional funerals which are oriented toward transforming corpses into ancestors (cf. Puett 2013), the socialist funeral was productive and valued not because the ancestors would later bless their descendents, but because the living transformed their mourning into revolutionary acts and integrated themselves further into the socialist world. The dead's devotion to the revolution was to “unite the people.” The productivity of the funeral was not to bring prosperity to the deceased’s family, but rather to bring about the continued construction of a socialist state by accepting its pre-eminence in memorializing the dead. In a truly satirical twist, as it turned out rehabilitation through the socialist memorial meeting was much more immediately effective in bringing prosperity to the deceased’s descendents than the traditional death ritual’s creation of benevolent ancestors ever had been!

**Memorial Meetings as Dissonance**

Memorial meetings are the default death ritual in urban Shanghai today. This is the primary time and place where the deceased is represented and where commemoration is performed in public. The defining characteristic of memorial meetings is their
memorial speech. Whether or not the bereaved actually like memorial meetings or believe what is being said and done in them, the memorial meeting is what the bereaved want for their recently departed relatives (mainly their parents). This despite the fact that this format is no longer required. I sat through countless business meetings between the bereaved and funeral professionals (both state funeral practitioners and private funeral agents). When funeral professionals asked if there would be a memorial speech given by a representative of the deceased’s work unit, the grieving family members often made a face as if the question was silly. They responded as quickly as possible, “yes, of course.”

This taken-for-grantedness is critical for a variety of reasons. For one, the right to and responsibility for organizing funerals has been returned from work units to families ever since the Reform period initiated at the end of the 1970s. The rapid changes that have taken place in work units through privatization, restructuring and the increase in private space over the last three decades have eroded the previous relationship of the domination of the work unit over individuals in urban China (cf. Davis et al. 1995; Lu and Perry 1997; Zhang and Ong 2008). The bereaved no longer need permission from work units to organize funerals. Work unit representatives also no longer show up at memorial meetings unless they are invited, technically speaking. In fact, most work units would not even know about such deaths if the deceased's families did not notify them. Yet, in reality, most bereaved “bothered” to invite work units to deliver memorial speeches. This means that the bereaved are not forced to follow memorial meetings as they were at the peak of the Cultural Revolution.
Furthermore, the CCP actually has issued several documents to discourage memorial meetings since the end of the Cultural Revolution, especially with regard to high-ranking cadres. The politically correct trend, for party members especially, is now not to have memorial meetings. In 1980, the CCP released a statement that prohibited Party members from having a memorial speech. Point Five of the statement says, “in the last few years, in order to pingfan zhaoxue those old comrades who were wrongfully accused, we had a lot of grand memorial meetings. This situation should be close to an end now. We should not spend so much labor force and money on it.” This central government policy could be understood at two levels. The first is related to the CCP, as a modernist regime, having always wanted to simplify ritual. Investment in ritual, both in time and money, is seen as a kind of waste. It not only fails to contribute to production and to the material well-being of the people, but also takes away the fruits of production (it wastes money!). The second is related to the political consequences of memorial meetings. Death in China has often been a powerful symbol for protest. The two relatively recent big political movements in China, the Tiananmen Incident in 1976 and the Tiananmen Democracy Protests in 1989, both started as people mourned recently deceased leaders: Zhou Enlai and Hu Yaobang respectively (R. Watson 1994). This power of death combined with the power to rehabilitate makes memorial meetings particularly dangerous moments as mourners were allowed to witness an authoritarian regime admitting its mistakes (not explicitly, but through the holding of the ritual itself).

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200 The General Office of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee 中共中央辦公廳. 1980. zhonggong zhongyang guanyu jianchi shaoxuanchuan geren de jigewenti de zhishi 中共中央關於堅持少宣傳個人的幾個問題的指示 [Regarding avoiding propaganda for individuals].
in public. The seemingly counterintuitive combination of descriptions of ritual as wasteful, but also politically dangerous suggests that the CCP was well aware of ritual’s efficacy even if it denied it. As a result, the CCP’s governing on ritual actually gave ritual more power than previous regimes had done.\(^\text{201}\)

Shanghai funeral parlors, however, decided to interpret the central government’s effort to ban memorial meetings as merely a means of regulating high ranking cadres. According to the Funeral and Interment Administration’s internal documents, officials decided to continue holding memorial meetings in Shanghai funerals (since they had already been popularized) because “memorial meetings are better than superstitious traditional funerals after all.”\(^\text{202}\) Shanghai funeral governing institutions chose to focus on treating Shanghai people as religious subjects who needed to be governed instead of as political subjects. In the last ten years or so, as discussed in the last chapter, Shanghai funeral governing institutions have further chosen to promote personalized funerals. However, what we see today is that Shanghai people overwhelmingly choose to die socialist (in addition to embracing religious aspects, as I will discuss in the next chapters). By continuing to perform stylized socialist memorial rituals, Shanghai people

\(^{201}\) Another example is the traditional use of suicide by Han Chinese women as a means to level powerful accusations (M. Wolf 1975).

\(^{202}\) Shanghai Funeral and Interment Administration 上海市殯葬管理處. 1984. Zhenfenjingshen, maikaigaigebufa 振奮精神邁開改革步伐 [Stepping forward to the reform], Library of the Chinese Funeral and Interment Profession, Shanghai, China. On page 7, the text says: “Regarding the No. 75 Document (the one asking party members to not have memorial meetings, see details in Chapter 4), it asks people not to keep cremains nor have memorial meetings. We should understand No. 75 Document correctly. This was meant to solve internal Party issues. This was to correct the Party line [within the Party]. The intention was to have “There are no good people in criticism meetings and there are no bad people in memorial meetings” (pipinghuishang wuhaoren, zhuidaohuishang wuhuairen 批評會上無好人，追悼會上無壞人). As for ordinary people’s funeral and interment issues, we cannot fix this in any short term period. Having memorial meetings is better than having feudalist superstition.”
constructed the subjectivity of dead bodies as socialist citizen subjects, in spite of the stated opposition of the government itself.

Performing stylized rituals is not new in the history of Chinese funerals. What’s new here is what memorial meetings index—socialist ideas of person. This then brings out two fundamental questions: what if the deceased had never lived the way that the narratives describe? What if the bereaved do not believe the content of their verbal utterances? These are questions I am asked all the time from fellow anthropologists and other people in China. These two questions reveal two important assumptions about rituals both in social life and in ritual theory. Does ritual simply stand as the antithesis of authenticity and sincerity and therefore is it irrelevant to understanding what being a person means? For the latter, if ritual by definition is an “inauthentic” representation of self and even of culture at large, then how can we analyze ritual beyond an interpretative paradigm that searches for the symbolic meanings of rituals?

To be clear, when I say that memorial meetings construct socialist subjectivity for dead bodies, I do not mean that by performing memorial meetings, the deceased somehow magically becomes an “authentic” socialist subject (no matter what we mean by authenticity) or that the bereaved somehow sincerely come to believe their beloved are now good socialists. What asserts socialist subjectivity is the act of accepting social conventions that existed before and beyond those individuals. Through modernist bodily movements (bowing instead of prostration, solemn and calmly expression of grief and mourning) and socialist verbal utterance (socialist dirge, stylized memorial speech, and thank you speech), funeral participants temporarily “pretend” that they are all model
socialist citizens. It is this act of pretending that allows ritual participants to momentarily enter a socialist subjunctive world (Seligman et al. 2008) where everyone lives as if they are model socialist citizens. Consequently, issues of sincerity and authenticity are less important if not outright irrelevant. What matters is the commitment to accept such social conventions during the ritual performance (Rappaport 1999).

As a result, ritual should be seen as a cognitive frame that provides “a spatial and temporal bonding of a set of interactive messages” (Bateson 1972 [2000]). Such a cognitive frame allows ritual participants to conceptualize words and behaviors performed in ritual in a way that is different from those enacted outside of ritual. To use Bateson’s examples, by evoking “this is a play,” participants would understand the same act of fist fighting as a play rather than a fight. Phrases evoked in memorial meetings, whether they are based on socialist time, person, and ethics, were not meant to be an authentic representation of the deceased or an indication of the bereaved's beliefs about the deceased, but rather to emphasize the presence of the work unit and therefore to underline the socialist humanity of the deceased. This was why memorial speeches (and thank you speeches in this regard as well) are so often based on templates. Many funeral professionals told me that when work units get memorial meeting requests, they simply take out the deceased’s dossier (dang’an 檔案) and fill in the blanks based on their own templates.203

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203 This is in addition to the fact that representatives of the deceased’s last work unit usually did not actually know the deceased in person in the case of a normal death. This is mainly because of age differences and possible differences in rank that date back to the time when the deceased was still working in the unit.
Consequently, those words and actions spoken and enacted during memorial meetings do not contain denotative meanings that connect the words to the person they addressed. What is being “communicated” is the frame of ritual (Goffman 1974). It is in this sense that Bateson says that ritual is always meta-communicative (Bateson 2000). This lack of denotative meanings is one crucial characteristic that I will continue to discuss in the next two chapters.

Since ritual is always meta-communicative, this means that the moment of “pretending” to be socialist is also the moment that makes people realize that they are actually not socialist (otherwise they would not have to pretend). Entering this subjunctive world de-naturalizes the social reality outside the frame of the ritual. In Shanghai, people have been through rapid social change over the last three decades. The change has been especially dramatic since 1992 when Deng Xiaoping reaffirmed a commitment to continue to deepen economic reform during his Southern Tour (Shanghai was one of his stops) as well as since the implementation of the Pudong New District project that eventually transformed Shanghai into a world financial center of the PRC today. As a result, Ellen Hertz’s (1998) ethnography of Shanghai’s “stock fever” in the 1990s was much closer to Shanghai people’s reality in 2011 (when I did my fieldwork) than idealist socialist visions performed in memorial meetings. Shanghai in 2011 was a cosmopolitan city where residents spoke with great pride over their hosting of the 2010 World Expo just on the heels of the grand 2008 Beijing Olympics. Shanghai’s everyday is probably everything but socialist. In this sense, memorial meetings strike a dissonant chord in a modernist, neoliberal social reality.
Dissonance in this sense is a challenge, but not a rebellion; a dissonant note violently disrupts taken for granted harmony, but does so only for a moment and then it, too, is gone. Yet it provides a striking alternative in making everyone, for that moment, outwardly pretend they are model socialist citizens. This ritually framed and constructed subjectivity, at the same time, allows boundary crossing from one kind of subjectivity to others. Many scholars working in China have pointed out that an individualized self has emerged in China since the adoption of a market economy (Yan 2003; Link et al. 2002; Zhang and Ong 2008; Rofel 2007). The act of entering a subjunctive world that constructs socialist subjectivity thus simultaneously allows ritual participants to cross from market subjectivity to the performance of a socialist one in a public domain. This socialist as if ritual is particularly striking in that it occurs precisely to mark one of the major rites of passage – the moment of collective representation of the recently dead. In this sense, dying socialist is an unintended but potent act of dissonance. It provides a potential critique of contemporary Chinese neoliberal governance by recognizing alternatives. As the state itself promotes “market” governance, actual opposition to the state is less linked to a triumph of capitalism or an embrace of liberal democratic values, and more expressed by clinging to socialist rituals. This subjunctive world whereby both dead and living bodies “regain” socialist social lives therefore is both a reminder that there is more than market subjectivity and a possible source of alternatives to it, however fleeting.
CHAPTER 8 CREATING RELIGIOUS AND RELATIONAL SUBJECTIVITY FOR SOCIALIST CITIZENS

With the failure of personalized funerals, the strong historical momentum of the memorial meeting, and the ongoing desire for the memorial meeting as a haven from profiteering, I have purposefully worked in the previous chapters to leave the impression of a strong socialist presence at the end of life. Without a memorial speech and thus without a work unit or residence committee representative—both Party representatives—a funeral simply cannot be a memorial meeting. You might wonder, however, is this all there is in urban Shanghai death rituals today? What kinds of alternatives exist in subject formation in urban Chinese death ritual? If such alternatives exist, how do they work in relation to the socialist subjectivity? In this chapter, I provide an ethnographic description of these variations in memorial meetings. By exploring memorial meetings and their variations, I mean to tackle what other kinds of subjectivities are also enacted in memorial meetings and how seemingly incompatible ideas of death and dead body may co-exist.

After the Memorial Meetings End…

Recall the structure of memorial meetings discussed in the last chapter. An MC’s announcement and farewell ceremony respectively delineate the beginning and the end of the meeting. They mark the boundaries of this subjunctive socialist world. The last step of a memorial meeting is the farewell ceremony where participants take turns to have a last look at the deceased and to bow to them three times. Prior to the Reform and
Opening Up, funeral practitioners would then zip up the body bags (since there were no coffins) and push the deceased to the crematoria immediately after performing the farewell ceremony.

Today, however, this “double farewell” to the deceased and to the bereaved's family members, is not the end of memorial meetings. In fact, if we use the language of music, the farewell ceremony is not even a “rest” within memorial meetings. It is more of a fading out of one movement and a fading in of the next one. If the old movement is about socialism, then the new movement is about spirits, afterlife, and social reciprocity.

Today, when the very last group of people finishes their farewell bowing, the immediate family members who were standing next to the deceased form a circle around the coffin. While the tempo of this congregating act could be fast or slow, once the circle is formed, the solemn atmosphere and highly restrained bodily movements that defined the socialist ritual suddenly break down with an outburst of tears, weeping, stomping, kneeling down, punching or shaking on or around the plastic cover over the deceased. There is no choreographed harmony in this instant moment of change; not even dissonance but only cacophony, chaos, and spontaneity. Bodies that were standing upright and straight just seconds prior all of sudden lose their proper forms and postures as if gravity has momentarily reappeared. Sometimes the outward expression of grief and mourning that were repressed earlier come out like lava from volcanic eruptions. The grief swallows both the modernist bodily movements and the socialist verbal utterances within a second as if they had not been performed so solemnly just moments earlier by the same bodies in the same space.
Just as wailing functioned as a notice of death that opened up the performance of folk death ritual in the past, wailing at this moment hails the raising of a curtain for the newly added folk death ritual within memorial meetings in modern Shanghai. When it is time to stop this moment of crying, the funeral professionals break the circle by opening the plastic cover that envelops the coffin and then push the coffin to the center of the hall. This is now the time to “place offerings” (baifang yiwu 擺放遺物). These offerings are not commemorative objects—personal belongings of the deceased while they were alive. Instead, they are religious and ritual objects. These objects are based on prior assumptions of the general existence of spirits and afterlife after the biological death. There are no personal sentiments that connect the life of the deceased and these objects.

If we pan, like a film director might, in a horizontal movement from shooting inside the meeting hall to the outside, we would see a vastly different world. The representative of the deceased’s work unit and some of the funeral participants leave the memorial meeting as soon as they perform their farewell ceremony. Other participants continue hanging out outside the meeting hall to satisfy their nicotine urge or to resume the socializing activities that were “interrupted” by the beginning of memorial meeting. Some of them stay for quite a long time because they plan to go to the funeral banquet afterward. These people have to wait outside because the immediate family members of the deceased (and anyone who wanted to stay inside the meeting hall) are still performing those post farewell ceremony events.

Inside memorial meeting halls, the exact sequence of placing offerings varies from funeral professional to funeral professional. In general, the first step is to invite one
child of the deceased to put a handkerchief and a wooden foldable fan in the deceased’s right and left palms respectively (though people only follow the right and left hand rule very loosely) so the deceased can use them in the afterlife. This was in spite of the fact that contemporary Shanghai people do not usually use handkerchiefs (most people use tissues) or foldable fans. Both objects appear to be traditional so they provide an aura of invariance—one key characteristic of ritualized actions (Bell 1997; Rappaport 1999).

Then the child of the deceased uses a wooden comb to comb the deceased’s hair three times before breaking the comb in half—one half is thrown to the floor and the other is placed in the casket. The combing and breaking of the comb symbolizes the social ties between the generations and their consequent break with death. This breaking symbolically allows the deceased to move on to the next world without lingering around in this one. The combing and breaking of the comb shows a classic image of a rite of passage (Van Gennep 1960). In professional jargon, a comb, a fan, and a handkerchief together are called the “Three Minor Things” (xiaosanjian 小三件).

After placing the Three Minor Things, the funeral professional directs the bereaved to place afterlife consumer products as well as “spiritual cash” (mingbi 冥幣) into the coffin to enhance the joy of the deceased's afterlife. The former commonly include mahjong tiles, maotai liquor, cigarettes and so on. All these afterlife consumer products are made of paper. While mahjong is usually gender neutral, maotai liquor and cigarettes are usually only for men. Spiritual cash includes cash that looks like Chinese Yuan, Hong Kong Dollars, US Dollars, Visa and Master Cards (all made of paper), or gold and silver ingots (yuanbao 元寶, made of plastic). At Longevity, funeral brokers put various kinds
of spiritual cash in one package for sales.\textsuperscript{204}

Occasionally, people place personal items used by the deceased such as her glasses or favorite chest set. I had expected such personal items to be popular. However, based on the 75 or so memorial meetings I observed, this was not the case, placing personal items was relatively rare, occurring in no more than 7% of these.

After placing the above objects, it is then time to add \textit{xibo} (錫箔), the most important kind of spiritual money, into the coffin. \textit{Xibo} are “silver” ingots made of tinfoil paper. They are used for all kinds of rituals in Shanghai, whether for salvation rituals, wake keeping, ancestor worship, or (cremains) burial ceremonies. During my fieldwork, while occasionally I saw people choosing not to use spiritual cash, almost everyone used \textit{xibo} (unless they were Protestants, see Chapter 8). In general, there needs to be enough \textit{xibo} to cover the deceased’s entire body except for the face. The bereaved (usually women and young men) often fold them by hand from special square tin foil paper during the wake. You can also purchase pre-folded \textit{xibo}. Some funeral professionals told me that handmade \textit{xibo} show more filial piety than the store bought version; therefore they might be more efficacious in granting wishes.

Prior to the Winter Solstice in 2011, I helped Chen Yu and the Longevity get ready for a night sacrifice they would perform outside their office building. In Shanghai, this day is the most “yin” day of the year—ghosts are out and about that night, wandering

\textsuperscript{204} Chen Yu told me that they used to sell spiritual cash separately. However, they found out that the bereaved did not like to choose these things one by one. The bereaved interpreted such lists of choices as the funeral brokers trying to sell more things. From funeral brokers’ perspective, they could sell spiritual cash much more easily and with higher prices after making a spiritual cash package for sale.
around in the human world. It is also one of only two annual time periods for Shanghai people to bury the cremains of their dead and to worship their ancestors (the other time was during the Tomb Sweeping Festival in April). I arrived at Longevity in the afternoon and approached Chen Yu to help her fold xibo. She told me that I could help, but instead of putting the ones I made into her existing pile, she instructed me to put mine in a separate one. I asked why. She told me that they had to be separated because her pile (of xibo) was for her ancestors, so she wanted to make them all by herself to show her filial piety so that they would then be more likely to grant her wish for prosperity. The ones I made could go to the pile for the previous “customers” of Longevity (all of the deceased for whom brokers at Longevity had previously organized funerals). These previous customers were those on whom Longevity’s livelihood depended (yishi fumu 衣食父母), since they introduced new customers to the agency from the other world.

After placing xibo, funeral professionals ask the bereaved to pick flowers from the flower baskets that were displayed on both side of the meeting hall during the meeting. They often ask the bereaved to pick the Chinese daffodils (shuixian 水仙花) from each basket because that is usually the most expensive flower in the baskets. They then put these flowers on top of the xibo so the flowers also cover the whole body (except for the head). Chen Ting often specifically tells the bereaved to pick one flower from each basket so the deceased will be accompanied by everyone’s hearts—she was very good at inventing satisfying details for directing the rituals.

The time needed to place offerings varies depending on how calm the bereaved actually are since they often cry and sometimes continue to wail during the ceremony.
Time management is important because meeting halls are booked in one hour time slots and there is only a ten minute break in between funerals for the parlor’s janitors to clean them up and set them up for the next family. Therefore, if placing the offerings takes up too much time, experienced funeral professionals call in the funeral practitioners who are responsible for bringing the coffin’s lid in before the bereaved actually finish. Once the lid arrives, the bereaved know that they have to finish placing the offerings in as soon as possible. When this is done, it is then time to put the lid on the coffin.

The professional coffin lid carriers, always men, also bring a hammer, four “descendant nails” (zisunding 子孫釘), and a “resting-in-peace covering” (安息罩) along with them. Descendant nails look like regular long nails. Nailing them is said to work as protection and as a blessing for the descendants of the deceased. Today, the descendant(s) of the deceased hammer the three nails down through the lid into three corners of the coffin. The bereaved are instructed, however, not to punch the fourth nail in all the way. Leaving the head of the nail standing out (or “rising out from the lid”) resembles a “descendant outgrowing” (zisunchutou 子孫出頭) and represents the protection of an ongoing line of descendants. The nailing is purely symbolic since the coffin will not actually be sealed and need not be airtight for the cremation.

Either the children or grand children, both male and female, of the deceased perform the act of nailing today. These four variables (children or grand children and males or females) are very flexibly combined depending on the specific funeral professionals and their ad hoc judgment based on the situation of the grieving family. For example, if the deceased only had one daughter, the daughter or the son-in-law may do
the nailing depending on different funeral professionals. Even the same funeral professional will change her “rule” based on her observations of family politics. For example, Chen Ting once made all four children of the deceased (one man and three women) do the nailing in one funeral. However, she made the grandchildren of the deceased do the nailing in another funeral. She told me that this was because the deceased had three children, but four grandchildren. Since funeral costs in Shanghai are generally split equally among children disregarding gender, she reasoned that this way avoided making a particular child more important than the others in the ritual.

The “resting-in-peace covering” is a red cloth covered with a printed Chinese character for luck or fortune (fu 福) that is used to cover the coffin after it is (symbolically) sealed. This covering prevents the deceased from being exposed to light. Since the deceased is in a liminal stage, it is vulnerable to all of the various kinds of spirits that fill the world. The act of covering someone who is in a liminal stage is very common in Chinese ritual practices. In Taiwan, for instance, when a bride walks out of her house after beginning the marital ceremony and is sent on her way to her future husband’s house to complete the wedding ceremony (thus while she is neither single nor yet fully married), she has to walk under a black umbrella so she is protected from spirits. However, it is worth pointing out that both the resting-in-peace covering and the descendant nails are not used in all funeral parlors in Shanghai. Among the three city funeral parlors, only Longhua has them. They became service items after the marketization of the parlors.

Of course, this does not imply that no such things existed in the past, just that they
were changed to fit new circumstances when the ritual was “brought back.” For example, according to Master Gao (who started to work in the Shanghai funeral industry in the 1950s and who I quoted in length in last chapter), traditionally there was only one descendant nail (instead of four). At that time when body burial was the main way of disposing of the body, funeral professionals nailed the coffins themselves because they actually needed to be properly sealed to be airtight. The descendant nail was a single large long nail with a lotus flower attached to it. It was symbolically nailed in the center of the top edge of the coffin close to the head. Moreover, instead of having the descendant perform the nailing, it was the maternal uncle of the deceased who performed this act (for the role of maternal uncles in Chinese folk death ritual, see Emily Martin 1973 and Rubie Watson 1988).

When the nailing ritual is complete, the funeral professionals lay the resting-in-peace covering on the top and sides of the coffin and then direct the bereaved to accompany the deceased to the parking lot. From the meeting hall to the parking lot, many funeral parlors have a service item called “ceremonial funeral procession” (*liyi chubin* 礼仪出殡) as introduced in Chapter 6. Several state practitioners told me that this kind of military style ceremonial funeral procession was borrowed from Taiwan.

In some funeral parlors, the bereaved were expected to accompany the deceased to the crematorium, this was especially the case in Yishan Funeral Parlor and all the suburban funeral parlors where they have crematoria on site. The bereaved in these funeral parlors usually accompany the deceased all the way by walking from the meeting halls to the crematoria. On the contrary, due to the latest urban planning policies,
Longhua and Baoxin have moved their crematoria to Yishan funeral parlor. Thus if the funeral is held in either of these downtown parlors, the coffin will be placed in a hearse to be driven to Yishan for cremation. Thus, the bereaved in Longhua and Baoxin usually did not accompany the deceased to the crematorium at Yishan Parlor. Either way, this last journey (from meeting halls to parking lot or to crematoria) is the mourners’ last chance to send the deceased off on his or her way (song zuihou yicheng 送最後一程).

Meanwhile, on the bereaved's side, the bereaved who watch the coffin entering the hearse are standing, bowing, or even kowtowing during this process of sending away. They may also sob, weep, or do nothing. Funeral professionals usually do not offer any direction to unify their movements for this part.

Once the people who stayed inside for the post-farewell ceremony rituals join those hanging out outside the hall, they then go to a pre-booked restaurant together either by rented tour bus or on foot to the parlor's own restaurant to have “doufufan” (豆腐飯), funeral banquets. Funeral banquets were banned at the peak of the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai because they were considered feudal practices that were centers for both waste and social reciprocity. Funeral banquets returned to Shanghai people’s public life as soon as state control over funerals lessened. After the marketization of funeral parlors, all state funeral parlors established their own funeral banquet restaurants to compete with the private ones. For example, Longhua Funeral Parlor has a funeral restaurant called Angel (tianshi jiujia 天使酒家).

In addition to these state run funeral banquet restaurants within funeral parlors, there are also private ones. Prosperity was one such example. Within Shanghai Proper,
Quanshan (泉山), Haijie (海傑), and Jin Zhuang (金庄) Restaurants are located in the north and therefore primarily serve funeral attendants in Baoxin Funeral Parlor. Haomen (豪門) and Deqifu (德齊福) Restaurants are located in the south and therefore mainly serve people who go to Longhua Funeral Parlor. These private funeral banquet restaurants often worked with funeral brokers to ensure ongoing business. For example, I described in Chapter 5 how some funeral banquet restaurants set up “shell companies” for independent funeral brokers to be “nominally affiliated” with so that the latter could be registered with the Funeral Trade Association to obtain work permits.

Before entering restaurants, people usually perform a cleansing ritual called guohuo (過火), meaning crossing the fire. Mourners put their black mourning armbands and condolence couplets into a small fire on the ground and then cross over the fire with one leg. However, although both Christian and non-Christian bereaved ended their memorial meetings with funeral banquets, Christians did not participate in all of this ritual. Christians simply threw their armbands into the fire and walked in. I will discuss a Protestant version of the memorial meeting in detail in the next chapter.

Christians are not the only group who do not participate in crossing the fire. The chief mourners also cannot participate because they are supposed to stay in mourning longer than other funeral participants. In Shanghai, the most common ending date for mourning was the 35th day after death occurred (seven days count as one cycle and the mourning period usually contains five cycles).

In all funeral banquet restaurants, crossing the fire was done in an outdoor space such as the sidewalk or parking lot. As soon as they enter the restaurant, the bereaved are
served with sweet tea. Everyone drinks this sweet tea regardless of their religious affiliations. It is worth mentioning that drinking sweet tea is a very common ritual in all kinds of life cycle rituals among Han Chinese. Also, funeral professionals were rarely invited to these funeral banquets, if a private broker arrived with the bereaved, they most likely will retire to a separate room to deal with logistics or chat with the employees and owners of the restaurant.

Overall, we can see three important transformations in the transition from socialist civil funeral to the post memorial meeting events described above. The first is a transition from ritual as a collective act to ritual as a relational act. Recalling my description, after everyone performs the farewell ceremony the family of the deceased stays in the meeting hall while the other people are free to decide what they want to do. They could go in to join the bereaved to put xibo in the coffin or they could stay outside the meeting hall to hang out. They could even leave right away if they did not plan to go to the banquet. Such change indicates a shift from socialist collectivism where everyone is doing the same thing at the same time to a popular religious world where many things occur either simultaneously or at different times. This was because folk death ritual is based on relational acts. Depending on the distance of their relationship to the deceased, ritual participants were now expected to perform different acts. The funeral could already be over as far as you are concerned depending on your relationship. This was in contrast to socialist civil funerals where everyone is related as comrade to comrade and there is no need to do perform ritual differently.

The second is a transition of “emotion regimes.” Reddy (2001) defines emotion
regimes as a spectrum of normative forces for regulating emotion (2001:124-125). As soon as the bereaved formed a circle around the coffin after the last group of mourners performed their farewell, they leave the socialist emotion regime and enter the emotion regime of folk death ritual. Their wailing might be accompanied only by crying sounds, tears, and sobbing, but it was also not uncommon to see dramatic bodily movements such as shaking bodies or stomping and screaming. Sometimes people even knelt in partial prostration even though the whole point of promoting bowing during the socialist civil ritual was to replace feudalistic kneeling. This was all in stark contrast to the emotion regime in the socialist subjunctive world; only moments before, individuals were expected to show solemnity and calm – even though that façade sometimes did crack. But a complete loss of control meant that the memorial meeting could not continue.

To some degree, the bereaved not only could but also should cry once they enter post memorial meeting events. This is because weeping is an important sign of filial piety. Under this emotion regime, the lack of outward expression of grief and mourning implies an absence of affect and therefore a breach of social propriety. For example, one day a funeral broker asked me to look at two crying women in a funeral. The broker whispered to me and said, I bet the woman on the right is the daughter of the deceased and the one on the left is the daughter-in-law. I asked him how he knew this. He said, it’s easy. One looks like she is really crying and the other looks like she is faking it. The assumption behind the broker’s description is that daughters-in-law, the ultimate outsider of the Chinese patrilineal system, are the prime suspects for not being able to cry at a mother-in-law’s funeral. Their relationships are always structurally fraught. Even if
daughters-in-law could produce tears and cry hard, this does not exempt them from public opprobrium for “fake” crying in contemporary Shanghai. The obligatory aspect of outward expressions of grief and mourning is why traditionally people hired professional weepers if the bereaved felt that they were unable to cry for the full socially expected length and strength.\textsuperscript{205} James Watson’s (1988) classic work on Han Chinese death ritual specifically addresses the importance of professional weepers based on his fieldwork in 1960s in the rural Hong Kong.\textsuperscript{206}

Today, funeral professionals actually perform a key role in regulating emotion in different emotional regimes in urban Shanghai. In the last chapter, I described how they made sure the bereaved control their expressions of grief and mourning during the socialist ritual. As soon as a funeral switches to these post memorial meeting events, funeral professional had to know exactly when the “appropriate” moments for crying out loud without too much self-restraint were and how much time was the right amount. That is, if you don’t give the bereaved enough time to “let it out” right after they formed the circle around the body, then when you try to direct them to place offerings in the casket at the next stage, they will still be too busy crying to do what they are supposed to do.

\textsuperscript{205} One informant, whose hometown was in rural Shanghai, told me that a couple of years ago when her mother died, she had to hire professional weepers. She said, in her village, people expected mourners to weep in a stylized fashion. This kind of weeping often involves verbal laments. Despite herself being an urban funeral professional, she did not know how to do this properly she had to hire a weeper.

\textsuperscript{206} Professional weepers are still alive and well in many parts of China. Shanghai is not exceptional even though weepers are only found in rural Shanghai. This was especially the case for people on Chongming Island (崇明岛), a rural area in Shanghai where there is a long history of wailing. One state practitioner I knew told me that her mother was a professional weeper on Chongming. Another state practitioner whose natal home was on Chongming told me that when she went home for her mother’s funeral, she had to hire a weeper to cry on her behalf because, in part due to her modernist funeral practitioner experience, she could not wail in the locally expected way.
thereby delaying the whole procedure. If funeral professionals gave the bereaved too much time, however, it could also delay the meeting hall’s schedule.

Leaving too much time for wailing could cause embarrassment if the bereaved stopped crying on their own before the funeral professional forces them to stop. In cases where the professional was late in stopping the crying it creates an awkward moment of silence because of the obligatory aspect of wailing in performing traditional folk funerals. Shanghai people in general have an ambivalent attitude toward excessive outward expression of grieving and mourning as discussed in the last chapter. This was consistent with James Wilce’s (2009) argument on how modernity further makes lament seem to be “traditional.” In fact, several funeral professionals (especially those who were rural migrants) told me that “stopping their crying before they have to” is a “Shanghai thing” because (they thought that) Shanghai people have less affection for their aged parents.

Finally, the third transition is the movement from a spiritless world to a world of spirits. While the socialist civil ritual is built on an atheist assumption that denies spirits and afterlife, in those post memorial meeting events, the most important goal is to take care of the spirit of the deceased to ensure a smooth transition into afterlife. In this world of spirits, one of the most important things is to please the deceased. This includes giving material wealth to the deceased through offering spiritual cash, paper made mahjong tiles, *maotai* liquor, cigarettes, and gold and silver ingots, and through giving “face” (*mianzi* 面子) to the deceased by purchasing ceremonial funeral processions and a nicer hearse for sending them off for instance. Through the act of providing provisions (Stafford 1995), the relationship between the living and the dead became one of descendent and ancestors.
We could see this materialized in the act of combing. The act of combing symbolizes the last affective act that was based on a relationship between parents and children. The breaking of the comb means that that kind of affective bond has to be changed (literally, broken with the funeral) to one between ancestors and descendants. Ideally, these ancestor spirits will grant prosperity to their descendants. The ritual of nailing the “descendant nail” is the direct enactment of such hopes today.

As a result, the tripartite transitions from collective act to relational act, from an emotion regime of being solemn and calm to one of highly emotional outward expressions of grief and mourning, and from a material world to a spiritual world are all a part of the exit from the solemn and entrance into the cathartic phenomenological world of “heat and noise” (renao 熱鬧) that marks all social occasions in Chinese public life, from night markets and temple festivals to weddings and traditional funerals (Yu Shuenn-Der 2004). This hot and noisy atmosphere is one of the most important characteristics that structured and sustained popular religion in Chinese societies (Adam Chau 2006; DJ Hatfield 2009; Weller 1994; Stephan Feuchtwang 2010: 81; Han Steinmuller 2013:74).

The extra ritual acts of memorial meeting are mixtures of Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, popular religion, and gift exchange between the living and the dead and among the living. Whether a funeral is arranged through a funeral broker or a state practitioner, these extra ritual acts are very standardized. The variation is primarily delineated along the lines of an urban-rural distinction.207 In the past, these kinds of

\[207\] Variations are primarily drawn along parlors’ lines. This means that Longhua, Baoxin, and Yishan are slightly different from each other. Among them, the first two share more similarity. For example, only Longhua has a descendent nailing ritual and resting in peace cover. Both
rituals were the prime targets for crackdowns during Funeral Reform because religion is “superstition” and gift exchange is “feudalism” under the CCP. In today’s Shanghai, however, various funeral professionals told me that over 90% of memorial meetings contained the set of rituals I described above. This number was even higher in my sample since almost all memorial meetings I observed contained these post memorial meeting events as long as they were not Christian versions of memorial meetings (Christians do also have funeral banquets, however).

Creating Religious and Relational Subjects in Socialist Civil Funerals

The extra rituals of memorial meetings held in funeral parlors not only recognize the spirit of the deceased, but also see such spirits as situated in reciprocal relationships. Consequently, in these extra rituals, the deceased are not conceptualized as socialist citizen subjects. Instead, they are conceptualized simultaneously as religious and relational subjects in public as well. In the following section, I provide several vignettes to further delineate how the deceased were conceptualized as religious and relational subjects in these extra memorial meeting events.

Longhua and Baoxin consistently told the bereaved that cremation does not require the family’s presence since this would be “too painful to watch” while Yishan told the bereaved that the journey from the meeting hall to cremators was the deceased’s last journey and people of course should “accompany their beloved at their last journey.” In a Pudong Funeral Parlor, a suburban one, body cosmeticians perform the “displacing the body into the coffin” (ruguan 入棺) ritual in front of the chief mourners before the memorial meeting starts. Meanwhile, in all three city funeral parlors, the “displacing of the body into the coffin” is not in any way ceremonial at all. Body cosmeticians simply put the deceased into a cremation coffin as a part of the overall preparations to get the body ready in the back stage.
The first time I saw a Dharani flag was also the time I first met my sleepover friend who taught me that her first day of working in a factory was her date of joining the revolution—the story I told in the last chapter. The deceased in this memorial meeting was an old bachelor. He had spent his most productive years as a sent down-youth in rural Heilongjiang (in northeastern China). Eventually, he was able to switch his household registration to Shanghai and therefore could legally return. After relocating back to Shanghai, he worked in a middle school until he completely retired. His job was a combination of security guard and janitor. His younger brother and the younger brother’s nuclear family (a wife and a son) lived with him after he moved back to Shanghai and took care of him before he died.

The younger brother felt that he owed his older brother a great deal because the latter’s acceptance of being a sent-down youth had meant that he himself was exempted. He also felt the fact that his older brother had never been married and therefore had no descendents was all directly a result this same sacrifice. For Han Chinese, dying as a bachelor without any descendents is one of the worst conditions of death (not to mention being an unfilial act to one's own ancestors). The deceased's situation was in stark contrast to the younger brother's, who had both a wife and a son. Finally, the younger brother also felt guilty about his own financial prosperity. In the beginning of the Opening Up period, the younger brother managed to find a job as a manager of a Taiwanese plastic molding company. This company made a lot of money since there was not much competition at all at that time. The younger brother learned the knowledge and
skills he needed from his Taiwanese boss and then moved on to open his own factory. He prospered greatly. He felt that he would not have had such a chance to prosper if he had been the one who was stuck in Heilongjiang.

The younger brother held a normal memorial meeting for the older brother. He made his only son hold the photographic portrait of his older brother, a role that is usually strictly played by direct descendents of the deceased. He also informed the school where the older brother had worked so the school could send someone to give a memorial speech. The wife of the younger brother was a lay Buddhist and she was a part of an informal group of lay Buddhist friends who did chanting and visited temples together. All of the members of this group were women. The lady I mentioned in the beginning of this vignette was actually the charismatic leader of this group. Through the connection of the younger brother’s wife, several lay Buddhists joined the funeral even though they did not know the deceased in person.

On the day of the funeral, the chief mourners and a group of six lay Buddhists arrived at the meeting hall together. There was no funeral broker involved in this funeral. At that time, I did not know that these lay Buddhists were not part of the deceased's family. There was no visual sign to distinguish the lay Buddhists from the chief mourners. After all, every funeral participant wore the same black armband and the regular clothes that Shanghai people wear every day. All I knew at that time was that they came together so they were all counted as chief mourners. I only found out the difference later when I was invited to the funeral banquet (one of the few times that I was invited to a funeral banquet by the bereaved). In any case, after the younger brother signed all of the
documents, the state practitioner led these people to the body preparation room located in the back of the meeting hall. In general, only direct family members of deceased go to the body preparation room (in addition to funeral professionals and the occasional stray ethnographer).

Once they were in the body preparation room, the charismatic leader got her Dharani flag out. She draped it on top of the deceased's body. A Dharani flag is a yellow flag printed with red Buddhist sutra texts on it (see Figure 8.1). Lin Wan from Longevity once told me that “having a Dharani flag to cover the body is like having the National or Party flag covering the body.” Thus, when the memorial meeting is finished, “just like you would not burn the National or Party flag, you need to take the Dharani flag out before closing the coffin for cremation. You use Dharani flags to wrap around a cremains casket like those who have National or Party flags do.” In other words, each of these flags provide protection for the deceased; they just do so by associating with different sources of power.

Meanwhile, the printed sutras function to produce merit for the deceased on their journey. After laying this down, the leader began to chant *amitabha* a couple of times while making the hand gesture of *namaste* (having two hands held against each other in front of her chest). In turn, the other people in the room began to do the same thing on their own. Their chanting was not collectively coordinated. I looked at the state practitioner to see what reaction she had. This was the first time I had seen people placing Dharani flags and chanting *amitabha* with the *namaste* gesture within a state socialist parlor. The state practitioner, however, did nothing. I was surprised.
The mourners stayed in the body preparation room a little bit longer than usual so that the family could take another close look at the deceased. Then the state practitioner told them that it was about time to return to the meeting hall. After receiving this instruction, instead of walking back to the hall, the charismatic leader again started to chant *amitabha* with the *namaste* gesture again. This time, however, all of the women followed at once and their chanting voices slipped into unison. Moreover, they did not just chant *amitabha* once or twice. They continued chanting a long chain of *amitabhas*. Since this was done in unison this time, the volume of the chanting increased significantly (there were at least 7 people chanting) such that it was high enough to be
heard above the background noise so mourners in other body preparation rooms could hear them. It was at this time of rising profile that the state practitioner suddenly stopped the chanting. She told them what they are doing was inappropriate. They stopped and all of us then returned to the meeting hall to wait for an otherwise quite unremarkable, equally socialist memorial meeting to start.

Conceptualizing the Dead as Buddhist Subjects II: Monks in kasaya

This funeral was a very unusual one. The deceased died young (in her early forties) and her husband was very rich—so rich that when she died in the accident that night, her husband was still in a jail somewhere serving a corruption related sentence. In addition, although the family were local Shanghai people, they had acquired Hong Kong residency at the beginning of the Opening Up period. Her death therefore counted as the death of a Hong Kong person instead of as one of a Shanghainese. This meant that the deceased was exempted from cremation. Finally, the deceased was not only rich (through her husband) but also famous in the entertainment business and in philanthropy in Hong Kong and Shanghai. She even made it into fashion magazines every once a while as a glamorous celebrity. The combination of these factors—of being a Hong Kong resident, rich, and famous—meant that the family was able to push the edges of regulation quite far in the process of handling this sudden and accidental death. Meanwhile, both the funeral broker and state practitioners gave this family a lot of leeway when organizing her funeral.

The family hired Chen Ting to be their funeral broker so I followed this incident
right from the beginning. Chen Ting and I went to the deceased’s luxurious colonial style house in downtown Shanghai to have our initial business meeting. Her memorial meeting was held in the biggest meeting hall at Huangpu Funeral Parlor. Although her family estimated that they would “only” have several hundred funeral guests, they insisted on renting the biggest hall because, as her sister told Chen Ting at our initial business meeting, “she deserved the best.” Before the memorial meeting started, twenty monks arrived in the meeting hall wearing bright yellow and red kasaya. The kasaya is a garment for practicing Buddhist monks. Moreover, such colors made this group of monks even more conspicuous in a socialist public place like a memorial meeting hall that rarely saw actual practicing monks and where the primary colors were of the buildings were white and light grey.

As soon as I saw the monks, I looked to Manager Liu, the manager of the Sales Unit at Huangpu. He showed up for all of the funerals held in the largest meeting hall. Not surprisingly, he had an expression of distinct disapproval on his face. By that time, I had learned how “monk rules” worked in the parlor. At Huangpu, monks were not allowed in meeting halls. They were only allowed in the wake keeping rooms located in a different building. The monks at Huangpu were also almost always non-practicing professional “monks” contracted by the parlor to perform chanting services for its customers. These, however, were not their monks. I immediately walked over closer to Liu in order to see what he would do next. As I approached, Manager Liu told me, “I am about to talk to the bereaved. In a place like this [the largest hall] with a memorial meeting at this level [having so many upper class people], it is very inappropriate [to
have so many monks in *kasaya*. They should at least wait until the meeting is finished [if they want to have monks performing rituals].”

Manager Liu first asked the monks to take a break in the resting room adjacent to the meeting hall to get them out of the public gaze. Then he went over to talk to Chen Ting about this. Chen Ting told Liu that the family originally told her that they wanted to perform a salvation ceremony *after* the meeting. She protested that she also had only just found out that the one who hired the monks insisted on having a short sutra chant performed *before* the meeting as well because the deceased had died so young and so suddenly. The soul of someone dying young is even more desperate for salvation and merit to ensure that she does not stay in limbo and linger around in this world. Manager Liu nonetheless insisted that it was inappropriate to have monks in the meeting hall especially in such a grand public space. After all, this largest hall is the same hall where memorial meetings of high-ranking Party leaders are held.

For a while I thought that the issue had been settled and that the monks would not chant. Later, however, Chen Ting told me that Manager Liu had agreed to step back and allow a brief chant to be performed before the meeting. It turned out that the monks were from the Jade Buddha Temple (*Yufosi 玉佛寺*). This is one of the four most famous Buddhist temples in Shanghai. In fact, one rumor that was circulating in Shanghai was that the late Deng Xiaoping himself had visited the Jade Buddha Temple every Chinese New Year. This rumor shows the extra power that the Jade Buddha Temple was seen as having. In any case, the deceased was active in philanthropy and a devout Buddhist. The leading monks there actually knew her in person. Otherwise, famous temples like this do
not usually send their monks out to perform salvation rituals. Moreover, one of the monks turned out to be a personal acquaintance of Manager Liu. All of these factors added together to make it such that Liu could not absolutely say no.

Manager Liu, Chen Ting, and the son of the deceased finally came to a solution so they could do this “properly.” They decided to first ask everyone to leave the meeting hall. They then could bring the deceased in while only inviting the family members to re-enter to join a short domestic salvation ceremony before the memorial meeting would begin. When this was done, they then could invite everyone else in again to start the public and official memorial meeting as usual. However, since there were about three to four hundred guests there, it turned out to be impossible to execute this alternative plan. The funeral professionals managed to ask some people to leave the main portion of the meeting hall, but when the deceased came in, everyone (and not just family members) all came back in (and many had never even left the hall as required in the first place). In the end, the twenty monks stood around the deceased to perform ten-minutes of sutra chanting in front of all funeral participants.

When this salvation ritual was over, the MC announced the beginning of the memorial meeting, pretending that the previous chanting and early entrance of the rest of the participants had not just happened. Through the power of officiating, the MC soothed the social glitches (Goffman 1974) as if everything was as it should be. The remaining parts of the memorial meeting then proceeded in the socialist manner as usual.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ The work unit representative who gave the memorial speech in this funeral was someone from the philanthropy association that the deceased had established.
Constructing Buddhist Subjectivity for Socialists

In Shanghai memorial meetings, rituals that are specifically related to Buddhism are less common when compared with the folk death ritual and funeral banquet additions described in the beginning of this chapter. In the context of memorial meetings, the socialist civil funeral, the most common Buddhist rituals are the use of the Dharani flag, chanting amitabha, or having monks in kasaya. Among these, you would be much more likely to run into a memorial meeting using the Dharani flag than one with monks in memorial meetings. All funeral brokers I know of regularly stocked Dharani flags even though funeral parlors themselves usually did not sell them. As for having monks in kasaya inside the meeting hall, among the 75 entire memorial meetings and numerous other parts of meetings I saw, I only witnessed this happen twice. The story I just described was the second time I saw it happen. The first time I saw three monks in grey kasaya in a medium sized meeting hall. Even though bright yellow and red kasaya and grey kasaya are both kasaya, I do think that the less conspicuous color of the gray robes gave these other monks a little bit more leeway. This was not to mention that this funeral was quite small, probably with less than fifty participants. As a result, when they did a quick chanting before the meeting started, the state practitioner who was in charge did not intervene.

In addition to these two, I also heard a different state practitioner complain about a third case one day. She told me that a funeral broker had allowed his customers to bring monks to the meeting hall that she was in charge of the day before. I could not probe for more details about this particular funeral, but her clear goal in telling me this was to
inform me of the way that funeral brokers were “messing around” (luangao 亂搞) and making everything chaotic. These examples are consistent with my description and analysis in Chapter 5 of how the structurally fragile position of funeral brokers creates the possibility for exactly this sort of religious revival within socialist civil funerals.

To some degree, the deaths in above two vignettes both involved abnormal conditions of death. The deceased in the first vignette was an old bachelor without any descendents. The deceased in the second vignette died young in an accident. According to Chinese lore, both cases might engender malicious ghosts and, at least, suggest extra difficulties that the deceased might encounter on their way to the next world. They therefore needed more help from the living on their route to salvation. As a result, it is understandable that the bereaved tried to do more than usual, pushing the boundaries a bit more.

Since the Buddhist ritual is not yet routinized (especially as compared to the post memorial meeting rituals), it provides a particularly salient point to analyze the kind of techniques used in adding new rituals to the socialist memorial meeting and therefore adding new ideas of self other than being singularly socialist. I argue that the most important technique is to carve out a momentarily alternative space within the socialist subjunctive world. In the first vignette, I described how the state practitioner did not stop them when the family (along with the lay Buddhist friends) chanted while they draped the Dharani flag on the coffin. This was possible because the body preparation room is behind the meeting hall and therefore far away from the official socialist space. Only close family members and funeral professionals (and I) were in the back rooms. In
addition, those sporadic and individual *amitabha* chants really were not easily apprehensible. People who were in the next body preparation room probably could not hear what was going on let alone people in the meeting hall itself. All these factors allowed the chanting act to be conceptualized as a domestic ritual even though it occurred in funeral parlor, a *de facto* state socialist space. However, as soon as the individual chanting became a collective act that allowed the chanting sounds to penetrate the walls of the body preparation room, it broke the bubble of the temporarily created alternative space and the state practitioner intervened.

In the second vignette, when Manager Liu (a state practitioner) saw a group of twenty monks in *kasaya* present and trying to perform chanting, he immediately removed them to the resting room so they were not seen in the meeting hall. However, due to the deceased’s influential background, the status of the temple that these monks represented, and the fact that Manager Liu knew one of the monks, he decided to compromise so the monks could perform a chanting ritual before the meeting started. The collaborative solution they came up with was to evacuate everyone from the meeting hall (although this solution failed). This evacuation of funeral participants allowed whatever events that were held in the same space to be viewed as domestic rituals. In other words, by removing the crowd, funeral professionals and the bereaved could (attempt to) turn a site of socialist mourning into a site of a family mourning. Though the funeral professionals and the bereaved did not execute their plan successfully, this solution nevertheless still indicates their belief that by momentarily carving out an (imagined) alternative space within socialist state space, it allowed Shanghai people to add Buddhist ritual even if they
both occurred in the same state space, the memorial meeting halls. During this Buddhist
ritual, the deceased is not a (dead) model socialist citizen. Instead, she is a wandering
soul who needs the power of Buddha to guide her onto her incarnation journey. And even
though the isolating strategy failed, the attempt to do so apparently made the chanting
performance acceptable – it was ‘as if’ the room had actually been cleared.

The need to carve out an alternative space (at least monetarily) within the state
socialist space is partially a result of contemporary legal regulations on religion in China.
Chinese law separates religious spaces (zongjiao changsuo 宗教場所) from “public
spaces” (gonggong changsuo 公共場所). Legally speaking, people can only have
religious activities in religious spaces. It is illegal to have religious activities in public
spaces because public spaces should be secular, socialist, and free of religion—a concept
that is somewhat parallel with laicism in French.

Taking Longhua Funeral Parlor as an example, the first time I visited Longhua
was during my preparatory fieldwork in 2009. I talked to a Mr. Huang who was relatively
high up in the parlor about Shanghai funeral parlors in general. At that point, I had never
been to any funerals in China. During our conversation, I asked him if religious activities
were allowed in funeral parlors in Shanghai. He said that the law says that religious
activities are only allowed in religious space. Funeral parlors, however, are public spaces.
This means that technically religious activities are not allowed in funeral parlors.

However, as Huang went on to explain, since the parlors’ consumers (the
bereaved) have “religious demands” (zongjiao xuqiu 宗教需求), funeral parlors today try
to accommodate consumer needs as much as they can. Huang said, for example, that
there are several western style memorial meeting halls that can be used for Protestant or Catholic memorial meetings. These meeting halls have stained glass windows to resemble those in Christian churches, albeit without the Christian symbols. This religious ambiguity is a part of the design since both Christians and non-Christians rent such Western style meeting halls. I then asked Huang if there were any meeting halls for Buddhists or other religions. He said that there are some meeting halls with decorated with wooden windows that appear more Chinese in style, and that such believers could use this kind of hall.

At that time, I did not know that people “die socialist” in China. I also did not know that when people book meeting halls, they rarely choose them based on how the decor might fit with their specific religious needs. Due to limited supply, people usually choose meeting halls based on size and then pick the best time slot accordingly. In any case, maybe because Huang sensed my interest in religion, he told me that one of the six wake keeping rooms (shoulingting 守靈廳) at Longhua is Buddhist—the Jade Lotus Room (Yulianting 玉蓮廳). This room is decorated with statues of the Eighteen Arhats (Shiba Lohan 十八羅漢). According to Mahayana Buddhism, the Eighteen Arhats are disciples of the Buddha who have ended the cycles of reincarnation and reached nirvana.

A year after that interview when I did start my fieldwork, I visited the Jade Lotus Room several times. This room (and all other wake keeping rooms) is not located in the

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209 Eighteen Arhat status are very common in temples in China. Many Chinese people believe that the Eighteen Arhats have supernatural powers.
same building with all the memorial meeting halls. All the wake keeping rooms are located in the office building itself on the fourth floor. Unless someone already knew where they were going, it is highly unlikely for someone to just pass by and see any of the wake keeping rooms. The room is rectangular just like any of the other halls in Shanghai’s funeral parlors. One short side of the room opens to the back hallway where the body comes in from the preparation room in the Cosmetics Unit. The other short side is adjacent to a separate lounge where several Chinese style wooden chairs are provided and a shower room. The bereaved sit in the lounge while monks perform sutra chanting and salvation ceremonies in the room. They need not be constantly present themselves because the bereaved only need to offer incense and prostrations to the deceased at certain moments. They don’t have to sit through the whole ceremony with the monks.

Extending from floor to ceiling along each of the two long walls of the room are 9 dark-stained wood-paneled display cases. While the bottom three feet of the cases are intricately carved solid wood, in the alcoves of the 9 top portions are golden painted statues in a variety of poses standing on white marble blocks. These Eighteen Arhat statues oversee all of the services that take place in the room. The impression they give is quite striking—each is about two feet tall and lit with a single spotlight from above—as their golden color sparkles in the light and presents a strong contrast with both the dark wood paneling and the white of the floor and the ceiling. This feeling grew even stronger once I became familiar with Longhua’s environment because its architecture and interior design is everywhere else modernist and minimalist. There is a lot of empty space and minimal decoration. As a result, the Eighteen Arhats in the Jade Lotus Room stand out
even more both as religious symbols and as extravagant decorations.

While the Jade Lotus Room at Longhua certainly stood out due to its deliberate decorations, all three city funeral parlors were much more likely to allow monks chanting in such separate, less accessible wake keeping rooms than in their actual memorial meeting halls. Huangpu Funeral Parlor allowed people to hire monks doing chanting in their wake keeping rooms as long as the bereaved hired these monks through the parlor. Several state practitioners told me that this was because they knew that the monks they worked with would follow the funeral parlor’s rules. However, the “problem” here is that most ordained monks in Shanghai did not go out of their temples to perform rituals at all, to have a ritual performed, you had to go to their temples instead. This is particularly true for those monks who are based in famous temples. Monks who are willing to go out to perform rituals at people’s homes are usually not “real” monks (meaning they were not ordained based on state rules). According to my informants, these “fake” monks are people who provide Buddhist rituals for their livelihood. These monks might know how to chant, but they do not practice celibacy and might not even be vegetarians. Many funeral brokers told me that the monks associated with funeral parlors are also this type of monks.

Regardless of whether the funeral parlors’ monks are “real” or “fake,” the fact that monks are not allowed in memorial meeting halls by itself is strange. This is because Protestant pastors and Catholic priests both can go into memorial meeting halls with their followers. I used to think that maybe this was because monks’ kasaya are too obviously religious among the crowds of funeral participants. However, a Catholic priest’s dress is
no less conspicuous in funeral parlors. My funeral broker friends were not at all confused by the religious discrepancy I saw, however. They thought it was not strange because parlors could make money by providing monks while they could not very well do the same in providing priests or pastors. Confining monks to the wake keeping room was merely a means to prevent the bereaved from hiring their own monks and to encourage them to purchase the overnight rental of wake keeping rooms.\textsuperscript{210}

I once asked a state practitioner why people have to hire monks through the parlor. He told me that if funeral parlors allow the bereaved to hire their own monks, funeral parlors would lose control of the ritual performance. Thus, these monks might burn spirit money or light up oil candles (instead of electric candles) inside the meeting halls. While this might be one reason, the fact that salespeople in funeral parlors received commissions from selling chanting services probably contributes at least equally (if not more) to why funeral parlors forced the bereaved to hire the parlor’s monks. Whenever I visited the main sales office at Huangpu, there was always a note on the whiteboard. This note showed how many Buddhist chanting services each salesperson had sold in the last month and how big a bonus they had earned respectively in the past few months.

Nevertheless, the ambiguous nature of Buddhist rituals within socialist civil funerals allows us to see some possible ways of creating and adding new rituals to the

\textsuperscript{210} Several people higher up in the Shanghai funeral industry actually told me that for a while they had hoped to fully promote wake keeping rooms for everyone. They got their inspiration from funeral parlors in Sichuan Province. People there often kept their three days of wake in funeral parlors immediately before holding memorial meetings. From the funeral parlors’ perspective, this meant three days of wake keeping room rental, not to mention three days of catering food, cigarettes, and other services. They told me that wake keeping was one of the biggest profit items for funeral parlors in Sichuan. However, this service item never took off in Shanghai. As discussed, most people held their wakes at home (even though there was no body there). I was told that only around 10% of customers purchased wake services from one parlor.
socialist civil funeral. Bad deaths provide a particularly useful site to examine the experimental creation of new ritual in performing socialist death ritual. By creating an alternative space within the state socialist space, either through the designation of wake keeping rooms or the temporary re-conceptualization of state space as a domestic one (such as the attempt to evacuate funeral participants in the second vignette), religious rituals are able to co-exist alongside socialist ritual. In this religious subjunctive world, the deceased is conceptualized as a religious subject.

*Conceptualizing the Dead as Relational Subjects I: White Envelopes*

One of the first things I noticed about Shanghai funerals was that Shanghai people did not set up a gift table outside the meeting hall to receive white envelopes (baibao 白包). I thought this very strange. Cash gifts in envelopes are the most common form of gift giving for Chinese life cycle rituals (and even for some gift giving beyond these ritual occasions). White is the traditional color of mourning for Han Chinese, so where wedding gifts are given in red envelopes, funeral gifts are given in white ones. Generally, the host family sets up a gift table at the entrance. Someone from the hosting family would receive the envelopes, take the money out from envelopes, calculate the exact amount of money, and then record the name and the amount of money in a gift book. This then would be the basis for future reciprocity. Such gift exchange is one of the key foundations for creating and maintaining social relations among Han Chinese, something that only slightly changed its form and intensity even during the high socialist period. This was why I immediately found the absence of a gift table in the meeting halls (or
funeral banquets) to be such a strange sight right from the beginning.

Once I had become a little bit more familiar with memorial meetings, I suddenly noticed a funeral participant push his hand into a chief mourner’s hand as they socialized with each other before the meeting started. The former gave the latter some kind of rolled up white paper. After this act, they exchanged eye contact, the chief mourner said thank you, and then put the white paper roll into his pocket in the back of his pants. They then carried on their conversation as usual as if nothing had just happened. The act of giving happened so fast that it was almost unnoticeable.

This furtive act was more like a drug dealer handing a bag of dope to a customer than it was like the normally very public gift exchange at non-Shanghai funerals. It was done in a very subtle and almost secretive way. Once I noticed this particular exchange, I started seeing it happening again and again between various chief mourners and funeral participants. At one point when I saw this act happen again, a state practitioner happened to be standing right next to me. I whispered to her and asked her to look what was happening in these secretive acts of passing white paper. She looked and then stared at me in disbelief.

“Those are white envelopes. They are funeral participants’ expression of condolence to the bereaved.”

“White envelopes?!” I replied. “Why do they give white envelopes in such a secretive way?”

“Don’t you give white envelopes in Taiwan?”

“Yes, we do, of course. But we have a gift table where someone takes the money
out of the envelopes and then makes a written record of who gave and how much they gave. Giving white envelopes is not a criminal act. Why do you hide it?”

“Oh, your way is like our rural way. We urban Shanghai people don't do that.”

It turns out that the rule for giving white envelopes in Shanghai is that they have to be given before the memorial meetings starts. Many people, especially if they are close to either the deceased or the bereaved, give their white envelopes at the wake. Most wakes are held at the deceased’s homes in Shanghai. When I later accompanied funeral professionals to do business meetings at the bereaved's houses, I often saw people coming to pay their respects. They offered incense and prostrations to the deceased’s portrait or simply gave the bereaved white envelopes and exchanged a few words. When it happened at home, the act of giving white envelopes was usually less “secretive” than what I had seen happen in the funeral parlors. However, not everyone could pay a visit during the wake. For those people who could not do so they would need to complete their white envelope transfer during the short time period before the official beginning of the memorial meeting.

_Conceptualizing the Dead as Relational Subjects II: Flower Baskets and their Mini-Couplets_

One day Chen Ting, Chen Yu, another staff member from Longevity, and I went to prepare the second largest meeting hall at Huangpu for a memorial meeting. This hall could accommodate several hundred people. The deceased for this meeting had committed suicide at her work in her forties. However, since she was on duty when she
died (in fact, she leapt from her office building window), her work unit organized the funeral. Chen Ting said that over one hundred flower baskets had been booked. As soon as the florist delivered the flower baskets, Chen Yu and I began to deal with their arrangement. All of the flower baskets had “mini-couplets” (xiaowanlian 小輓聯) attached to them. Mini-couplets are different from the vertical banner (hengfu 橫幅) and horizontal couplets (wanlian 輓聯) that were hung on the wall of the meeting halls (I discussed these in detail in Chapter 6 while recounting the details of a business meeting between state practitioners and the bereaved). Mini-couplets record the names of the gift giver, receiver, and kinship terminology that links the two sides of the flower basket gift.

After we arranged the flower baskets, Chen Ting asked the sisters of the deceased to verify our arrangements. Chen Yu went on to do other important things while Chen Ting directed me to do these final adjustments. She liked to make sure that the base part of all of the flower baskets were set up in a straight line for aesthetic reasons. In the middle of doing this, the sisters of the deceased came to Chen Ting and told her that they needed to talk about something with her. One of the sisters began, “I don’t know how to say this. This is kind of embarrassing. My sister [the deceased] and her husband got divorced a long time ago. She had since been seeing Mr. Lee for several years but they never got married. We called Mr. Lee Big Brother Lee. He, instead of her ex-husband, was more like family to my sister and me. Could you rearrange Mr. Lee’s and my sister’s ex-husband’s flower baskets so that Mr. Lee’s will be in front?” Chen Ting said, “I understand. Which flower basket was sent by Mr. Lee?” One sister led us all the way to the back of the line on the right where Lee’s flower basket was.
The mini-couplet on the flower basket from Mr. Lee simply said “dear friend” (zhīyǒu 摯友). The mini-couplets from the ex-husband’s flower basket did not describe his relation to the deceased as “ex-husband.” Instead, he had avoided mention of their relation, describing instead their unmarried daughter's relation to the deceased as daughter to mother. In general, the closer a person is related to the deceased, the more to the front her or his flower basket should be. For example, since kinship ties are considered closest, all baskets that addressed the deceased as friends are supposed to be at the back of the line. Flower baskets of immediate family members of the deceased are placed in front.

Since Mr. Lee’s flower basket defined his relationship to the deceased as “dear friend” while the ex-husband’s one described his daughter's relation to the deceased as daughter to mother, of course Chen Yu put the ex-husband’s one (without knowing that they were divorced long ago) in front while leaving Mr. Lee’s in the back of the line. Chen Ting apologized for the mistake. The sisters said that it was not her fault since she did not know these personal matters beforehand. Chen Ting then asked the sisters of bereaved where she should put Mr. Lee and the ex-husband’s flower basket. The two sisters talked to each other for a while. They decided to put Mr. Lee second, after the basket of the mother of the deceased. The third and forth basket were then their own baskets (given along with their respective nuclear families). The fifth one, the last prior to other relatives and friend's baskets, would be that of the ex-husband and their daughter.

*Constructing Relational Subjectivity for Socialists*
Almost all memorial meetings in Shanghai contain elements of gift exchange as described above regardless of their religious differences. Whether referring to popular religious, Buddhist, Protestant, and Catholic versions of memorial meetings, they all also contained the ritual of giving white envelopes, flower baskets, and funeral banquets. This universal character testifies to the well-documented foundational place of gift exchange in the social fabric in Chinese societies (cf. Morton Fried 1953; Fei Xiaotong 1949). In contemporary China, many scholars have identified the importance of the gift economy in late socialist China and have extensively documented how such reciprocal exchanges construct relational subjects (Yan Yunxiang 1996, Mayfair Yang 1994, Andrew Kipnis 1997).

One of the few funerals that I know of that did not end with a funeral banquet (although this funeral did have flower baskets) was one related to the death of a child. I interviewed the mother of the deceased whom I met through a grief-counseling group in Shanghai. She lost her only child when she was in her thirties about ten years prior to our interview. She hired a funeral broker to arrange her son’s funeral in a funeral parlor. This funeral was not a memorial meeting since there was no work unit giving the speech. Her funeral broker helped her prepare funeral baskets so she could put gift givers’ names down on the mini-couplets. However, my informant could not bear to have a funeral banquet so they decided not to organize one. She said that a funeral banquet only works when the dead is an elder. She told me that she just could not imagine eating and socializing with people after her son’s funeral. She looked me straight into my eyes and gave me a sorrowful smile. She said, the pain of losing a child is beyond human
imagination. I immediately felt deeply embarrassed and guilty about even asking her this question even though we were talking about a funeral that happened 10 years ago.

For non-personalized funerals, flower baskets are the primary and often the only decoration of the meeting hall. The aesthetic value, however, is not why people have flower baskets. Like the funeral brokers at Longevity told their customers, flower baskets are records of renqing wanglai (人情往來 literally meaning human relationship interactions). These “human relationship interactions” are exchanges in three ways. First, it is a gift between the living and the dead. Traditionally, people gave silk or paper wreathes to the bereaved family in Shanghai. These wreathes had mini-couplets attached. By the end of funeral, the wreathes and the mini-couplets on them are burned, along with other things such as xibo, as an offering to the deceased. However, as explained in Chapter 3, wreathes and their immolation were considered to be feudalist superstitions (all folks practices were feudalist superstitions). They were completely banned at the peak of Cultural Revolution. Today, while both funeral parlors and private funeral brokers all sell paper and silk wreathes, flower baskets are their top selling item. At least one unspoken reason is that flower baskets have much higher profit margins (even though funeral professionals’ explanations to the bereaved are that flower baskets look prettier and are more modern). Nevertheless, even though many Shanghai people changed from wreathes to flower baskets, they still burn the mini-couplets as a way of notifying the deceased about who sent her or him a posthumous gift. The act of burning makes flower baskets a gift from the living to the dead.

Second, flower baskets are a return gift among the living. In fact, this is the most
common explanation that funeral professionals offer when explaining the necessity of buying flower baskets. When someone gives the chief mourners a white envelope, the latter needs to return it. One way to (partially) return the gift is to buy flower baskets and put the name(s) of the giver(s) of the white envelope on the basket's mini-couplets to announce them as the flower givers. If the relationship between white envelope givers and the deceased (or the chief mourners) are distant or if the amount of money in the white envelopes is small, the chief mourners might simply write mini-couplets for them without purchasing flower baskets on their behalf. Every memorial meeting hall has several iron stands where people can hang those mini-couplets that are not attached to flower baskets. Funeral professionals put these iron stands behind the flower baskets if there were just too many baskets. Finally, flower baskets are a *gift* among the living. Funeral participants (either as individuals or representatives of institutions) can decide to give a flower basket to the mourners whether or not they had given white envelopes. These three kinds of gifts are not necessarily mutually exclusive either, especially in reference to the first and third.

However, while flower baskets are exchanged very publicly, exchanging white envelopes is not. This even though flower baskets actually served as a partial return gift of the white envelopes. I once asked Chen Yu about this. She told me that people in her hometown (in rural Jiangsu) also set up a gift table for funerals (and other life rituals). She thought that Shanghai people did not set up gift tables because they are both too frugal and too concerned about other people knowing how frugal they are (since this would make them “lose face”). In fact, Shanghai people were often described as
especially frugal by my rural immigrant informants.

I also asked about this subtle and almost secretive manner of giving envelopes to a state practitioner who was himself a local Shanghainese. He gave a very different explanation. He said that Shanghai people do not have public gift books to record gift exchanges because they are more sophisticated. He said, being sophisticated means being less direct. For him, giving money and counting it in public is too direct and almost vulgar. This is why their act of gift giving had to be subtle and unnoticed. He definitely did not say that Shanghai people were frugal nor did he suggest that they did not want their contributions known because they were afraid of losing face.

To some degree, such discrepancy is not that surprising since neither statement really explains the secretive style of gift giving. I suggest that such a secretive way of exchange is a way of making gift giving, something conducted in (State) public spaces (such as funeral parlors), into something domestic. Since not all funeral participants had time to pay a visit before the day of the funeral, not having gift tables or gift books and giving white envelopes in secretive gestures allows people who are involved in the exchange (as well as the audience who see the exchange) to see such acts as family matters instead of public matters. This was why there was no gift table in the meeting hall.²¹¹

²¹¹ Another interesting part about envelope giving is that instead of treating the hosting household as a corporate unit in gift exchange, Shanghai people exchange gifts at a more individual level. One day when Chen Yu and I were at a wedding organized by Chen Ting, I noticed there was no gift table or gift book to receive and record “red envelopes” there either, just as there wasn't one for white envelopes at funeral banquets. To be clear, there was a sign-in table. In fact, I was in charge of the sign-in table. However, there was no gift book to record the exchange of red envelopes. Moreover, just as happened in the funeral account above, wedding guests subtly
Nevertheless, all these acts construct the deceased and the living as socially embedded persons whose identity is defined and maintained by reciprocal exchanges of “gifts, favors, and banquets” (Yang 1994). One of the best places to observe these relationships is the mini-couplets attached to flower baskets. Mini-couplets have a right and left component. On the right, they announce the mourning of the gift giver over the loss of the deceased by identifying them relationally based on their closest relationship with the deceased. On the left, they show a hierarchical respect through the perspective of the gift receivers by identifying how the deceased would refer to the gift givers. For example, a mini-couplet given to a grandfather by a grandson might be like this:

Right: Deeply Mourn Paternal Grandfather (沈痛悼念祖父大人)
Left: Respectively Given by Patrilineal Eldest Grandson Ma Wen and Grand Daughter-in-Law Jiang Mei (长孫馬文长孫媳婦江美敬輓)212

As we can see, the writing of mini-couplets indicates at least two things. First, mourning is by definition a relational act. A person mourns for the loss of her or his

shoved red envelopes into the hands of the bride, groom, bride’s mother or father, or groom’s mother or father. While the parents of the bride and groom had purses and pockets to store these red envelopes, the bride and groom had to pass the envelopes (once they received them) to a bridesmaid and a groomsman since their European style white wedding dress and black tuxedo had no storage space. Chen Yu told me that wedding guests gave their red envelopes to the people they knew personally (the bride, the groom, the bride’s parents, or the groom’s parents). This was not just an act of convenience due to their not having a “central station” to collect the money. On the contrary, by receiving the money as an individual, that individual enters into a debt relationship through gift exchange. They therefore take individual reciprocal responsibility respectively even if the condition of creating that debt relationship (the wedding or funeral) was a household matter.

212 Chinese kinship terms distinguish patrilineal and matrilineal sides, generation, and gender. In this particular case, if Ma Wen and Jiang Mei have unmarried children, these children would be listed underneath the parents’ names. All other non-kin would be addressed as comrades, friends, or neighbors.
paternal grandfather or maternal grandmother, not by their names or just as a person who did great things or simply with status. The kind of relationship that existed is so important that there is no need to even say the name of the deceased. Second, there is no single definition of mourning. The length of mourning period and the kind of mourning garments to wear vary depending on how a specific living individual relates to the deceased. As a result, these mini-couplets articulate Confucian moral personhood. In this vision, everyone is embedded in five set types of hierarchical bonds: ruler to ruled, father to son, husband to wife, elder brother to younger brother, and friend to friend. In this sense, self is not only relationally, but also hierarchically embedded.

These kin based relationships articulated on mini-couplets are easily used also to include relationships based on socialism. By describing gift givers and receivers either as a comrade or a work unit, these flower baskets and their mini-couplets can also delineate a socialist ideal of a person who is in comradeship with other fellows and who is directly tied to the state through work units. Consequently, the more flower baskets the families receive in the funeral, the wider the network of gift exchange “the families” have whether we are talking about kinship based or work unit based. Having many flower baskets then makes a public statement about the status of the deceased, the bereaved (or the specific bereaved), the family, or all of the above. As a result, it is not surprising to know that one common thing people do before memorial meetings start is to browse through the mini-couplets on the flower baskets so they know who (including institutions) have participated in gift exchange. Many times I saw funeral participants making comments about mini-couplets such as “Oh, the party-secretary (of whichever organization) gave a
flower basket” while looking around.

However, it is crucial to point out that flower baskets and their mini-couplets as well as funeral banquets are more than “the representation of the social” in a Durkheimian sense. They are also sites of creation. One of the best examples is the last vignette. I described how the sisters of the deceased asked Chen Ting to re-arrange Mr. Lee’s flower basket. By moving Mr. Lee’s basket to the front as the second basket, right after the mother of the deceased, the sisters of the deceased made a public announcement to declare how they and the deceased related to Mr. Lee (as a brother-in-law) even though there was no marriage between the deceased and Mr. Lee in the first place. For anyone who browsed the couplets, it would be clear that this “dear friend” was much more than that.

Negotiations over the sequential order of flower baskets happen all the time. For example, if the deceased was a woman and her parents were still alive, should the flower basket of her parents stand before that of her parents-in-law or vice versa? (I found that the former arrangement is more common in Shanghai.) If the deceased had several children and some were men and some were women, should their flower baskets be arranged purely based on birth order or separated by gender first and then birth order? Although funeral professionals all know the general rules and all have their own preferences for making arrangements based on their interpretation of the general rules, these rules are constantly negotiated on site. It is in this sense that I argue gift exchange and the social relationships articulated through it are more than the representation of existing social relationships. Through the negotiation of every actor’s idiosyncratic
understanding of the general rules (including perhaps most strongly the funeral professionals who do the original arrangement), they actually create, upgrade, and downgrade relationships.

Such negotiation occurs with flower baskets on the work unit’s side as well. The general rule is to have the deceased’s last work unit first, since that work unit was the closest organization that the deceased belonged to. This rule sounds straightforward, but it is more complicated when carrying it out. In fact, many state practitioners told me that for memorial meetings of important people in the largest meeting hall, arranging flower baskets is one of the most time consuming preparations. They sometimes had to spend the whole night before doing it. This is complicated due to the rapid restructuring process that has been happening in all kinds of institutions (government or not) since the Opening Up whereby, for instance, an institution that was a state bureau when the deceased worked there is now a quasi-private entity, but staffed by a high ranking party official (albeit a retired one).

In addition, hierarchy between different work units sometimes overrides the actual affiliation between the dead and the institutions. Furthermore, the exact hierarchical relationship is never as clear as people like to think it is, even if we are talking about government bureaus (or, perhaps, particularly when we are talking about

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213 For memorial meetings organized by the family of the deceased, flower baskets based on kin ties and other personal ties are placed on the left (from the deceased’s perspective) because the left side is the superior side (shangshou 上首) in Shanghai funerals. Flower baskets from work unit are placed on the right side of the meeting, the inferior side (xiashou 下首). By the same token, when work units are the organizers of a memorial meeting, its flower baskets should be on the left. However, several funeral professionals told me that since most funerals were organized by family now, many professionals prefer to place the family’s flower baskets on the left and work units’ flower baskets on the right no matter who the organizer is.
government bureaus). So, to make up an example, say the head of Funeral Parlor A was made the Party secretary of Funeral Parlor B two years before he retired so as to solve the succession issue at Parlor A. Having retired from Parlor B, he went on to work as a consultant on funerals for the Civil Affairs Bureau. For his funeral, his last work unit before retiring was Parlor B. However, he actually spent much more time (and was much more well known) at Parlor A. Moreover, after he retired, he worked more informally for the Civil Affairs Bureau which is itself the parent organization of both parlors. Such a case would require a set of negotiations to determine the order of the baskets. This negotiation could take even longer when the staff who were sent to supervise the flower basket arrangement by different institutions needed to call their superiors (or their superiors need to call their superiors) to find a resolution when different understandings of hierarchy arose. Finally, once a particular flower basket is moved, all the other flower baskets after this one may need to be moved as well. As a result, arranging flower baskets on the work units side involved clarifying and delineating the exact hierarchical relationships among institutions, among people who represented the institutions, and between these and the deceased or the bereaved.

In addition to pointing out how gift exchange is not merely a representation of the social, I also want to emphasize that the engagement of reciprocity does not guarantee social solidarity. Taking funeral banquets as an example, they may, but do not always, facilitate the consolidation of social ties damaged by death. On the contrary, they could just as easily facilitate the destruction of social ties. While memorial meetings temporarily tie siblings who are in conflict together, this by no means indicates a
permanent resolution. Funeral banquets then became the site that allows such displaced conflicts to resurface.\textsuperscript{214} As Tang An said, imagine you had few drinks of yellow rice wine (\textit{huangjiu 黃酒}) and just spent time doing things together with siblings whom you may just have had a big fight with at home right before the memorial meeting. Of course you would be very likely to let all that repressed anger come out. A state practitioner who used to be a manager of a funeral parlor’s restaurant told me that when he first got that job, he was surprised to find out that mediating quarrels was one of his primary jobs even though it was not listed in the job description. He also had to make particularly sure that people did not start to smash cups and dishes or even flip the tables in their anger. And, if it did happen, he needed to make sure that he kept track of the restaurant’s property damage so he could ask the bereaved to pay for the damages. Though which bereaved he would need to ask to pay the damages might start another quarrel later.

All these examples show that gift exchange (through flower baskets, their mini-couplets, and their funeral banquets) constructs relational subjectivity both for the dead

\textsuperscript{214} One of the key causes of banquet/funeral conflict is related to property, especially real estate property. Scholars working in China have long pointed out the conflicts associated with dividing households (as opposed to the American style inheritance post-death). Cases where the death of the head of a household precedes this division were one such moment ripe for conflict because one of the key figures that might have upheld or enforced the agreement is the very person who died. Funeral professionals I spoke to thought that these quarrels over property had only gotten worse in post economic reform China as the real estate bubble continued to grow in Shanghai. Not to mention that many elders’ real estate properties were purchased decades ago in what is now downtown Shanghai and therefore had even higher property values. Many of these elders gained these properties through work unit distributions in the first place. The high property value meant that the children of the deceased could completely turn around (\textit{fanshen} 轉身) their financial situation if they successfully fought for their “appropriate” share of the property. While quarrels caused by death are common, in most cases, people are able to put conflict aside at least temporarily in order to hold the memorial meeting. However, I did hear of cases in which the siblings could not reconcile and therefore ended up hosting two separate memorial meetings back to back.
and for living in the public domain. However, while we can gain insight into the social relationships of the deceased and the bereaved through their gift exchange, we should focus also on the productive value, instead of merely the representational value, of such exchanges. Finally, conceptualizing the deceased as relational subjects is the most common kind of alternative observed in contemporary memorial meetings since it transcends religious differences.

**The Preface-Appendix Approach and Plural Subjectivities**

So far I have analyzed what alternative kinds of subjectivity are enacted within socialist civil funeral and how they are enacted. I have shown that there are at least two alternative kinds of self that are commonly constructed in memorial meetings today: religious and relational kinds of self. The dominant idea of a religious self is articulated through folk death ritual performed right after memorial meetings. This folk death ritual model is itself a combination of both the secular (e.g., focusing on filial piety) and the sacred idea of death and dead bodies (e.g., focusing on spirits and afterlife). Overall, folk death ritual includes Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist, and popular religious ideas and practices. At the same time, the idea of a relational self is articulated through gift exchange, whether we are talking about white envelopes, flower baskets (and their mini-couplets), or banquets. These two ways of conceptualizing the deceased are in more or less “peaceful” relationship with the dominant socialist self as evidenced in the fact that they are standard practices in funeral parlors and now commonly practiced in the majority of memorial meetings in Shanghai.
Buddhist ideas of conceptualizing the dead, meanwhile, are secondary within socialist civil funerals. I suggest that the Buddhist idea of self is particularly salient when the death is considered to be “bad” (usually meaning someone died young or died from an accident) in Shanghai. Nevertheless, although the Buddhist idea of a person is a little bit more problematic within socialist civil funerals, it is rendered more or less acceptable by way of a deliberate act of creating an alternative space within state socialist spaces. In this alternative space, both funeral professionals and the bereaved perceive what they are doing as merely domestic ritual even though this “domestic ritual” is now being held in a “public space” (rather than a “religious space”) and is seen by non-family members.

If we imagine the memorial meeting as a book of socialism, what Shanghai people did in performing this kind of religious and relational variations of socialist civil funerals was to add a preface and an appendix to the socialist book. While the story that makes the book is still about socialism, the preface and appendix of the book are concerned with religious conceptions of the world, the deceased, and of the afterlife as well as the reciprocal relationship between and among the living and the dead. Specifically, this preface and appendix approach is achieved through temporization. By making added ritual exist before or after the core socialist civil funeral, they are able to become routine, if optional, additions onto the socialist core. This was especially true if they were performed after memorial meetings (as the work unit representative could leave without watching this). The best evidence for this is the standardization of that whole set of rituals (including funeral banquets) that happen after the farewell ceremony.

One unintended consequence is that it was not uncommon to see people spending
more time on post-memorial meeting rituals than on the actual socialist meeting itself. This was certainly the case if we add the time spent on funeral banquets to the non-meeting total. Yet, while the length of the preface and appendix might be longer than the actual book, for participants the memorial meeting is still the primary event. Without it, the funeral would not have taken place. While some Shanghai people went without the banquets, Buddhist, or popular religious practices, it would make no sense to go without the memorial meeting and, by definition, the memorial meeting is (still) Socialist.

In the last chapter I suggested to conceptualize memorial meetings as a kind of cognitive framing that provides “a spatial and temporal bonding of a set of interactive messages” (Bateson 1972 [2000]). In this chapter, I propose that when people create religious and relational variations of memorial meetings, they transform the frame of memorial meetings into a kind of modular frame. In this modular frame, socialist ideas of person provide a base that allows religious and relational ideas of person to co-exist. This priority is important because it would make no sense to Shanghai people to only have gift exchange, folk funerals, and/or Buddhist ritual without having the socialist ritual.

To be clear, some people indeed do not hold memorial meetings at all. As explained in the last chapter, some people only had farewell ceremonies (meaning no work unit’s memorial speech). I encountered one son of a deceased who refused to let me attend his father’s farewell ceremony. He told me that his “father was an intellectual. He did not believe in those ritual things and we will not have rituals. His farewell ceremony will be a simple event of close family members saying goodbye.” In this sense, what he rejected was the idea of ritual instead of the epistemology behind the ritual. In fact, rather
than being a challenge to the socialist idea, this refusal of the memorial meeting was a rare case of a person following the Party line by completely excluding ritual. Nevertheless, although a modular frame is potentially pluralist in nature, it does not here allow pluralist ideas of self to exist equally.

Moreover, it is important to point out that the boundaries between different ideas of person within this modular frame are fuzzy and porous. There are no concrete walls between the base and the addition. One of the best examples is the Dharani flag. While the state practitioner successfully asked the bereaved to chant individually and only in the body preparation room, she did not remove the Dharani flag as the body was moved into the memorial meeting hall afterward. As a result, the Dharani flag covered the body, in public, throughout the memorial meeting. This description has a much bigger influence than it might sound. Nearly all memorial meetings are open casket ceremonies in Shanghai. For open casket memorial meetings, many deceased are displayed in coffins where their bodies are covered by a layer of fresh flowers like a blanket—a new service item called “flowers on the body” that has emerged since the marketization of funeral parlors. Having a Dharani flag on top of the flowers means that it visually symbolizes a prominent religious expression in the place everyone will be focusing throughout the meeting.

Another example of a fuzzy modular frame occurred during a different funeral I

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215 The alternative was to instead have the already cremated cremains in a cremains casket placed at the front of the room in the place of a body in a coffin. These situations usually applied to especially to abnormal deaths and were to be avoided unless necessary. I discuss these issues in Chapter 6.
participated in. The bereaved rented a wake keeping room at Huangpu starting from the night before the memorial meeting. In addition to hiring monks to chant that night, they had one more chanting session in the morning right before the memorial meeting. Huangpu allows the mourning family who rents a wake keeping room to rent one extra session and to have the memorial meeting there too. However, you could not just rent a wake keeping room to hold a memorial meeting in, rather you had to buy the entire package. Since the chanting in the morning session and memorial meeting were held in one space right after each other, many participants who arrived earlier for the memorial meeting observed the end of the sutra chanting session. Some even joined the bereaved family members to offer incense and prostrations to the deceased. Similarly we saw this in the case where state practitioners, funeral brokers, and the bereaved failed to clear the hall and hold a private Buddhist family ritual before the meeting started. Both cases allowed Buddhist conceptualizations of the deceased and his journey to infiltrate the meeting right from the beginning. While added rituals inside the funeral parlor such as chanting are confined to (imagined) domestic space as people move from their pre-memorial meeting activities to memorial meetings proper, they do leave traces that therefore could be observed even when people are participating within the socialist civil funeral.

Of course, saying the boundaries of modular frames are fuzzy and porous does not mean that there is no attempt to govern and maintain them. On the contrary, as several of my examples show (especially concerning those rituals that are not yet routinized as proper socialist additions), there are constant, but variably successful efforts to police
(including the effort of not governing on the state side), define and regulate proper behavior, and negotiate these boundaries.

Being modular, however, is not the only characteristic of religious and relational versions of memorial meetings. In the last chapter, I discussed how within memorial meetings, socialist subjectivity is constructed through ritual participants’ commitment to prescribed social convention instead of through the denotative meanings of ritual. I suggest that this lack of denotative meanings not only remains in these religious and relational versions of memorial meetings, but also plays a key role in making incommensurable ideas of self commensurable. Through the emphasis on doing instead of pursuing authenticity and sincerity, Shanghai people construct pluralist subjectivity that simultaneously constructs the deceased as a religious, relational, and socialist person even if these share very different epistemologies of death, spirits, and afterlife. In this kind of funeral, the living sequentially construct dead bodies as spirits needing to be pleased, ancestors in kinship relationships with the living, and sources of pollution that need to be managed. They also construct reciprocal and relational kinds of subjectivity of dead bodies—a guanxi kind of self that continues as the deceased is transformed by these exchanges into a beneficent ancestor. What the temporization does here is to create a particular set of plural subjectivities that allows socialist subjectivity to exist in sequential conjunction with religious and relational subjectivities. As a result, by not emphasizing sincerity and authenticity through the denial of denotative meanings of memorial meetings, ritualized acts (such as memorial meetings) allow ambiguity (Seligman and Weller 2012).
If you recall from Chapters 2 and 3 on the history of Funeral Reform, the CCP originally aimed not only to establish a socialist identification, but also to eliminate all other sources of identification, actively working to destroy or diminish alternative ties to foreigners, nuclear families, lineages, temples, and native place associations. By turning memorial meetings into a modular frame through the addition of religious and relational rituals, Shanghai people covertly challenged the singular primacy of socialism. Meanwhile, however, the exact same act of creating modular frame also means that the socialist idea of self is re-affirmed. While this pluralist idea of self does not pose a challenge to the socialist state, it did challenge the necessity of a collectively shared singular socialist self. By turning the original socialist frame into a modular frame where socialism was the dominant, but not the only way of conceptualizing the deceased, religious and relational versions of memorial meetings allow the possibility for pluralist subjectivity. This is possible exactly because ritualized acts transcend the denotative meaning of ritual.

This preface and appendix approach, however, is not the only possible way to create a modular frame. Protestants, and especially those who use Protestant memorial meetings as a site of proselytizing, must transform the performative nature of the socialist ritual into one wherein the denotative meaning of the meeting can be realized so as to facilitate the conversion of non-believers. In the next and also the last content chapter of this dissertation, I discuss these Protestant variations of memorial meetings, their contrasts with this book, preface, appendix approach, and some of the consequences of emphasizing denotative meanings of ritual.
A Protestant Version of Memorial Meetings

One afternoon Chen Yu asked me if I wanted to go to a memorial meeting with her the next morning. A funeral broker, Lin Bingzhong, from a different funeral agency had hired her to be the videographer for a funeral he was putting on. Early the next morning we arrived at the parlor from our respective homes. Not long after Chen Yu and I arrived in the parking lot, Lin Bingzhong drove in as well. He gave Chen Yu RMB 500 (USD 77) up front for her work that day because he might be too busy to pay her later since the endings of memorial meetings are usually quite chaotic. He told Chen Yu that this family had requested that the video recording start in the parking lot in order to record the arrival of the bereaved (and the deceased as materialized in the picture). Without such a specific request, the usual funeral recording only covers those rituals that happen inside the meeting hall along with the final act of sending the body away.\(^{216}\) We waited another twenty minutes or so before we saw three buses filled with guests drive into the parking lot. The first group who got off from the first bus were members of a marching band. They all wore marine-like white uniforms. Three of them were percussionists and the other four played a variety of wind instruments such as clarinets and saxophones. After leaving the bus, they formed two lines on the sides of the walkway, got their instruments ready, and started to play Christian hymns.

As soon as the music started, the immediate family of the deceased then

\(^{216}\) Occasionally, some of the bereaved demanded that Chen Yu start filming even earlier at a wake they held for the deceased.
descended from the first bus. The first one held the deceased’s portrait. This meant that he was the deceased’s eldest son. As more and more people got off all three buses, I quickly realized that, despite the hymns, the immediate family members of the deceased were not Christian. Most of the people in the last bus, however, were. I knew this because the people who got off from the first and second buses all wore black armbands. As I mentioned before, black armbands (having replaced full mourning dress) are the standard form of mourning dress in contemporary Shanghai. By contrast, the people who got off the third bus wore a white armband with a red cross on it. I later confirmed my speculation with Lin Bingzhong. He told me that the deceased was a devout Protestant but none of her five children were. It was her (the deceased’s) wish to have a Protestant memorial meeting.

Once everyone got off the bus, they started to walk together to the meeting hall. The marching band was in the lead, followed by the eldest son (holding the deceased’s picture) and other immediate family members, then distant family members and friends, and finally the Protestant group from the third bus. Since Chen Yu had to film this march, we had to run so that we got ahead of everyone again. After finding a proper distance between ourselves and the mourners, we then walked backward so we could face the crowd. While Chen Yu recorded the march, I helped her to carry the equipment and camera cases. This ceremonial march from the parking lot to the meeting hall was a new experience for me at the time. This was because most city funeral parlors would not allow
such conspicuous marching inside funeral parlors in Shanghai.\textsuperscript{217}

After the band arrived at the meeting hall, they stood outside just by the door so that the deceased (via her picture) could enter first. They then continued to play to welcome the rest of the funeral participants as they walked past them into the hall. Inside the meeting hall, once the funeral participants had signed in, they then began to socialize with each other. Some walked around the meeting hall so they could read the couplets on the flower baskets. As explained in the last chapter, these couplets are the textual record of the social relationship that the giver had with the deceased or the deceased’s children embodied. In fact, whenever she was hired to be a videographer Chen Yu had to film the couplets of each flower basket one by one so the family had a record of gift giving. She quickly set about doing this to ensure she had filmed each basket prior to the start of the meeting itself.

Meanwhile, Lin Bingzhong (the broker) was talking through some last minute preparations with the eldest son of the deceased, the state practitioner who was in charge of this meeting hall, and another man I did not know. I later found out that this man was a pastor. He wore a black button down shirt and a pair of black suit pants. While his dress was on the relatively formal side, this was obviously not a uniform. Later, a much younger man joined this group discussion as well. He was the representative of the

\textsuperscript{217} Only Yishan City Funeral Parlor and suburban funeral parlors allowed the bereaved to have this kind of marching. In fact, even the frequency of hiring bands varied across urban and suburban funeral parlors. Longhua, a parlor that primarily served middle and upper class “customers,” had the lowest band usage rate. Baoxin, located in a working class area, had a higher band usage rate than Longhua. In both places, the only “marching” they allowed was when they sent the body from the Meeting Hall to a hearse in the parking lot at the end of the funeral. As for Yishan and all other suburban funeral parlors, marching band usage rates are quite high and people were allowed to march into the funeral parlors.
deceased’s work unit. He looked a little bit timid and inexperienced to me. From the conversation, I realized that he did not know the deceased in person. As I explained earlier, though, this was a fairly common situation in Shanghai.

About twenty minutes later, the pastor started to test the microphone. He, rather than the broker, would be the MC for today. He told funeral participants that the memorial meeting was about to start so they should line up. As explained in Chapter 7, the general rule is to have immediate family members stand in the first few rows while the work unit representative stands somewhere in those rows along with the immediate family (See Figure 9.1). However, perhaps because participants were busy socializing with other people and therefore did not hear the pastor's instructions or maybe because the pastor did not try very hard to make people line up “correctly,” the participants ended up lining up in a very unusual way. The first few rows split into right and left sections (from the deceased’s perspective) with 1 to 2 ratio. On the left was the family of the deceased as is the normal case. However, people from the deceased's congregation occupied the first few rows of the right side. The timid work unit representative was pushed all the way to the middle rows, just behind the Christian crowd (see Figure 9.2).

After the people all lined up, the pastor formally announced the start of the memorial meeting. In the following selections, I have transcribed parts of the memorial meeting. I have also numbered the pastor’s facilitation for the convenience of later analysis.
The Pastor (1):

God loves everyone. [...] God is the creator of the universe. [...] God sacrificed his only son. [...] We are really happy that the family members of Sister Ma Donghua are willing to respect her religion and her wish to not have folk (shisude 世俗的) practices in her funeral such as burning (paper money), offering (sacrifices), and worshipping (ancestors). We also will not have bowing today because Protestant funerals cannot contain “prostration and worshiping” (跪拜).
We Protestants only submit ourselves to the Holy God. [...] Today we’ll have hymn-singing, praying, a family members’ thank you speech, and the church’s testimony. [...] Let us sing a hymn. [...] 

I want to point out several things here briefly. First, in the list of funeral events, the pastor neglected to mention the work unit’s memorial speech. Second, the hymn singing was accompanied by the marching band’s music. However, it was clear that only those who wore white armbands (the Protestants) were singing. The immediate family members who stood in the first few rows had a piece of paper with the lyrics on it in their hands. Some of them looked like that they were reading the lyrics during the hymn singing, but most of them looked like they were simply listening to the hymn. Either way, they did not open their mouths and sing like the Protestant participants. That said, they “participated” in this hymn singing by agreeing to be there and to have such a ritual performed in the first place. Finally, the pastor’s “opening,” his combination of preaching and hymn singing, took a long time. He did not invite the body in for a good 10 minutes. After the pastor gave the instruction to bring in the corpse, a state practitioner pushed the deceased to the designated space. He then stepped to the side and remained more or less invisible in the meeting hall for the rest of the memorial meeting.

The Pastor (2):

Today, we are here in the biggest memorial-meeting hall of the Huangpu Funeral Parlor to have this funeral for Sister Ma Donghua. The people who came to join Sister Ma Donghua’s funeral are her family members, relatives and friends, her leaders and colleagues at her work unit, and her brothers and sisters from the congregation. Now I announce the beginning of Sister Ma Donghua’s funeral. Please all commemorate her silently. Please play the dirge.
The Pastor (3):
Now we are going to pray to God. Please, everyone close your eyes and pray to God.

Dear Holy Father, Thank you for loving everyone in the world. [Amen! The church members said in unison.] You created the sky, the earth, and everything. [Amen!] You created us, your human beings. [Amen!] Your glory enlightens us. [...] When the work unit’s representative gives his memorial speech, the bereaved's representative gives a thank you speech, and when we hear the church’s testimony, you are with us. You watch, lead, and guide us like a shepherd taking care of his flock! Now we invite the work unit representative to give the memorial speech.

The work unit representative came up and stood facing the deceased’s portrait and body.

He bowed three times to the deceased. He then turned around and bowed one time to the participants.

The Work Unit Representative:
Comrades! Today, with extreme sorrow, we all come to this memorial meeting to mourn Comrade Ma Donghua, a retired worker from the Shanghai Machine Limited Liability Company (Co., Ltd.). Comrade Ma Donghua died from failure to cure illness. She passed away at 22:30 on March 22, 2011 at the age of 77.

Comrade Ma Donghua was born in Shanghai City on June 16, 1934. Prior to 1949, Comrade Ma Donghua stayed in her hometown to help her parents with domestic affairs. Between July 1955 and 1965, Comrade Ma Donghua worked as a worker in the Fuxin District Committee and at the Shanghai Electric Factory. Starting in July 1968, she entered the Shanghai Machine Factory to work in the administrative unit. She retired in June 1984.

Comrade Ma Donghua was born in the Old Society. During the decade before Liberation, she followed her parents and experienced much disturbance, hardship, and bitterness—like the other thousands and hundreds of millions of workers’ children. She experienced exploitation and oppression in the Old Society and had a difficult life. After New China was established, she liberated herself (fanshen 翻身). She joined the construction of socialism fully, heartily, and with enthusiasm. She devoted all her youth and life to this, especially after July 1968 when she entered the administrative unit in the Shanghai Machine Factory. She worked hard and did her best to contribute from her humble position. She retired
in glory in June 1984.

After she retired, she never made excessive demands to the work unit. Over twenty years of retired life, she overcame all her difficulties herself without giving the work unit trouble. She showed excellent quality in being a retired worker. Who won’t feel pain and sorrow for her departure? Commemorating Comrade Ma Donghua is to learn from her love for the Party and for socialism, her hard working ethic and endurance, and her selfless (wu#si 無私) spirit. The life of Comrade Ma Donghua was a laborious life; a life of dedication. We need to turn our grief into strength. From our own working location, we each need to contribute to construct China as a well-off and harmonious society as early as possible.

Now, please allow me to represent the Retirement Committee of the Shanghai Machine Co., Ltd. and all employers in the Shanghai Machine Co., Ltd. to give deepest condolences to Comrade Ma Donghua. Comrade Ma Donghua, please let her rest in peace! It is March 26, 2011.

After the work unit representative went back to where he stood, the oldest son of deceased came up to the front. Note that he did not bow three times to the deceased before giving his speech. He “stared” at the picture for several seconds and then nodded to the audience.

The Oldest Son of the Deceased:
This is the thank you speech. Dear [work unit] leaders, relatives and friends, Protestant brothers and sisters, good morning. First, I am representing my family to thank you for coming to my mother’s memorial meeting despite the busy schedules you have. Thanks to those Protestant brothers and sisters who visited and helped my mother while she was alive and sick. I give all of you my deepest gratitude. My dear mother was born on June 16, 1934. She entered the Shanghai Machine Factory in July 1968 to work in the cafeteria under the administrative unit. She retired in glory in June 1984 from the Shanghai Machine Factory. On February 23, 2011, she was admitted to the No. 5 People’s Hospital due to her long-term illness with diabetes. Due to her illness deteriorating, she left this world forever at 22:30 on March 22, 2011. She passed away at the age of 77.

My dear mother was born in a poor worker’s family. She worked diligently in her life without recognition from the world. She was conscientious, honest, and down
to earth. She raised five children in her life. She helped her husband and taught her children. She was frugal and prudent in order to bring us up. She loved and cared about us all wholeheartedly. She taught us how to be a person and how to lead the next generation to become a proper person. She was a typical Chinese style good wife and good mother.

Dear mother, your departure made us feels so much pain and sorrow. Dear mother, how could you leave so soon? It is just about time for us children to return your upbringing and love—how could you leave us forever without enjoying this? Your sons are crying. Your daughters are crying. Your departure is so bitter and our hearts are in pain. Dear mother, please leave without worrying. We will never forget your wish—your wish for us siblings to stay together and educate the next generation. We hope you are peaceful and cheerful in heaven (tiantang 天堂). We hope to be your children again in the next life. My dear mother, please rest in peace and have a good last journey.

Finally, I represent our family again to show our deepest gratitude to all of you who have come to her memorial meeting today.

He then turned around and “stared” at his mother’s picture portrait for several seconds and then nodded to the audience before walking back to where he stood earlier.

_The Pastor (4):_
Now, let us sing another (Christian) hymn. […]

Again, as in the beginning, it was clear that one third of the participants appeared to be deeply immersed in the hymn singing while the other two thirds were simply listening.

_The Pastor (5):_
Yes, Jesus loves you [spoken in response to the last line of lyrics in the hymn]. Jesus saves you. Our dear Ma Donghua Sister left all of those wonderful memories to us. We heard all these beautiful testimonies about her, whether from her family or her work unit. We need to know today that she was also a good example in the church. She was very pious in her beliefs. She went to church service; she also went to home prayer gatherings. With fellow brothers and sisters, she attended church gatherings, sang hymns, prayed, worshiped God, read the
bible, and listened to sermons. All these are beautiful testimony and valuable treasures in the eyes of God. Today, we see all these family members, relatives, friends, and leaders from the work unit all respect this old lady and all love this loving mother. We all feel sorrow for her departure. What she has left to us is her faith. She found God, this unchanging God. [...] In today’s China with over a billion in population, there are not many people who know God. Ma Donghua Sister was blessed because she had this chance to know the only one true God. [...] I am skipping here the portions of his preaching that involved narrating the life of Jesus, that there is only one God, that all other folk religious practices were idolatry, that God loves us and sacrificed his life to save us, that simple belief can save you too, and so on. The pastor’s preaching went on and on. I started to feel my legs getting sore. After all, I had been standing up ever since I arrived in the parking lot (this was in addition to my hour plus of standing up during my commute from home to the parlor). I quickly noticed, however, that I was not the only one who felt this way. I saw many people, especially those who did not wear Christian armbands, starting to stretch their feet. They began with subtle stretching but soon their actions became more obvious. More than this, some non-Protestant participants started to get restless and exchange eye contact. Some of them even began whispering to each other. After all, a normal memorial meeting should be finished within 20 minutes. Yet, we had already passed the 40 minute mark and the pastor had not yet even invited the participants to begin the farewell ceremony.

I was standing next to Chen Yu facing the crowd from the front. I could see that the Protestant participants were still very much concentrating on their pastor’s preaching. Meanwhile, the faces of more and more non-Protestant participants changed from showing seriousness (or indifference?) to obvious impatience. I could see such changes
even among the immediate family members of the deceased. I felt an awkward atmosphere continue to build up, but the Pastor kept preaching. Then, at some point, I accidentally made eye contact with the eldest son of the deceased. He subtly asked me over to him with his eyes. I looked around to make sure that he was indeed looking at me. The state practitioner and Lin Bingzhong the funeral broker were out of sight and Chen Yu, though also facing the participants, was standing on the other side of the meeting hall from me by that time. I approached the eldest son as requested. He whispered to me to tell the pastor to finish his preaching soon because they were running out of time. Not knowing what to do, and feeling I should not talk to the preaching pastor directly, I left the meeting hall to find Lin Bingzhong. My guess was right—he was enjoying a cigarette outside. I told him about the chief mourner’s request. He then tossed his unfinished cigarette and walked back to the meeting hall and went straight to the pastor and spoke a few words to him. The pastor acknowledged Lin Bingzhong’s reminder. However, he went on for another several minutes before he finally announced the beginning of the farewell ceremony.

We could finally start the farewell ceremony—the last step of the official part of memorial meetings. Recall that in the usual memorial meeting as I described it in Chapter 7, people bowed to the deceased three times collectively before the farewell ceremony. Then during the farewell ceremony, small groups of people each approached and bowed to the deceased another three times. However, in this particular memorial meeting, as the Pastor requested at the beginning of his performance there was to be no personal nor collective bowing. In fact, up to that point the work unit representative was the only
person who had bowed during the whole meeting. When the immediate family members (and the Protestant participants) performed their respective farewell ceremony, they did not bow since prior to the memorial meeting the pastor had specifically asked them not to. They just “stared” at the deceased and then left flowers on top of her body. Some participants, however, bowed as usual when they performed their own part of the farewell ceremony. This may be because that they were unclear about the Protestant rules, because they did know the rule, but forgot, or simply because they did not want to follow the no bowing rule. In any case, without the bowing the farewell ceremony went very fast.

Some people left the meeting hall after the farewell ceremony, but some stayed. As I described in the last chapter, this movement marked a change in modality from mourning as a (socialist) collective act to a more popular religious idea that sees mourning as relational. The immediate family then formed a circle around Ma Donghua's coffin. Once the circle was formed, they suddenly started to wail loudly. This, too, was consistent with the memorial meeting “appendix” where we saw a change in emotion regime from self-restraint to outward (sometimes obligatory) expression of grief and mourning. The big difference here in this Protestant version, however, was that as soon as the immediate family members started to weep, the pastor, who was not standing in the circle, gave the bereaved a withering “look” that looked like condemnation to me. He then walked close to the bereaved and reminded them that they should restrain themselves. The bereaved decreased their volume of wailing for several seconds, but soon began crying loudly again. Lin Bingzhong then said to the bereaved, “Aren’t you Protestants? Aren’t Protestant not allowed to wail? Please stop weeping.” The bereaved,
however, continued to wail. After all, they were not Protestants.

After a while the bereaved’s wailing gradually faded and the state practitioner pushed the body to the middle of the meeting hall. In this particular meeting hall, the deceased’s body rested on a “bed” during the memorial meeting instead of in a coffin (different funeral parlors have different ways of organizing these arrangements). Another practitioner pushed a white coffin into the hall. In Shanghai, only Christians used white coffins. Lin Bingzhong directed the direct descendants of the deceased to move their mother’s body from the bed to the coffin. Lin Bingzhong then asked the bereaved to pick flowers from the displayed flower baskets to put inside the coffin. There was no placing of xibo (the spiritual money discussed before) in this funeral. People brought so many flowers (as if they were xibo, hence, the more the better) that Lin had to stop them in the end. Otherwise, he told them, they would not be able to close the coffin's lid. The coffin lid was also white. Painted on top of the white lid was a big Red Cross. People continued to wail throughout this whole time as in the popular religious ritual described in Chapter 8. Lin Bingzhong kept reminding them, “Don’t wail. Protestants do not cry. Protestants are happy in times of death because your mother now is in the heaven with Jesus. This is a good thing. She is in heaven now. No need to cry.” While Lin himself was not Christian, this comment was not his own idiosyncratic interpretation. The general knowledge among funeral professionals in regard to Protestant memorial meetings was that Protestants could not (or at least should not) cry at funerals because funerals were supposed to mean a happy reunification with God.

When this part of the ceremony was over, a group of five people wearing marine-
like white uniforms came in. They lifted the coffin onto their shoulders and did a goose step march to carry the coffin from the meeting hall to the crematoria. Since this service resembles a secular military ritual, ceremonial funeral processions were quite popular disregarding religious difference during my fieldwork. Along with the marching band, all of us marched to the crematoria, which was located on the other side of the parlor. When we arrived at the cremator unit, the bereaved increased their wailing. A state practitioner then put the coffin into the cremator and pushed a button. We witnessed a conveyor belt sending the deceased away into a dark tunnel. Lin Bingzhong then led all funeral participants to a restaurant nearby to have their funeral banquet lunch. The immediate family members would pick up Ma's cremains after their meal on the same day.

Chen Yu called someone she knew at that parlor and asked him if he could give us a ride back to Longevity’s office. She saw this person driving into the Parlor earlier. He told Chen Yu that he had just dropped off a body so he now had an empty car going back downtown. We were welcome to join him. This was the first time I ever sat in a hearse. Chen Yu sat in the passenger seat and I sat in the back. There was only one seat in the back. Right next to my seat was a stainless steel board where the body would be (and was just recently) placed. On my way from the parlor to Longevity’s office I didn't speak much, instead I stared at that steel board and tried to figure out what (or how exactly) I should feel about it.

Ritually Constructed Plural Subjectivities

From Ma Donghua’s memorial meeting, we can see that her funeral constructed
her simultaneously as a socialist citizen, as holding a traditional Chinese female social role, and as a devout Protestant. This was articulated in the sequential co-existence of the work unit representative’s memorial speech, the eldest son’s thank you speech, and the pastor’s preaching. I examine these three speeches in turn by showing how each genre of narrative delineates a particular kind of self of Ma Donghua.

First, the work unit representative’s standard and stylized narrative describes Ma Donghua as someone who was born in the Old Society, who experienced disturbances, hardship, bitterness, exploitation, and oppression, and who then liberated herself after New China was established. Recall the memorial speech of Wang Dashan in Chapter 7. These two speeches use the same narrative devices to delineate the life history of the dead. Moreover, the embodied ethics of Ma Donghua and Wang Dashan are also practically identical. As I analyzed in his case, these socialist narratives construct the identity of the dead within a particular socialist imagination of time and person. Just like Wang Dashan’s funeral created socialist subjectivity for him postmortem, through narrating this socialist idea of time, person, and ethics, Ma Donghua’s funeral made her into a model socialist citizen at the end of her life. As far as the public was concerned, whether or not it was an authentic or sincere representation of who she was while alive, she was now a model socialist citizen in the public domain, at least momentarily.

One thing worth pointing out is that Ma Donghua’s memorial speech further elaborates the relationship between the socialist state and its citizen(s) through a concrete example that illustrates Ma Donghua’s selflessness that we did not see in Wang Dashan’s memorial speech. The work unit representative said, “After she retired, she never made
excessive demands on the work unit. Over twenty years of retired life, she overcame all her difficulties herself without giving the work unit trouble. She showed excellent quality in being a retired worker.” In this narrative, a true selfless socialist citizen not only devotes all her productivity to the work unit, but also asks for nothing in return once she loses her productivity. She is a true socialist citizen due to this selflessness even though the company she had worked for had since been privatized (note that it is now a limited liability company). This one-sided devotion is in stark contrast to traditional Chinese ideas of social relationships, including that between ruler and subjects, which was essentially based on reciprocity. For example, the idea of filial piety is built on the assumption that parental provision creates a debt relationship. When parents are old, their children are expected to return the favor, taking care of old and infirm parents just as the parents took care of them as equally infirm babies. Confucius's idea of the ruler-subject relationship was an extension of filial piety. This is why in imperial China one important sign of an emperor losing the Mandate of Heaven (and thus his legitimacy to rule) was his inability to provide provision to his people during natural disasters and when a high number of the dead did not receive a proper burial. Recalling my analysis of the marketization of funeral parlors in Chapter 4, contemporary public concerns over death for profiteering, or more accurately speaking, that “the dead could not afford to die,” is itself a way of questioning the regime’s legitimacy. Nevertheless, by describing her as a good retired worker, her memorial speech transforms her into a true socialist citizen whose moral superiority transcends the implied utilitarian nature of the traditional moral world. Whether or not Ma Donghua actually made no demands after she retired was a
different and maybe irrelevant matter since this speech was probably based on her company’s memorial speech template.

While the memorial speech makes Ma Donghua into a socialist citizen subject, the thank you speech, given by her eldest son, remakes her as both socialist and (Han) Chinese. Unlike the memorial speech, which is based on a singular ethical source of socialism, this thank you speech contains a variety of ethical sources in conceptualizing the deceased. We can see this in several parts. First, the eldest son started his speech by thanking work unit leaders, relatives and friends, and Protestant brothers and sisters. This was in contrast to the work unit representative who referred to everyone simply as Comrades. This recognition of different identity categories articulates a shift from conceptualizing all funeral participants as undifferentiated (and individuated) socialist citizen subjects who are collectively and directly tied to the socialist state (everyone is a “Comrade”) to differentiated groups of people whose identities are defined by their relationships to the socialist state (some are “leaders”), kinship and other reciprocal relationships (some are “relatives and friends”), and religious affiliations distinguished by gender (some are “Protestant brothers and sisters”).

The first conceptualizing framework in the thank you speech is socialist subjectivity. This operated through narrating Ma Donghua’s socialist status categories and socialist ethics. In the second paragraph of Ma Donghua’s thank you speech, the eldest son said that she came from a “poor worker” family. Moreover, the eldest son described his mother as honest, down to earth, frugal, prudent and so on. Just as Wang Dashan’s thank you speech echoed his memorial speech, so does Ma Donghua’s thank
you speech also echo her memorial speech. Both the memorial speech and the thank you speech use the same narrative techniques. However, we can also see a shift in how to conceptualize such socialist status and ethics in Ma Donghua’s thank you speech. Instead of presenting these standards solely in terms of socialism, by the end of the second paragraph the eldest son illustrated his mother's merits by concluding that these had “led the next generation to become a proper person” and that his mother was a typical “Chinese style good wife and good mother.” This conclusion tacitly adds onto and transforms a socialist interpretative framework into a Chinese cultural interpretative framework for understanding what these moral characteristics mean in being a person. Thus, Ma Donghua being honest, down to earth, frugal, and prudent was (also?) because she was a “typical Chinese woman.”

The third paragraph of the thank you speech shifts voice from talking to the bereaved to speaking directly to the deceased. The intriguing part here is that this paragraph is a direct entrance into the traditional Chinese moral world where human relationships are defined by reciprocity again. The eldest son said, “It is just about the time for us children to return your upbringing and love—how could you leave us forever without enjoying this?” The evocation of “return” shows how the one-sided socialist social relationship has been submerged into a reciprocal folk Chinese relationship. Moreover, such reciprocity within family is built on the affection and nurturance between mother and children (Stafford 1995). Thus, right after grieving the emotional loss, the eldest son then talks through his regret at not having been able to fulfill his filial obligations. Furthermore, the eldest son said, “Your sons are crying. Your daughters are
crying.” I discussed in Chapter 7 that externalized expression of grief and mourning is key to traditional Han Chinese death ritual. This was so important that ritualized wailing and professional weepers were integral parts of traditional funeral. In Chapter 8, I further discussed how funeral participants today experience a change in emotion regime between socialist and Chinese regimes of affect. The mention of crying in Ma Donghua’s eldest son’s speech articulates this sequential transformation in emotion regimes as well the embedding of such emotion regimes in reciprocal social relationships.

Moreover, Ma Donghua was not only conceptualized as a typical Chinese mother who was hierarchically and reciprocally related to her children, but also as a critical source of lineage continuity. The eldest son said, “We will never forget your wish—your wish for us siblings to stay together and educate the next generation.” Ma Donghua’s provision to her children was not only intended to elicit reciprocity between her and her children, but also meant to create lineage consolidation and continuity through the provision for (and of) “the next generation.” This was possible through her transformation into an ancestor. This was why the eldest son said that she was now “peaceful and cheerful in heaven.” Another thing worth mentioning here is that the eldest son used the word tiantang (天堂) here. Although this phrase usually refers to a Christian idea of heaven, the next sentence that followed shows that this might not be the case. The son described how he and his siblings “hope to be your children again in the next life.” The “next life” reference is based on an idea of reincarnation that is prevalent in traditional Han Chinese ideas of death, afterlife, and heaven that have long been heavily influenced by Buddhism, at least since the Song Dynasty. In other words, we could say
that the usage of the phrase *tiantang* first constructs Ma Donghua as a Christian person. But this Christian person is then immediately re-configured into a traditional Chinese person, now an ancestor who can take care of lineage consolidation and continuity, and who might be reborn into this world.

Finally, in the last paragraph, the eldest son switches from talking to the dead to talking again to the living. He stressed his gratitude to people who came to his mother’s funeral. Such thank you etiquette also creates and recognizes the debt relationship between the immediate family members of the deceased and other funeral participants. This means that the immediate family members have continuing obligations to attend fellow funeral participants’ life rituals and associated gift exchanges (whether through banquets or cash) to repay such debt.

Overall, if we compare Wang Dashan’s thank you speech in Chapter 7 and Ma Donghua’s here, we see slight variations. The bulk of Ma Donghua’s speech constructs her as a traditional Chinese mother more than as model socialist citizen. Possible reasons for this are many. For example, this might be caused by a different choice of templates or whether the funeral broker or the family member chose the templates. I did not have a chance to confirm whether Ma Donghua’s eldest son wrote his speech based on templates, but both Chen Yu and I felt that the speech sounded like a template-generated one. Nevertheless, as discussed, the “odd” part about the thank you speech in contemporary Shanghai was never the presence of a traditional Han Chinese idea of person and death. On the contrary, it was the presence of socialism, since socialism rarely defines the ontological experience between parents and children in contemporary
Shanghai. What’s important here is that Ma Donghua’s thank you speech, ostensibly from her children's perspective, contains both the folk and socialist frameworks in delineating “who Ma Donghua was.”

Finally, the pastor’s preaching performs the postmortem construction of a Protestant subjectivity of Ma Donghua. Right from the beginning, she was delineated as a “sister” to him and his congregation instead of as a Comrade or a typical Chinese woman. In order to put this “sister” into context, it is important to first explain to the assembled participants who God was and what God’s relationship to Ma Donghua was. Perhaps this was why the Pastor immediately told funeral participants that “God is the Creator and he loved us so much that he sacrificed his own son” (see Pastor 1). In other words, the conceptualization of a Protestant person is first and foremost based on a relationship to a Christian creator God. However, such an understanding is merely the first step. The next necessary step is to separate Ma Donghua from the rest of the people who had not yet been saved by Jesus Christ. This is why the pastor stressed how they (those who were saved) were really happy that Ma Donghua’s family members (who were not yet saved) were willing to respect her religion by rejecting the “folk” practices of burning (paper money), offering (sacrifices), worshiping (ancestors), and bowing (prostration and worshiping). By respecting her faith, Ma Donghua’s remaining family distinguished her funeral from regular people’s funeral. It is worth noting here that the pastor used the word “shisu” when describing folk practices. This phrase actually has a double meaning in Chinese. In addition to meaning folk, shisu is also the Chinese translation of the English word, secular (as understood in the dichotomous sense of the sacred and the profane). In
this sense, to distinguish themselves from the secular, Protestants need to reject both the profane and other religions such as popular religion and Buddhism.

Moreover, just as the work unit representative narrated the socialist ethics and the eldest son narrated both the socialist and traditional Chinese ethics that Ma Donghua embodied, so too did the pastor narrate her Protestant ethics: “She was very pious in her beliefs. She went to church service; she also went to home prayer gatherings. With fellow brothers and sisters, she attended church gatherings, sang hymns, prayed, worshiped God, read the bible, and listened to preaching. All these are beautiful testimony and valuable treasures in the eyes of God” (see Pastor 5). As a result, while the work unit lost a good comrade and the family lost a good (Chinese) mother and a good wife, the church lost a good and faithful Christian believer.

Yet, while losing a good Christian was already bad enough, there was something worse. That is, “[i]n today’s China with over a billion in population, there are not many people who know God.” Thereafter, the pastor’s narrative fully switched gears from commemorating Ma Donghua to introducing the salvation offered by Christianity to the funeral participants. This was why the pastor started to proselytize (although, more accurately speaking, the proselytizing tone and intention already existed right from the opening sermon). The pastor’s effort at proselytizing is a critical point that I will return to in the next section. What I want to stress here is that Ma Donghua’s funeral simultaneously constructed her as a socialist citizen person, a traditional Chinese, and a Protestant despite the apparently incommensurable ideas of person, death, and afterlife in these three ethical traditions.
The co-existence of these three speeches provides a different lens through which to examine how and why religious variations of memorial meetings are a kind of modular frame. Even though the immediate family members and the work unit did not believe in Christianity, by following the pattern of the socialist civil funeral and standing through the hymn singing alongside the Protestant participants, they made Ma Donghua a socialist citizen, a mother embedded in Chinese kinship, and a Christian in the memorial speech, thank you speech, and the pastor’s preaching respectively. Their willingness to commit themselves to social convention constructed a pluralist subjectivity of Ma Donghua. Through the acts of “as if” (whether we are talking about the immediate family acting as if they were Protestants and model socialists, the work unit representative acting as if he were Protestant and traditional Han Chinese, the Protestants acting as if they were both model socialists and traditional Han Chinese, or whatever a specific individual had to pretend to be), their acceptance of social convention also establishes who they appear to be in public at that particular subjunctive moment. In other words, attending this Protestant memorial meeting allowed them to cross from one epistemological boundary to another. Whether these people feel any “authentic” ontological transformation is beside the point and irrelevant. This is consistent with my finding in Chapter 8 when discussing popular religious, Buddhist, and relational variations of socialist funeral.

Despite such similarities shared by all of these religious variations of socialist civil funeral, however, readers might notice that this Protestant memorial meeting
involved more than simply adding a preface or appendix to the socialist book. In the following section, I focus on the unique character of this Protestant version of a memorial meeting to show how the Christian version of the memorial meeting is trying to do something more than adding preface and appendix within this modular frame. I describe how this can undermine and even lead to the breakdown of pluralist subjectivities in performing religious variations of socialist civil funeral.

Reconfiguring a Religious Socialist Funeral

From Pastor 2, we can see that, like the thank you speech (but unlike the memorial speech), the pastor’s narration recognizes different identities of funeral participants. Thus, “the people who came to join Sister Ma Donghua’s funeral are her family members, relatives and friends, her leaders and colleagues at her work unit, and her brothers and sisters from the congregation.” This recognition is parallel to the pastor's recognition of the co-existence of the Church’s testimony, work unit’s memorial speech, and family’s thank you speech in the memorial meeting itself. However, this recognition was merely a first step. In Pastor 3, we can also see that when the pastor prayed, he asked God to watch over all of these differentiated groups. He even asked for God to watch over the work unit leader, the effective Chinese Communist Party representative! Evidently, the pastor was attempting to symbolically submerge these differentiated groups of people under the power of his Christian God.

This new reconfiguration is best articulated when we examine the structure of this Protestant memorial meeting. Here I list the completed procedures of Ma Donghua’s
memorial meeting below. I mark the newly added or changed Protestant steps in bold.

Preface: Pastor preaches and leads the assembled in collective hymn singing
Step 1: The Master of Ceremonies (MC) verbally announces the beginning of the memorial meeting
Step 2: Commemorate the deceased in silence while playing a dirge
Step 3: Pastor prays
Step 4: The work unit representative gives a “memorial speech” (daoci 悼詞)
Step 5: The representative of the bereaved gives a “thank you speech” (daxieci 謝詞)
Step 6: Collective hymn singing and the Pastor preaches
Step 7: Farewell Ceremony (gaobie yishi 告別儀式) without bowing.
Appendix: Weeping, placing flowers inside a Christian coffin, ceremonial funeral procession, and funeral banquet.

As we can see from this new structure, the pastor not only added a preface and appendix, but also changed the original steps of the memorial meeting by inserting hymns and prayers in between each socialist step. The hymn singing in the beginning was especially powerful because of its length and density. The opening hymn singing lasted about ten minutes. Ten minutes is a long time considering the fact that people only need about three minutes to read a memorial speech or a thank you speech. Moreover, the sound of the hymn singing effectively filled with the whole space of the memorial meeting hall. During these ten minutes, Christian hymns were the only sounds that could be heard. Furthermore, even though bowing was meant to be the modernist bodily movement that replaced prostration’s extreme production of hierarchal relationships, Protestants treat bowing and prostrations as the same thing. They reject both because, as the pastor said, “protestants only submit themselves to God.”

Consequently, while the key elements to the socialist meeting remain—the work
units' official memorial speech, the thank you speech by the bereaved, and the farewell ceremony—these have been surrounded and penetrated by a new, explicitly religious and aggressive ideological system as Ma Donghua’s pastor inserted Protestant Christian messages in between each socialist step over the course of his facilitation of the meeting. While Protestant memorial meetings, as one type of religious variation of socialist ritual, are still modular frames, they are on their way to changing the base from socialism to Christianity.

Such a change was possible because the pastor was the MC. Who the MC is, therefore, turns out to be much more important than it might at first appear. Before the decline of the work unit in daily life in Shanghai, work units, not families, organized memorial meetings. As such, the work unit would assign their own people to be the MC. This was consistent with the popularization of memorial meetings resulting from Cultural Revolution rehabilitation rituals. In fact, even at the beginning of the marketization of funeral parlors, state practitioners working in meeting halls were only in charge of meeting hall maintenance. One practitioner told me that when she worked in the meeting halls in 1999, she took care of six halls, but the main thing she did was to clean them up after meetings. She did not need to do the MC job. Today, however, funeral professionals are the default MCs. Each state practitioner only takes care of one hall and they do not do any cleaning.218

When funeral professionals act as the MC, they do not talk much. They say only

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218 The cleaning jobs have now been outsourced. While the state practitioners who were in charge of the meeting halls received roughly RMB 3000 (USD 479) per month, the outsourced cleaning staff was paid closer to RMB 1000 (USD 159) per month.
enough to facilitate the memorial meeting by explicitly directing participants when to speak, bow, or walk around the coffin. However, when pastors are the MC, they not only say a lot, but also have the ability to reframe memorial meetings through their performance. John, a pastor from a different Protestant church, told me that through being the MC, pastors could “encase the original framing (kuangjia 框架) of memorial meetings with Protestantism” when hosting a Protestant version of a memorial meeting. As a result, the ideal situation for Protestant memorial meetings is for the deceased’s pastor to be the MC. Through being an MC, pastors are able to insert a more powerful ethical source for constructing the subjectivity of dead bodies.

Why, then, is it so important for pastors to be the MC in Protestant memorial meetings? John told me that there are three primary goals of Protestant memorial meetings: “the first (goal) is to commemorate the deceased. The second is to console the bereaved. The third is to proselytize (chuanfuyin 傳福音).” John was from one of the Three Self Churches (sanzi jiaohui 三自教會) in Shanghai—a state authorized Protestant church. This meant that his congregation was less evangelical than the family churches that are currently growing rapidly in the areas around Shanghai. Yet, although he represents a less evangelical church, John told me in no uncertain terms that proselytizing often ends up being the most important goal of having a Protestant version of a socialist funeral.

John explained that Protestant memorial meetings are for the living. That is to say, if the deceased converted to Christianity while they were alive, having or not having a Protestant memorial meeting does nothing to influence their salvation. By the same
token, if the bereaved were to organize an idolatrous or other non-Protestant ritual for the deceased they could not “undo” their salvation. The deceased’s salvation solely depends on their individual relationship with God. Since what the bereaved did or didn’t do would not affect the deceased’s relationship to God, proselytizing the living therefore became the primary goal.

The move toward proselytizing is critical in analyzing this Protestant type of modular frame not only because this version attempts to change the base from socialism to Protestantism, but also because it also marks a shift from ignoring the denotative meanings of ritual to paying particular attention to them. Unlike other religious versions of memorial meetings described in Chapter 8, the Protestant variation is striving to make sure that funeral participants receive and understand the message of the ritual in correct ways and therefore act accordingly. Just by committing to social convention is not enough any more; proselytizing requires people to move in a way that they can understand the words and actions and so that they are inspired to belief and to achieve salvation. By emphasizing denotative meanings about God, pastors hope to eventually turn ritual participants into authentic and sincere Protestants. The mere commitment to social convention defeats the purpose of proselytizing.

For the preface-appendix type of modular frame (non-Protestant religious variations of socialist ritual), the deceased was conceptualized as a socialist citizen first, and then as religious and relational subjects. Both the preface and appendix added to the socialist core have significantly restricted audiences, limited to family and close friends of the deceased. The Protestant version, in contrast, cares less about the preface and
appendix precisely because these aspects happen only after the beginning and end of the official meeting and they therefore have little effect on people who are not already believers. As a result, for the Protestant type of memorial meetings, the work unit’s memorial speech (and the family’s thank you speech) would just be one more speech submerged into a proper Protestant funeral. In other words, the key to reformulating Protestant versions of memorial meetings is to move away from the approach of adding preface and appendix instead toward a total rewrite of the book of socialism, replacing it with Christianity.

**Social Conflict and the Return of the Singular**

Given these quite different varieties of religious versions of socialist memorial meetings, what then are some of the consequences of transforming the base of the modular frame and emphasizing denotative meanings? Let me relate a short story that Chen Yu told me to illustrate one possible consequence.

In many memorial meetings, there was often at least a sensible tension between Christian attendees and non-Christians, between the Pastor and the work unit representatives, or between attendees expecting a 15-20 minute meeting and the Pastor speaking for close to an hour. We could see these tensions in Ma Donghua’s memorial meeting. When the eldest son called me over and told me to ask the pastor to stop his preaching, this was certainly a breach of etiquette. However, this breach of etiquette did not turn into actual conflict. In Chen Yu’s example, however, the tension inherent in the Protestant memorial meeting did lead to a real argument.
In mid-January 2011, there was a funeral where the deceased was both a scholar and a Communist Party member. Following his wife’s earlier conversion to Protestantism, he himself had a deathbed conversion. None of his children were Christian. As Chen Yu told me, “when people are on their deathbed, they listen to anything.” After he died, his children arranged a Protestant memorial meeting based on his final wishes. He had passed away at the age of 61. This relatively young age meant that some people in the work unit still knew the deceased in person. Because he had been a relatively young and influential person, many people from his work unit came to the memorial meeting, including the leaders of the work unit. When the work unit people arrived and realized that this would be a Protestant memorial meeting, they decided they could not accept it and insisted that the funeral professional should be the MC instead of the pastor. They said that the pastor could say whatever he wanted to say after the memorial meeting (remember this is how people who practiced Buddhist or popular religion did their religious ceremonies). The funeral professionals listened but refused to take a stance, saying instead that they had to do whatever the bereaved, as their customers, wanted.

Not being appointed MC and only talking after the meeting was an unacceptable option for proselytizing because the people who stay afterwards are either already fellow Christians or people whom the church already has access to (like the bereaved’s immediate family). The pastor therefore refused the suggestion, saying that it was the deceased’s wish for him to be the MC. The work unit people became angry, replying that the deceased was a Communist Party member for his entire life! He was an atheist. He believed in Communism, not Jesus. He converted to Christianity because he was old and
ill and vulnerable. The Church people tricked him.

In the beginning of the quarrel, the children of the deceased were not sure what to do since it was their father’s wish to have a Protestant memorial meeting. However, the work unit people then said that if the pastor was the MC, all but one of them would leave. This remaining person would be the lowest ranking member and he would read the memorial speech. Additionally, the bereaved should also not even think about getting their father’s funeral expenses reimbursed (Shanghai people usually received some reimbursement from the deceased’s work unit). When the bereaved realized they might lose their funeral subsidy and their father might lose face, Chen Yu said, they then changed their minds. In the end, the work unit (and money) won. A state practitioner MC’d this funeral.

This incident was not an isolated case. John also told me that the most likely kind of conflict in Protestant memorial meetings today is between work unit and church. John said that in the past, when this Protestant version of memorial meetings was first allowed in funeral parlors after the Opening up, there were frequent conflicts between church and the bereaved's family as well. This was because conversion in Shanghai often happened at an individual instead of a household level. Back then, occasionally overly enthusiastic Protestant followers tried to perform a Christian service within the funeral of a Protestant without getting family permission in advance. This could often spark rather serious incidents such as fights.

After a few incidents, John’s congregation decided to only host a funeral when the bereaved themselves (and not just the deceased) came to ask them to. This new policy
removed the potential for conflict between the church and the family. It is understandable that John’s congregation made such a move since he belongs to one of the state sanctioned churches. He told me that some family churches might still try to hold Christian rituals within regular funerals without the consent of the deceased’s family. Recall the opening facilitation of Ma Donghua’s memorial meeting. The pastor even forgot to mention the work unit’s memorial speech in his opening talk (see Pastor 1). Although it was probably an unintentional omission, it may not be too farfetched to see such an absence as a Freudian slip on the pastor’s part reflecting the tension that exists between the church and the state.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I continue the two lines of exploration developed over the course of Chapters 7 and 8. The first investigates how socialist civil funerals (memorial meetings) construct dead bodies as socialist citizen subjects. I developed this line of argument primarily in Chapter 7, but then carried it through Chapter 8 as well. The second line of exploration concerns how religious variations on memorial meetings articulate with the socialist core and, in turn, construct plural subjectivities based on social convention. Specifically, in Chapter 8, I showed that within the urban funeral industry in China, ritualized and externalized acts enable subjectivities that might otherwise contradict each other instead to co-exist in sequential conjunction with one another through the addition of religious variations before or after, but rarely during the core ritual. As a result, religious and relational variations of socialist funerals are a kind
of modular framing. The specific characteristics of these modular frames depend on the creation of prefaces and appendices while at the same time ignoring the contradictory denotative meanings of these alternative versions of socialist funeral.

In addition to the continued analysis of these two sets of interrelated concepts, I also took these a step further to explore the breakdown of plural subjectivities, especially with reference to challenges to the socialist memorial meetings' construction of the dead as model socialist citizens. I did so by providing an in-depth account of a Protestant memorial meeting I encountered during my fieldwork. I asked how and why Protestant pastors change the modular frames of religious versions of socialist funerals and then by exploring some of the associated sociological consequences. Specifically, I argue that while Protestant memorial meetings do indeed add a Protestant preface and appendix, they also were attempting to override and rewrite the original portion of the socialist book itself. In this new book, what Protestants intend to do is to write Protestant Christian narrative of conceptualizing person, death, and salvation. Protestant pastors do so by repeatedly drawing attention to the denotative meanings of Protestant socialist funeral. Such emphasis on the denotative meanings of ritual acts and words is important because the goal of a Protestant socialist funeral is to convert, to make ritual participants into authentic and sincere Christian subjects whose socialist identity is submerged to their religious identity. As a result, I argue that Protestant and radical socialists actually share a similar view of subject formation despite their epistemological and ontological differences in conceptualizing death and dead bodies. Both seek a uniquely singular subjectivity (theirs to the exclusion of all others) defined through death ritual where
words and acts in memorializing the dead are denotative instead of performative, singular instead of plural.
CHAPTER 10 CONCLUSION

Ritual, Governance, and Subject Formation

Religious and ritual revivals in general have become a common process globally in many post- and late-socialist nations. Since the beginning of the Opening Up, many scholars have tackled why a religious resurgence has occurred. Some stressed that this revival resulted from local resistance to state power (cf. Anagnost 1994; Bruun 1996; Dean 1997; Feuchtwang 2001; Jing 1996). Others emphasized state tolerance in combination with ongoing state control such that the state can permit some religious expression, but that when it feels its legitimacy or stability threatened by specific religious groups, it does not hesitate to crack down on them (whether successfully or not) (cf. David Palmer 2007; Nancy Chen 2003; Madsen 1998). Still others focus on the psychological need for religious and ritual life after traumas like the Cultural Revolution or to deal with the anomie of reform-era life (cf. Yang Fenggang 2005). While some argue that the rapid revival of religious ritual shows that, on the ground, religious and ritual life never really disappeared, others emphasize that current religious and ritual life are more or less invented traditions that meet individual and corporate utilitarian goals (cf. Helen Siu 1989, Emily Chao 2000, Liu Xin 2000).

Consequently, to say that traditional folk death ritual and religious ritual has been revived in funerals in Shanghai or that there are now religious ethics that serve as alternative sources for subject formation in China today is hardly a ground-breaking statement. Instead, the intriguing part of my fieldwork findings is about why and how Shanghai people continue to “die socialist.” More importantly, how have Shanghai
people died as socialist subjects, religious subjects, and relational subjects when they all still perform socialist civil funerals (memorial meetings) and when the core ritual itself denies any recognition of spirits, afterlife, or gift exchange? In other words, what I analyze in this dissertation is the way that ritual, especially death ritual, works as a site of subject formation and how ritual provides for pluralist constructions of subjectivity.

I started this inquiry by examining how the CCP carried out funeral reform in Shanghai after the 1949 regime change. I showed how the funeral governing institution changed its early task of cleaning up dead bodies to instead begin to promote funeral reform and therefore started a process of what I called civil governance. Specifically, by nationalizing the horizontal ties and intermediate entities that handled death and dead bodies and that stood between individuals and the state, the CCP isolated individuals from their various social affiliations so they came to be tied more directly to the state.

After eliminating these intermediate sources of identity, the CCP generated a new idea of person through the promotion of memorial meetings in state funeral parlors—the model socialist citizen. By performing modernist bodily movements (especially by bowing instead of kowtowing and permitting only solemn expressions of grief and mourning) and socialist verbal utterance (especially through the socialist dirge, the memorial speech, and the thank you speech), memorial meetings made everyone momentarily act as if they were all model socialist citizens.

This articulates two important characteristics of memorial meetings as a type of ritualized act. The first is its emphasis on social commitment to externalized acts instead of pursuing authenticity and sincerity. The second relates to the ignorance (if not denial)
of denotative meanings in performing ritual. We saw these two most clearly in the way
that memorial meetings rehabilitate “cow ghosts and snake demons” into proper persons.
As a result, I suggest that memorial meetings construct socialist subjectivity of both the
living and the dead. Such death rituals provide a cognitive frame to ritual participants to
understand what is being said and acted out in memorial meetings.

The irony of dying socialist in memorial meetings today is that the CCP has prohibited Chinese people (at least Party members) from performing memorial meetings since shortly after the Cultural Revolution ended. Meanwhile, as Shanghai (and other) funeral parlors were marketized, the CCP actually wanted people to shift to having personalized funerals. Personalized funerals were the funeral parlors’ solution to business competition from private funeral brokers and to the continued demand for them to carry out funeral reform. None of these has worked out on the ground. The majority of Shanghai people prefer to commemorate their beloved with memorial meetings that delineate the dead as model socialist citizens instead of personalized funerals that portray the dead as autonomous individuals. It is against this background that we see memorial meetings (and their variations) actually taking root in Shanghai.

Consequently, why do Shanghai people die socialist after three decades of economic reform? The root cause is associated with the peculiar political economic structures of death in China in general and in Shanghai in particular. With Opening Up, the CCP transformed all funeral parlors from ineffective (in monetary terms) resource draining institutions into financially flourishing ones. However, funeral parlors administratively remained “Non-Profit Public Service Units” that were obligated to
promote funeral reform policies concerned with promoting cremation and eliminating “superstitions” and “feudalism” (associated with traditional and religious funeral). The trick was that they were now to do so in a way that generates profits. This institutional awkwardness (are funeral parlors for profit or non-profits?) is further complicated by another set of contradictions. That is, while funeral parlors should operate based on the market spirit of competition, they also remain a state monopoly.

The above two sets of contradictions have two direct consequences. First, this meant the formation of divergent interests between state practitioners and higher up managers and officials. While the latter might care about the political tasks of funeral reform (largely due to political pressure from above them), the former’s primary care is their monthly quota and bonus. This means that while higher up managers and officials wanted to direct the bereaved to move in certain directions that are also profitable, state practitioners just wanted to sell more by providing what the bereaved wanted. The second consequence was that once state funeral parlors were caught in the role of being lucrative, money-making state institutions as well as “Non-Profit Public Service” state institutions, they lost legitimacy to dominate the performance of funerals. In other words, once death fell from a project of moral governance to a profit making business, public concern over profiteering made the state lose its legitimacy to dominate subject formation at the end of life. Meanwhile, the state’s ongoing monopoly provides extra incentive to state practitioners to do business in a way that they know will work.

Consequently, at an analytical level, I suggest that we see Shanghai people dying socialist in capitalist Shanghai as a kind of dissonance within contemporary Chinese
neoliberal governance. By continuing to act as if everyone was a model socialist citizen, Shanghai people construct socialist subjectivity for dead bodies on the one hand, while also realizing that they are no longer socialist on the other (otherwise they would not have to act as if they were). This dual process of becoming socialist and realizing that they are not after all creates a meta-level realization of the capitalist reality of their daily life. Meanwhile, it allows ritual participants to cross from market subjectivities to a socialist subjectivity in a public performance of this crucial rite of passage. When both dead and living bodies “regain” socialist social lives, they are reminded that that there is more than market subjectivity and a possible source of alternatives, however fleeting. In other words, as the state itself promotes “market” governance, actual opposition to the state is less linked to a triumph of capitalism or an embrace of liberal democratic values, and more safely expressed by clinging to socialist rituals.

This said, however, Shanghai people do not just die socialist today. As my opening story of Chairman Mao being both socialist proletarian leader and the resident deity of Prosperity restaurant symbolized, contemporary death ritual is a conglomeration of socialism and religion within socialist civil funerals. Memorial meetings today often contain religious ritual and gift exchange. This means that Shanghai people conceptualized the dead as socialist in conjunction with religious and relational subjectivity. This then poses an interesting question. How do incommensurable ideas of death and dead bodies co-exist? I suggest that religious and relational variations of socialist civil funerals are possible because they turn the meeting into one with modular frames by adding a religious and relational preface and appendix to the original book of
socialism (classic memorial meetings). Even though the length of these religious and relational prefaces and appendices might be longer than the socialist book itself, they were nevertheless secondary, since they accepted the centrality of the socialist memorial meetings.

This characteristic of being modular is possible because, like the original socialist memorial meetings, what matters is the external social commitment. By de-emphasizing authenticity, sincerity, and denotative meanings, ritualized acts allow pluralist constructions of seemingly incommensurable ideas of self at the end of life. This argument is more clearly articulated when we see what happens when this modular frame starts to breakdown through Protestant memorial meetings. Wanting to take the preface and appendix approach a step further, Protestants wanted to re-write the socialist book itself with a message of Christianity. They do so because the primary goal of Protestant memorial meetings: to proselytize in order to create more “authentic and sincere” Christians. As a result, the denotative meanings of messages and acts spoken and performed in Protestant versions of memorial meetings suddenly become more important for this variation. The fact that this type of memorial meetings creates more conflict in Shanghai re-affirms how pluralism is more likely to be achieved when authenticity, sincerity, and denotative meanings recede within the motivating actions. Consequently, at comparative level, we find an interesting irony here. That is, high socialism and Protestantism actually share a similar idea of conceptualizing the self of the dead. They both strive to create a singularly defined and collectively shared subjectivity (the only “minor” difference being that one is a model (atheist) socialist citizen and the other is a
sincere and authentic Protestant Christian). Meanwhile, popular religion and Buddhism (and to some degree, the contemporary “socialist” government) accepted plural ideas of the self of the deceased.

Theoretically, my work proposes a methodological shift in studying subject formation away from either governmentality and subjectification or the psychosocial experience of individual subjects and toward a focus on ritual. By re-orienting our site of exploration to ritual, we can see subjects created at the intersections where individuals commit themselves to externalized, conventional, and repetitive acts and where governing power and other normative forces interact with each other. It is through the rituals created and enacted in the frictional political economic relationships between state funeral practitioners, private funeral agents, and the bereaved that the final definition of the self of the deceased is made. While this does not replace a psychosocial understanding of subjectivity, this shift does provide a perspective from which to research plural processes of subject formation, their interaction, and their potential for conflict across multiple individuals. Finally, my dissertation enhances our understanding of how various ethical codes and their respective ideas of self relate to governance and social change in contemporary China as it undergoes its rapid economic development and social transformations. By studying how people die and are commemorated, we can better understand how they live and what they live for.

Under the CCP (and to some degree the Republican government, too), funeral reform is “one of the most salient aspects of the modern state’s intervention in private religious practices” (Goossaert and Palmer 2012:227). This was due to the central role of
the dead in the lives of the living, no matter whether the former was thought to live among or separate from the latter, and the importance of funerals in the maintenance of social ties among the living in imperial China. It is in this context that we can begin to understand how, by changing funeral rituals, the CCP deliberately changed how its people perceived themselves in relation to their own selves, to others, to their ancestors, and to the Party/state. Linking death ritual and subjectivity is by no means accidental. After all, death is perhaps one of the most critical existential crises for both the living and the dead.

Change and the Invariance

On May 28, 2014, the New York Times journalist, Didi Kirsten Tatlow, published an article about rumors that at least six elders committed suicide in Anqing City, in Anhui Province after the Anqing Civil Affairs Bureau announced its determination to implement Funeral and Interment Reform in that small city. Rumors suggested that the suicides were precipitated after the local government confiscated the coffins the elders had prepared.219 This article reported that the suicides were a way both to protest the changes and to get into their coffins and graves before the change went into effect.220 Whether or not these elders were indeed committing suicide to avoid being sent into a funeral parlor

219 It is a customary practice in many parts of China that elders buy coffins before they actually die.
220 See also Yang Tao 楊濤 (2014).
to be cremated, this 2014 incident reminds us that by no means is Funeral Reform an historical policy limited to China’s high socialist periods.

By the same token, memorial meetings are by no means exclusive to high socialism as well. Several scholars have asked me whether contemporary Shanghai people continuing to “die socialist” is simply a “cultural vestige” or perhaps simply another proof of how funerals are “always the last thing to change” in any given society. I hope that by now my dissertation has shown not only that dying socialist is a contemporary phenomenon that really happened alongside and in correlation with the Opening Up, but also that death ritual changed rapidly over time. Particularly, I suggest that these changes were not only initiated and implemented by powers at the center—both in terms of the original Funeral Reform efforts and again in terms of the decision to marketize funeral parlors during China’s entrance into its market economy—but also instigated and brought about in the particular ways they emerged by powers at the margin, by private funeral brokers. What makes marginality especially powerful is its fragility. Due to funeral brokers’ structurally fragile middle position as well as their own feeling of being fragile, they pushed death into a moral vacuum on the one hand, and created a platform for religious and relational morality to re-join the socialist funeral on the other. The importance of this fragile middle position, along with its accompanying moral ambiguities and ambivalences, show how social change is neither a top-down nor bottom-up process. Instead, certain social fields such as death ritual (or, at another level,

221 The local government, of course, denied the existence of such cases.
222 Several of my informants told me similar stories from the 1960s when the Civil Affairs Bureau promoted cremation in Shanghai.
funeral brokers themselves) work like a node where multiple, sometimes contradictory forces, move in and out to make change happen. I think that the fragile middle (funeral brokers) is the key to directing the trajectories of these forces as they intersect in the node. This type of description, moreover, helps to deconstruct the analytical dichotomy of “the state” versus “society,” “the state” versus “the market,” or “tradition” versus “invention” in analyzing religious and ritual revival. Perhaps more importantly, it reminds us that social change and change makers under authoritarian regimes need not necessarily be inherently “liberal” or even “moral” even though the result may be an increase of diversity.

Though funerals might not be the first thing to change, at least in China they certainly have not been the last thing to change either. Memorial meetings might appear to be “paleosocialist,” especially considering the decline of work units since the introduction of economic reforms. For Shanghai people, however, this socialist civil funeral is what a modern urban funeral ought to look like. Their way of commemoration signifies their privileged status of being urban and Shanghai residents. From funeral professionals’ perspective, Shanghai funeral ritual and funeral parlors are actually the future, not the past, of Chinese death ritual and the Chinese funeral industry. One state practitioner told me, “it is just a matter of time before other places catch up.”

The continued and increasing efforts at establishing (state) funeral parlors to take over the handling of dead bodies all over China provides another piece of evidence to confirm Shanghai as an imagined linear future destination since funeral parlors here are already the only places that handle death. Another state practitioner told me that “the
Chinese national funeral industry follows Shanghai and the Shanghai funeral industry follows Longhua Funeral Parlor" (quanguo binzang kan shanghai, shanghai binzang kan longhua 全國殯葬看上海，上海殯葬看龍華). Whether or not the Shanghai model is really the future of the Chinese funeral industry and of Chinese death ritual is a question to return to in a decade or so. What matters here is that dying socialist, funeral ritual, and funeral parlors in Shanghai are not cultural survivals that have remained unchanged. Quite the opposite, death ritual is a contemporary response to the economic reforms wherein state institutions have had to make profits, boundaries of moralities have been contested, and different ideas of self flow in and out. Ritual might appear to be invariant, yet they change just like other aspects in daily life and in their changes, when we pay attention, we gain yet another critical perspective on changing subjectivity in China.
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2013  Teaching Fellow, Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, Boston University.
2012  Teaching Fellow, Children and Culture, Boston University.
2009  Teaching Fellow, Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, Boston University.
2008  Teaching Fellow, Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, Boston University.
2005  Teaching Fellow, Annual Fieldtrip, Taiwan, Chinese University of Hong Kong.
2005  Teaching Fellow, Women, Men and Culture, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCES
2009  Ph.D. Exploratory Fieldwork in Shanghai and Beijing, China.
2008  Ph.D. Exploratory Fieldwork in Shandong, China.
2005  M.Phil. Thesis Fieldwork in Pingdong, Taiwan.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES
2013  Referee for *The China Journal*.
2010  Co-referee for *Ethos Journal*.

ACADEMIC CONFERENCES

Organized Sessions

Refereed Presentations


2009  “Motion of Modernity: Railroads as the Threshold of Nationalism in China,” at the Society for East Asian Anthropology Conference, July 2-5, in Taipei.


2006  “Betel Nut Consumption in Contemporary Taiwan: Gender, Class and Social Identity,” July 13, at the Society for East Asian Anthropology Conference, “East Asian Anthropology and Anthropology in East Asia” in Hong Kong.


2001  Co-authored (with Wang Jiwei et al.), “A Comparative Study of Newspaper and E-Newspaper Reading Habits among College Students (in Chinese),” April 28, at the Development and Vision of the Internet Media Conference in National Taiwan University, Taiwan.

**Invited Presentations**

2014  “Death Ritual as a Site of Subject Formation: Religious Variations on Socialist Funeral Ritual in Shanghai, China,” September 23, at the Fairbank Centre in Harvard University.

2013  “Award Winning Teaching,” at the International Teaching Fellows Orientation, August 27, at Boston University
2009  “Motion of Modernity: Railroads as the Threshold of Nationalism in China,” at the conference Crossing Space and Making Boundaries: Anthropological Perspectives, July 1, at the National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan.

2008  “Contradicting Modernities: Consuming Betel Nut in Taiwan,” at the conference Charismatic Modernity: Popular Culture in Taiwan, October 4-6, at the University of South Carolina.

2007  “Masculine Taiwanese Men: Betel Nut Consumption in Contemporary Han Chinese Culture (in Chinese),” May 25, at the Institute of Austronesian Studies, Taitung University, Taiwan.

2006  “Betel Nut Consumption in Contemporary Taiwan: Gender, Class and Social Identity (in Chinese),” June 14, at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

Public and Volunteered Presentations

2014  “Death Ritual as a Site of Subject Formation: Religious Variations on Socialist Funeral Ritual in Shanghai, China,” February 19, at the Anthropology Department in Boston University.

2009  “End of Life and Self-Formation: Ritual and Death Industry in Contemporary China,” October 2, at the Anthropology Department in Boston University.

2009  “Motion of Modernity: Railroads as the Threshold of Nationalism in China,” February 13-14, at the Conference on East Asia in Boston University.

2006  “Being a Real Man in Taiwan: Masculinity and the Chewing of Betel Nut,” June 29, for the Hong Kong Anthropological Society at the Hong Kong Museum of History.

2006  “Betel Nut Consumption in Contemporary Taiwan: Gender, Class and Social Identity,” March 17, at the Anthropology Department in the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

LANGUAGES

Native Mandarin (read, spoken, written), Fluent English (read, spoken, written), Proficient Holo (Fujianese) (spoken), Proficient Shanghainese (spoken), Fair Cantonese (spoken), Basic Korean (spoken).