

## Of Space and Place

### *Separation and Distinction in the Homes of the Dead*

Urbanization in most places involves the segregation of the dead from the living, and such is the case in China today. Different aspects of this segregation have separate causes. Regimes of urban sanitation remove the slaughtering of live animals from the home; the increasing availability of hospital care shifts human death from the home to the hospital; the lack of space for burying the dead shifts burial to cemeteries located far from city centers and the places where most people live. The segregation of the living from the dead leads to new attitudes towards death and new practices of memorialization, which in turn reinforce the segregation. But the segregation of the dead from the living does not always mean relegating the dead to second-rate places. Elite cemeteries are often spectacular locations which maintain tombs and gardens meticulously, even when they are neglected by family members. Non-elite cemeteries, however, can be desolate places.

In rural China many aspects of death were and are close to home. Most rural old people die in their homes and express a preference for doing so (Cai, Zhao, and Coyte 2017). In the rural funerals I witnessed in the 1980s, or read about in the anthropological literature, the body would remain in the home for several days after death while people paid their respects, and the funeral itself would be held in the home. After the funeral, burial would take place in either the fields around the village if the village were located in the plains, in the mountains surrounding the village if people had access to mountainous land, or perhaps in a village graveyard.<sup>1</sup> When I was doing research for this project in 2015, such practices continued in the villages around Nanjing. Refrigerated caskets allowed the body to be kept at home for five or seven days after death even in the peak of summer. During this period, friends and relatives of the deceased stopped by to pay their respects to the deceased, give a gift to the family, and be treated to a banquet and perhaps other forms of entertainment (such as traditional opera performances). These practices

resemble those that occurred during the visits to the home altar of Mr. Wang, but, in the peri-urban villages around Nanjing, the respects are paid to the body of the deceased itself rather than a photo on a makeshift altar. Though residents of these villages must still have the body cremated, they bring the ashes back to be buried on village land or in a village cemetery.

In the mountainous areas of China, one can still see tombs scattered across the hillsides. Very often villagers in such places have consulted geomancy masters to help their families locate graves in places thought to be the most propitious, that allow the spirit of the buried ancestor to bring good fortune to future generations. Villages and families sometimes fight over favorable burial sites, or attempt to alter the landscape to destroy the favorable geomancy of places where their rivals' ancestors are buried. But whether the dead are buried in family fields, in family tombs in the mountains around the village, or in a village cemetery, in rural China the site of burial remains close to the home and is shared not by strangers but by agnatically related kin or at least fellow villagers. Moreover, the burial of the dead and the productivity of the land are intimately related. Either the dead are literally buried in the fields where crops are grown, or the burial sites are linked to the productivity of the fields through the forces of geomancy.

I do not mean to idealize rural life here. As in urban areas, in rural China there were and are people who died away from home or at a young age, people who were too poor or marginalized to be given a dignified burial, and periods of war, famine, epidemic, and other forms of mass death that led to irregular forms of funerary ritual, burial, and memorialization. However, for those fortunate enough to see their elders die a good death and properly become an ancestor, land and family, the dead and the living, the generation of food through agriculture and the recreation of community are intimately inter-related. In urban China today, the spaces of the dead are not so intimately connected to those of the living. Rather, from the moment of death to the time of burial, the dead are sequestered in their own spaces, and this segregation feeds psychological fears of death and dying.<sup>2</sup> Cultural analysts in many other parts of the world argue that this segregation has led to a rising fascination with death in popular culture—an increasing focus on zombies, vampires, and ghosts (Khapaeva 2017).

#### HOSPITALS AND THE MEDICALIZATION OF DEATH

That Mr. Wang died at a hospital speaks both to general trends of mortality in urban China and the class circumstances of Mr. Wang and his family. Mr. Wang was a low level cadre during his working career and hence a relatively educated person with a regular pension and some limited health care coverage. In China, rural people and people of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to die in their homes than middle-class urbanites (Cai, Zhao, and Coyte 2017). In part, this is because they cannot afford hospital care. But in a city like Nanjing, most of the

elderly with urban household registrations, even if they used to be factory workers, have regular pensions and some health care coverage. They worked during the socialist period of economic policy in China and their status in retirement is not so different from that of Mr. Wang.

In China as a whole, the number of hospital beds has more than doubled between 2007 and 2017.<sup>3</sup> In most urban areas, the heavy regulation of the public hospital sector, along with the lack of development of non-hospital primary health clinics, has made public hospitals the main site of health care for urban residents (Wang et al., 2018). Those with cancer or severe heart problems, like Mr. Wang, often spend their last days in a hospital.

Hospitals make death less visible in several ways. First, they are segregated social spaces in themselves, with walls and admittance procedures. Hospitals separate the sick from the well. Second, death, for hospitals, is failure. Their purpose is to cure people and hospitals do not like to advertise their failings to the public. When a patient dies, curtains are drawn around the bed as quickly as possible and the dead person is transferred to the hospital morgue. Morgues are located in the part of the hospital least likely to be seen by visitors and other patients. Throughout China, public funeral homes arrange for cars to take the dead from hospital morgues to government-run funeral homes with a minimum of fanfare. Hospitals might declare that death is a private matter for the family of the deceased, but it is also in their interests to remove death as much as possible from the public view. Too much attention to those who die in their care damages reputations and generates lawsuits.

Advanced medical technologies make the determination of death an increasingly difficult matter. With the availability of cardiopulmonary resuscitation, the simple cessation of breathing cannot be considered an irreversible death. Doctors must certify a death according to legal definitions that vary from country to country. Neither the legal definitions of death nor the technological means of determining death are transparent to the majority of people.

In the context of the United States, Helen Chapple (2018) argues that the invisibility of death in hospitals has led to numerous medical scandals and even murderous episodes. The American nurse Charles Cullen was convicted for killing forty patients over a sixteen-year period while working at seven hospitals. Because death is a commonplace but hidden phenomenon in hospitals, no one noticed the patterns behind Cullen's activities for many years. Hospitals have little incentive to vigorously audit all of the deaths that occur on their premises, and considerable reason not to let news of wrongful deaths become public knowledge.

Though some urbanites do die at home, in all of the cities I visited, urban residents were not legally permitted to keep dead bodies in their apartments for the period leading up to cremation. Upon discovering a lifeless body in an apartment, urban residents must call an ambulance if they think there is any chance that the person might be resuscitated. If the ambulance workers determine that the body

is dead and beyond resuscitation, they will take the body either directly to the state-run funeral home or first to a local hospital so that the cause of death may be certified. If the person discovering the body is confident that it is dead, she or he may instead notify the local neighborhood committee (社区), who will send someone from the local health service to certify the death and arrange for the funeral home to pick up the body. In urban China, these services are available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

When I discussed the rural practice of keeping a body in a coffin at home with urban residents, all I spoke to said that the practice would be unthinkable in an urban context. Not only might the stench upset the neighbors, but even if there were no smell, the idea of having a dead body in the same apartment building would make people feel uncomfortable. "It would be inauspicious" (不吉利) was the most common way of describing this discomfort. One man said "keeping bodies at home is a result of rural people's superstitious beliefs." Urban people, he added, have "higher quality" and would not think of keeping a dead body in their apartment.<sup>4</sup>

A young woman extended this argument to the setting up of a home altar. She said that home altars reeked of superstition, were disrespectful to neighbors (who would not want to think about the fact that there had been a death in their building), and demonstrated the "low quality" of the people who did so. While I did not conduct surveys that would enable me to say how common such attitudes are, I found that the larger and wealthier a city was, the less extensive the practices associated with home altars were. In Nanjing, home altars were common, but not the erection of large tents or platforms outside of apartment buildings for the purpose of staging performances or entertaining large numbers of people. In Shanghai, both another researcher<sup>5</sup> and a one-stop dragon entrepreneur told me that the setting up of home altars was unusual. But three of my students who hailed from poorer, smaller urban areas in Western China told me that both home altars and large tents or stages for opera performances were common. When I conducted research in 2019, I found that more and more cities were taking steps to discourage home altars, encouraging families to instead set up their altars at specialized rooms designed for that purpose, available for rent in state-run funeral homes.

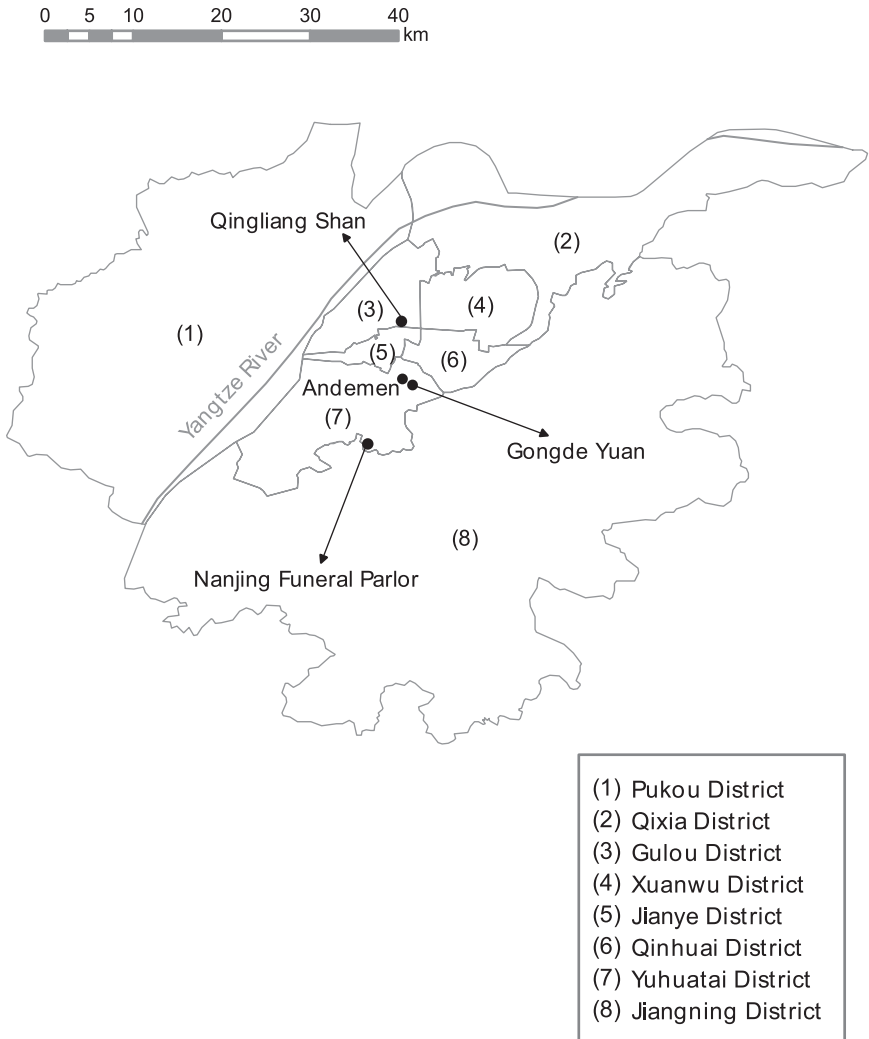
Common forms of ideology in China suggest that people living in large, wealthy, Eastern cities are more civilized, less superstitious, and "higher quality" than people from other parts of the country. These forms of ideology, in turn, are used to justify how funerary practice is regulated in various Chinese cities. In the next chapter, I will explore how hyper-urbanization influences social relations in ways that might explain the elimination of home altars in the largest and wealthiest cities; here, I just want to note how practices of keeping death hidden from public view are supported by ideologies of establishing a "civilized society," disparaging people of "low quality," and eliminating "superstition." These ideologies are mobilized by many of the officials in charge of dealing with death in urban

contexts, who continually remind urban citizens to conduct their funerals and funerary activities in a civilized manner.

Practices and ideologies of hiding death can be self-perpetuating. Disgust at the smell of dead bodies may be a cultural universal (Robben 2018, xxxi). But such disgust is minimal in people who work regularly with dead bodies. Moreover, extending this disgust into an exaggerated fear of death and corpses occurs most commonly among those who rarely if ever have seen even an odorless corpse. In modern urban environments, lack of experience and discomfort with death become commonplace. The existence of such discomfort makes neighbors who fail to hide death and dead bodies from public view seem un-neighborly and encourages the further segregation of the dead from the living. In China, the ideologies that link “superstitious” and “uncivilized” behavior to lower-class and rural people of “poor quality” reinforce this segregation.

#### FUNERAL HOMES, CREMATORIUMS, CEMETERIES, AND URBAN REAL ESTATE

The separation of the dead from the living also occurs by moving funeral homes, crematoriums, and cemeteries further and further away from the center of the city. As the boundaries of cities expand, ever greater efforts are required to create this separation. In Nanjing, the first state-run funeral home was built in 1937 by the Republican regime, and was located in Qingliang Shan (清凉山), which at that time marked the outskirts of the city. But now this park is located in the Gulou (鼓楼) district of the city, one of the most central parts of Nanjing. In 1980, the state-run funeral home and crematorium were relocated to new facilities in the Andemen (安德门) area, which constituted the southern fringe of the city through the 1990s, but became a relatively central district after the subway opened in 2005. In 2012, the state-run crematorium and funeral home were again relocated, to a massive new facility nearly twenty kilometers further to south, in what is still a rural area, near several cemeteries. The new location cannot be reached by subway, but is served by a public bus route. During the 2000s, as people's wealth increased, many new cemeteries were built. But all of these were located far from the city center. Some of the older cemeteries were completely relocated; the cinerary caskets were dug up, and family members were given some minimal compensation (usually not enough to cover the costs of a plot in one of the newer cemeteries). The only graveyard that has been allowed to remain near (what are now) the central districts of the city is Gong De Yuan (功德园), the cemetery that is devoted to Party-designated martyrs and heroes of Nanjing origin. It is a site of patriotic education, and is by far the most expensive and exclusive cemetery in Nanjing. Most cemeteries in Nanjing are located in the outlying Qixia and Jiangning Districts. In Jinan and Shanghai similar patterns can be observed. Cemeteries, funeral homes,



MAP 2. Nanjing.

and crematoriums are gradually relocated to the outskirts of the city, though a few historical leftovers remain in districts that were once at the outskirts but are now relatively central parts of those cities.

Part of this relocation may be attributable to the value of the land on which the cemeteries are located. No matter how much is charged for a cemetery plot, if the value of land increases rapidly, the income from cemetery plots cannot equal the amount that could be earned from erecting a shopping mall or a high-rise

office or an apartment building. But another aspect of this relocation relates to desires to separate the dead from the living. One official in charge of arranging funerals at a large work unit in Nanjing told me: "People are still afraid of ghosts; the value of real estate near cemeteries and funeral homes is always lower than in the central districts, so, to protect the value of its real estate, the municipal government attempts to keep funeral homes located far from the city center." An official in the Office of Funerary Regulation (殡葬管理处), told me: "We cannot allow people to dispose of their parents' ashes in public parks. People fear ghosts. One person's ancestors are another's ghosts. People would not like Nanjing's parks if they thought they had ghosts, so it is illegal to scatter cinerary ashes there even if they do not pollute the environment and are indistinguishable from the rest of the dirt." The operator of a one-stop dragon business told me, "sometimes if I have done funerals for many days in a row, I will feel like I have been exposed to too much *Yinqi* (Yin energy, 阴气). Then I will go someplace that is full of life and *renao* (热闹, social activity, literally heat and noise), like Xinjiekou (新街口, the most central shopping area of Nanjing), and get warmed up by the *Yangqi* (Yang energy, 阳气)." In all of these statements, we can hear an ideology that insists on the separation of the spaces of the dead from the living. To protect the living (from their fear of ghosts), the dead must be kept far from the center of the city. To recover from too many visits to the spaces of the dead (which produce Yin energy in the Yin/Yang dichotomy), one must visit a place that is brimming with life, crowds, and human activity.

Hong Kong provides an example of how this separation has been enacted in another Chinese environment, but under a completely different set of governing rules. In Hong Kong, places of burial have also progressively moved towards the outskirts of the city (Yuan Wufeng 2013). The largest public cemetery is located in the New Territories, close to the Chinese border and far from the city center. In Hong Kong, there are seven licensed funeral parlors, places of business that can conduct funerary services on their property and store dead bodies for the purpose of holding such rituals, and approximately 120 licensed undertakers who, like the one-stop dragon entrepreneurs in Nanjing, help with funerary arrangements and sell coffins and other funerary paraphernalia, but do not have the facilities to conduct funerals themselves. What is interesting about these businesses is not so much their location, which can be explained by historical factors, their establishment occurring at times when locations that are now central were peripheral, or at transportation hubs that connected easily to cemeteries in peripheral areas, but the conditions of their licensing. Only those undertakers who began their businesses before the current regulatory regime began in the 2000s can openly advertise the nature of their business, display coffins in their shops, and store crematory remains. These businesses have what are called type-A undertaking licenses. Those with type-B licenses cannot store ashes or display coffins in their stores if any other business or homeowners in their vicinity object. Those with type-C licenses are

even further restricted. They may not use the word “funerary” (殡仪) in the signs displayed publically in front of their stores. The logic here is the same as the one voiced by my interviewees in Nanjing. If any neighbor either fears death or dead bodies, or fears that other people’s fear could affect the value of their business or property, then this neighbor has the right to restrict the activities of the undertaker. In practice this means that business activities of all proprietors with type-B and type-C licenses are affected. For this reason as well, the only funeral parlors in Hong Kong are older ones that established their businesses long ago.<sup>6</sup> The new restrictions on licenses further freezes the business locations of the current funeral parlors and type-A undertakers. If they were to move their businesses, they would face further restrictions, so they remain where they have been historically located.

Currently, most of the undertakers with type-A licenses are located in the area of Hong Hom, near the terminus of the East Rail line which connects to mainland China and the areas of Hong Kong furthest from the downtown core. In Hong Hom, many apartment buildings are located in the vicinity of these undertakers. Those apartments which have a window from which one can see an undertaker’s shop (and shop sign) rent for less than apartments which do not feature such a view.

In Guangzhou and many other large mainland Chinese cities, land use laws prevent the establishment of new cemeteries or the expansion of old ones. While these laws are justified in terms of saving land, their effect is to shift the location of cemeteries further from the city center (to a location outside of the city’s jurisdiction) rather than eliminating them altogether. But these distant cemeteries market their gravesites to families from those very cities that exclude them. The location of cemeteries outside of large cities results in customers needing an automobile to visit, but that is not necessarily an obstacle from the point of view of either the customers or the cemetery owners. Driving to a countryside grave can make for a nice family outing, and customers who can afford their own cars are also those who can pay the most for gravesites.

#### RELOCATING THE DEAD

The rapid pace of urbanization in China has resulted in a massive number of grave relocations. Thomas Mullaney (2019) suggests that over ten million graves have been relocated in the past decade alone. He has documented the original sites and the number of these relocations by mapping grave relocation notices, which must be published in local newspapers, onto a digital platform with a map of China. Christian Henriot (2019) has researched over a century of such relocations in Shanghai and notes that procedures for these relocations during the twenty-first century at least improves upon those of the Maoist era, when graves were simply flattened and built over rather than relocated. Nevertheless, the current procedures rarely seem just in the eyes of those people whose ancestors’ graves are being relocated.



# 散坟迁移补偿政策公告

## 南京市人民政府文件

宁政发〔2010〕265号

### 市政府关于公布征地补偿安置标准的通知

各区县人民政府，市府各委办局，市各直属单位：

为进一步做好我市征地补偿安置工作，切实维护被征地农民和农村集体经济组织的合法权益，根据《南京市征地补偿安置办法》（宁政发〔2010〕264号）规定，现将我市征地补偿安置标准公布如下：

一、本标准适用于《南京市征地补偿安置办法》规定的玄武区、白下区、秦淮区、建邺区、鼓楼区、下关区、栖霞区、雨花台区（以下简称“江南八区”）范围内的征地补偿安置。

#### 二、征地区片价补偿标准

本标准指《南京市征地补偿安置办法》第十一条规定的征地区片价补偿标准。征地区片范围以市国土资源局公布的征地区片分布图为准。具体范围和标准见附表一（表1-1、表1-2）。

#### 三、青苗和附着物补偿标准

本标准指《南京市征地补偿安置办法》第十一条规定的青苗和附着物综合补偿价以及政府指导价标准。综合补偿价、具体种类以及政府指导价标准见附表二（表2-1至表2-14）。

#### 四、被征地农业人员一次性生活补助费标准

本标准指《南京市征地补偿安置办法》第二十八条规定的一次性生活补助费标准。具体标准见附表三。

#### 五、临时用地、取土用地、堆土用地土地补偿费标准

本标准指《南京市征地补偿安置办法》第十七条、第十八条规定的临时用地、取土用地、堆土用地土地补偿标准。具体见附表四。

详见《征地管理与耕地保护文件汇编》南京市国土资源局二〇一一年十一月（369、378页）

表2-11：公墓迁移补偿指导价格

单位：元/丘

类别	双穴	单穴
水泥坟	3400（含劳务费）	2600（含劳务费）
土坟	3000（含劳务费）	2200（含劳务费）
备注	1、征地涉及的公墓迁移工作应当自迁坟公告之日起三个月内完成。属于规定期限内完成坟墓迁移的，给予适当奖励；公告之日起一个月后至公告后三个月内完成墓穴迁移的，奖励1200元/座；公告之日起三个月内完成墓穴迁移并采取骨灰存放纪念堂、骨灰撒江等非占地安葬方式的，另奖励300元/座。逾期未迁移的墓穴，将作为无主墓穴，作深埋处置。 2、公墓的认定按照民政部门的标准执行。	

表2-12：散坟迁移补偿指导价格

单位：元/座

类别	双穴	单穴
水泥坟	1050	800
土坟	520	400
备注	征地涉及的散坟（除表2-11所指的公墓以外的坟墓）迁移工作应当自迁坟公告之日起三个月内完成。对于规定期限内完成坟墓迁移的，给予适当奖励；公告之日起一个月后至公告后三个月内完成墓穴迁移的，奖励100元/座；公告之日起三个月内完成墓穴迁移并采取骨灰存放纪念堂、骨灰撒江等非占地安葬方式的，另奖励300元/座。逾期未迁移的墓穴，将作为无主墓穴，作深埋处置。	

FIGURE 3. Grave relocation compensation notice. Photo: Andrew B. Kipnis.

Often villages situated in what was the outskirts of a given city had small collective graveyards. In other cases, individual families buried their dead in their own fields, with or without tombstones. But regardless of whether the relocation involves scattered individual graves or a collective cemetery, the procedures individualize those families whose graves are relocated. Descendants must come forth separately to reclaim the cinerary caskets of their relatives and receive compensation. When, where, and if to rebury the cinerary casket is a decision for each individual family, so collective gravesites can never be reconstituted. The community of the dead as well as the community of families who bury their dead together is dispersed. Second, the amount of compensation is not enough to purchase a new plot in one of the newer cemeteries. In Nanjing in 2015, the maximum amount of compensation to be received for a relocated grave was less than 5,000 yuan, while the least expensive plot in a new cemetery was over 15,000 yuan.

In Nanjing, I came across an announcement for an impending grave relocation near a park in the Yuhuatai District in 2015. One man there complained of the amount of compensation he would receive for his father's grave. He said that he could not afford a new grave and tombstone with the amount of money he would receive, so he would be forced to relocate his father's ashes in a tree burial, a form of burial without a tombstone in which the ashes of many unrelated people are scattered into the ground in front of a tree.

But new construction projects are not the only cause of grave relocations in urbanizing China. Urbanization in China has also entailed a vast amount of geographic mobility. Many rural families have relocated and bought property in urban areas far from their original homes. At a cemetery on the outskirts of Nanjing, I met a man who had just conducted a grave relocation ceremony for his parents. His parents had been buried in a village cemetery in Shanxi province. He said that he felt like he had no connection to his home village anymore. He spent most of his childhood in boarding schools outside of his village in the county seat where he lived. He went to university and then got a job in information technology in Taiyuan (the capital of Shanxi province); he married and had a child there in his twenties and was transferred by his company to Nanjing in 2009. His father died when he was in his twenties and was buried in the village cemetery; his mother had lived with them, helping with the care of their son until she died in 2008. They buried the mother with the father in 2008, but, in 2013, they purchased an apartment and formally moved their household registration to Nanjing. He said that they now felt like Nanjing residents and that it was too inconvenient to go all the way back to Shanxi every time they wanted to visit his parents' grave. So, in 2015, they purchased a cemetery plot in Nanjing and had the cinerary caskets of their parents relocated there. He personally went back to Shanxi to carry the caskets to Nanjing, and arranged a reburial ceremony through the cemetery office. The cemetery manager told me that they regularly conducted such rituals for customers that were relocating their parents' ashes from another place.

Another three-generation migrant family I knew was having conflicts over where the parents were to be buried. They had migrated to Nanjing from Anhui province and ran a successful pet grooming business. The grandparents were in their seventies and seemed well adapted to urban life, but still said that they wanted to be buried back in their village in Anhui. The father thought that he would be well-remembered by the descendants of the fellow villagers with whom he had grown up, many of whom belonged to his lineage. But the son and daughter-in-law were less certain. "Our future is in the city," the daughter-in-law said; "how can we be filial in tending our parents' grave if it is so far away from where we live?"

### CEMETERIES AND CLASS: DISTINCTION IN THE SPACES OF THE DEAD

If cemeteries are being pushed further and further away from the centers of the city and the spaces of the dead are being increasingly separated from the spaces of the living, that does not imply that the spaces of the dead are shabby. Rather, the beauty of the spaces of the dead varies greatly with the prestige of their families and the amount of money that is spent on their funerals and gravesites. Graves are often called "residences for the deceased" (阴宅), especially when using the logics of a real estate market to discuss the buying and selling of gravesites. Just as many people pay more for an apartment on a higher floor with a beautiful view and an aspect that receives sun at the right time of the day, so do cemetery salespeople justify charging more for graves higher up the slope of a hill or with a nicer view or aspect. In some cemeteries, there are opportunities to consult an expert in geomancy about the exact location of one's grave. While in earlier dynasties geomancy was considered particularly important for locating graves in a manner that would bring good fortune to the descendants of the deceased, geomancy experts today often frame their art in much less "superstitious" terms. They offer "scientific" advice about all manner of practical problems such as the location of apartments for the living, the arrangement of furniture within homes and apartments, and the architecture of buildings. Their practice reinforces the comparison of real estate for the dead and the living. Moreover, just as upscale apartment complexes include beautiful landscaping around their buildings and a workforce of landscapers to maintain it, so do elite graveyards manicure their gardens with great care and precision and hire a large number of caretakers to tend the grounds. Finally, just as residing in an expensive apartment complex ensures that one's neighbors will not include people of the lower classes, so does being buried in an expensive cemetery ensure that you will be buried among other relatively wealthy people. In China, I have heard both residential apartments and gravesites marketed in terms of the "quality" of those residing in the same "neighborhood."

The word “quality” in China often has a political connotation as well, with one’s loyalty to the Communist Party being a crucial dimension of one’s supposed overall quality. Those who are high-ranking cadres within the Communist Party are assumed to have the highest political quality of all. This sort of ideology permeates elite cemeteries, as many cemeteries become elite when a large number of high-ranking Party members are buried there. Babaoshan cemetery in Beijing is the national political cemetery, memorializing the bodies and the ashes of the highest-ranking deceased Party members and national heroes. While most countries may have something like a national cemetery for war heroes and political leaders, in China the logic of the national cemetery is reproduced at many political levels, with almost all major cities having cemeteries devoted to local Party leaders and martyrs. All such cemeteries are meticulously maintained, as they enshrine both the respect and obedience of the local population to the local branch of the Party and the loyalty of the local Party to the Party leadership in the national capital.

The Communist Party regulates cemeteries and funerary ritual fairly strictly in China, and one of the ways in which the owners of cemeteries attempt to ensure that their businesses will not be adversely affected by government regulation is to reinforce the ideology that political quality is the most important component of one’s overall quality. Cemeteries express this ideology by going out of their way to memorialize the people and the ideals that the Propaganda Department of the Party would like to see memorialized, and transforming their cemeteries into museums that depict the historical events that this Department wants the public to remember. Schools often arrange for students to take fieldtrips to such cemeteries for classes in patriotic education, and local governments often stage wreath-laying ceremonies at such cemeteries on national holidays.

In addition to advertising the quality of the people residing in their neighborhoods, elite cemeteries ensure political backing for their continued existence by reproducing political messages supportive of the current regime. In these cemeteries, ideals about quality, devotion to the Party, and respect for the dead blend. Catherine Bell (1992) suggests that ritualization is a political act in which one defines ideals, symbols, or people as sacred, placing them beyond criticism and making them unquestionable. Respect for the feelings of the grieving make it unthinkable to criticize a dead person in front of mourners at her or his funeral. The separation of death from life in urban contexts furthers the sacralization of the dead. Fear of the dead leads to a silence that can be read as deference. The government forces the public to be respectful to the symbols of the Party and country. Elite cemeteries reinforce the sacralization of the idea of “quality,” respect for these symbols, and respect for the dead by blending them together.

The Gong De Yuan (Garden of Merit) in Nanjing is one elite cemetery that utilizes this form of sacralization. As its promotional materials explain, in 1954,

Party leaders selected a majestic spot at the edge of the city to create a burial ground for revolutionary martyrs. In 1956, the first burials were held there in state-sponsored ceremonies. Over the decades, other city leaders and martyrs were buried there, and, in 1992, the organization that maintained the site was declared a “work unit protecting high level cultural relics” (高级文物保护单位), giving the site political protection from redevelopment by real estate interests while the city expanded. In 1999, to enable the government work unit that ran the site to be less economically dependent on funds from the city budget, the Garden of Merit was allowed to operate as a public cemetery. It started selling gravesites to whomever could pay the price, in addition to continuing to bury heroes and leaders designated by the Party-State of the Municipality of Nanjing. It became by far the most expensive cemetery in Nanjing, charging prices many times higher than the least expensive cemeteries. It also became the best maintained cemetery in Nanjing; throughout the day scores of workers tending the gardens are visible. After the opening of the subway line in 2005, the cemetery’s location became a relatively central part of the city, but, as a protected site for cultural relics, it could not be relocated or redeveloped. As of 2016, it was the only large cemetery accessible by subway in Nanjing.

There are many types of burial available at the Garden of Merit. The most common forms include wall burial cubicles and regular gravesites. In 2015 the prices for a wall burial cubicle could cost as much as 100,000 yuan (generally spots higher up the wall cost double those near the bottom), which was five times the cost of a regular gravesite at the least expensive cemeteries in the vicinity of Nanjing. Because land for burials is limited at the Garden of Merit, most of the available slots are of the wall burial type, but their ability to sell these cubicles, and for such a high price, demonstrates the premium some people are willing to pay for the opportunity to be buried or to bury their family members at the Garden of Merit. Other than the Garden of Merit, no cemetery in Nanjing has been successful in selling wall burial cubicles, as most people prefer to purchase regular burial plots with headstones and would economize by looking for a plot in a less expensive cemetery rather than by accepting a wall burial.

A one-stop dragon entrepreneur explained to me, “In China, people believe that entering the earth brings peace (入土为安), so they prefer their ashes to be buried in the earth rather than a wall cubicle.” But official policy now promotes wall cubicles because wall burials use less land than burial plots. The government and the cemeteries market them as a form of green or ecological burial. When I asked a salesperson at the Garden of Merit why so many people chose wall cubicles there, he linked the acceptance of green forms of burial to ideas of human quality and loyalty to the Party: “The people who choose to be buried at the Garden of Merit are of high quality. They have a high level of ecological consciousness and are loyal to the Party. Therefore, when the government promotes the idea of green burial, they are receptive to the message.”





FIGURE 4. Wall burials at the Garden of Merit. Photo: Andrew B. Kipnis.



FIGURE 5. Gravesites at the Garden of Merit. Photo: Andrew B. Kipnis.



FIGURE 6. Grave of Communist martyr at the Garden of Merit. Photo: Andrew B. Kipnis.

The Garden of Merit also earns money by offering elaborate services. These include burial ceremonies, decorating tombs with flowers when family members are not able to come themselves to place flowers on a grave, and ceremonies on various anniversaries of the death of the person buried or on Chinese holidays. For heroes of the Communist Party from the 1950s, many of whom no longer have family members living in the Nanjing area, the cemetery regularly places large batches of expensive flowers on the tombs to make it look as if someone had just visited the grave.

Perhaps the most spectacular cemetery in China is the Fu Shou Yuan (福寿园), located on the outskirts of Shanghai. Founded in 1994 as a joint venture between the Shanghai Municipal Government and a private company, the company has since expanded and restructured to open cemeteries (in partnership with other local governments) in eight cities across China. The history of the Fu Shou Yuan is very different to that of the Garden of Merit. Because it was founded after the Maoist period, it does not have a long history of burying communist martyrs. Moreover, because it was founded in a period of rapid urbanization, municipal officials were very cautious about using land that might interfere with the expansion of the city, and located it far from the city center. Despite these differences, the political and ideological strategies of Fu Shou Yuan resemble those of the Garden of Merit. As a joint venture between the local Party-State and private capital, it can count on local state support while it pursues profit. Like the Garden of Merit, it bridges the public/private divide. Though it started out with no Maoist-era national martyrs buried on its land, it has aggressively pursued the ashes of celebrities, high-ranking officials, and national heroes, with the result that it now claims to have more than six hundred famous people buried on its grounds. Many of these celebrities died well before the founding of the cemetery, so Fu Shou Yuan had to entice the families of these people to relocate their ancestors' ashes to the cemetery's premises. It now aggressively markets its ability to provide "residences for the deceased" in the same "neighborhood" as these celebrities. It also promotes communist heroes and national martyrs as the most important form of celebrity of all, politically supporting its existence with the twin ideological pillars of nationalism and loyalty to the Communist Party.

A tour of the cemetery illustrates the extent of these strategies. The entrance to the cemetery is lined with paired statues of mythic and real animals, in the style of the statues on the entrance roads to the tombs of Ming dynasty emperors. Since Ming dynasty tombs have been preserved as historical relics and reconstructed as tourist attractions in both Nanjing and Beijing, this style is familiar to many Chinese visitors. The statues announce that one is entering an elite memorial space, and that the elite-ness of the space relates to the memorialization of the government in power. In addition to tombs, the site houses a columbarium, a building for storing boxes of ashes before they are buried in a grave, a museum, a memorial to the New Fourth Army, a monument to model workers with the names of all model



FIGURE 7. Humanism Memorial Museum. Photo: Andrew B. Kipnis.

workers buried in the cemetery, a Buddhist temple, gardens filled with statues, a hotel, extensive office and meeting facilities, and a coffee bar. All of these cater to the ideology of Party-supporting social distinction described above.

The museum, called the “Humanism Memorial Museum,”<sup>7</sup> is a large three-story building that displays the life stories of many of the most famous of the celebrities who are buried in the cemetery, and a few others who have close ties to Shanghai. It includes over three thousand relics from their lives as well as a movie theater, a gift shop, a lecture hall, a library, artworks, and a collection of over 150 epitaphs, carved in wood, taken from the tombstones of people from around the world. Some of the people featured in the museum include Chen Duxiu (1879–1942), one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party; Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940), former president of Peking University and founder of Academia Sinica; Deng Lijun (Teresa Teng, 1953–95), a famous Taiwanese pop singer, who, though not buried in the cemetery, was so popular in Shanghai during the 1990s that a popular saying went “Deng Xiaoping rules China during the day, but Deng Lijun rules at night”; Feng Zikai (1898–1975) a famous artist, intellectual and cartoonist;<sup>8</sup> and Wang Daohan (1915–2005), a communist official credited with the economic planning behind Shanghai’s rapid development in the 1980s as well as a former mayor of Shanghai. Throughout the museum, famous intellectuals, party officials, and popular figures (singers, artists, actors, and athletes) are mixed together and presented as a unified elite devoted to Shanghai, the Party, and the nation.





FIGURE 8. Section of New Fourth Army Memorial. Photo: Andrew B. Kipnis.

The New Fourth Army was one of the two main components of the Chinese Communist Party's army during the civil war with the Nationalists in the 1940s. Appropriately, it was the section of the army that was located close to Shanghai, and many members of the army became Shanghai residents after the war. Fu Shou Yuan's New Fourth Army Plaza includes a long, low wall with the names of all the soldiers who participated in particular campaigns near Shanghai (in a style that reminds me of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, DC), as well as statues of men at battle and of children saluting soldiers. The site has been declared an area for "red tourism," and Shanghai schoolchildren are regularly taken to the memorial as part of their patriotic education. According to publicity material released by Fu Shou Yuan, this "base of red tourism" receives 400,000 visitors a year.<sup>9</sup> When I visited the cemetery just before National Day (October 1) in 2019, the local government was rehearsing a to-be-televised wreath-laying ceremony complete with speeches, an honor guard, and military personnel.

The museum, New Fourth Army Plaza, tombs of famous people, and statues are scattered across the grounds of the cemetery, which is divided into different sections for different types of people and different types of burial. Maps enable tourists to find the tombs of their favorite celebrities when visiting the grounds. Near the New Fourth Army Plaza is a section for military men. Separate sections for children, intellectuals, artists, and devout Buddhists and Christians are dispersed around the cemetery. There are also sections for highly individualized "artistic tombstones," as well as sections for eco-burials and a large area for wall burials. There are both tombstones that give elaborate biographies of the people whose ashes are buried underneath, and, much more commonly, tombstones that simply present the names of the deceased (usually couples are buried



FIGURE 9. Chen Duxiu's tomb.  
Photo: Andrew B. Kipnis.



FIGURE 10. Wall burials in Fu Shou Yuan. Photo: Andrew B. Kipnis.





FIGURE 11. Children's section of Fu Shou Yuan. Photo: Andrew B. Kipnis.

together) and the names of their descendants. Like the Garden of Merit, the Fu Shou Yuan also offers a wide range of services including making offerings at the grave, placing flowers by the grave, interment ceremonies, and rituals led by clergy from the attached Buddhist temple. Specific sorts of food offerings are permitted to be placed in front of graves, as is the burning of candles, but not the burning of the types of paper products prevalent at many other cemeteries. Perhaps because the cemetery is located on a completely flat plot of ground, there are no offices offering advice on grave location (geomancy consultation). The grounds are kept spotless.

The particular mix of memorial activities, museum displays, and Party-loving patriotism at the cemetery reflects the social conditions of Shanghai's elite at this moment in history. Shanghai identity itself is a form of elite identity, as Shanghai has been a symbol of wealth, cosmopolitanism, and successful commercial cultural endeavor for the entire reform era, if not longer. The actors, artists, singers, and intellectuals memorialized at the cemetery help distinguish such an elite Shanghai identity. The trick is to merge this identity with one of patriotism and love of the Party. To do so, key aspects of the lives of those memorialized are elided. Chen Duxiu's intellectual life and career as a communist are memorialized, but not his conflicts with Mao Zedong. Teresa Teng's commercial career and ties to Shanghai are memorialized, but not her support for the student protestors in Tiananmen Square in 1989, or her concert of "Democratic Songs Dedicated to China" performed in Hong Kong in May of that year. Feng Zikai's cartoons and lay Buddhism get a mention, but not his persecution during the Cultural Revolution. Communist party officials and war-time martyrs are blended together with these cultural figures as a singular cultural elite.

The second aspect of Fu Shou Yuan's elite identity is the manner in which it draws distinctions between proper religious activity and superstition. Space is

made for a Buddhist temple and both Buddhist and Christian burials, as these two religions claim many adherents among Shanghai's elite and are officially recognized by the Chinese Communist Party. Daoism is also recognized as an official religion in China, but is more often associated with less elite and less urban temples than Buddhism. Buddhist priests offer to chant scripture for the souls of the deceased, a relatively intellectual activity. The associations of Buddhism with Buddhist philosophy enhances its status as an elite religion. While the cemetery offers an extensive range of flower products and living plants to be used in memorial services and to decorate graves, it does not sell paper houses, appliances, or mahjong tiles to be burnt in sacrifices to the ancestors, as such forms of memorialization reek of their association with low status, "low quality," rural people. Such practice is often labelled as "superstition," in contrast to the more elite forms of religious activity permitted at Fu Shou Yuan.

Non-elite cemeteries make no attempt to articulate the elitist ideologies apparent in Fu Shou Yuan and the Garden of Merit. They are not sites of patriotic education, and have no memorials dedicated to communist or nationalist martyrs, model workers, or celebrities. They have very few eco-burials or wall burial slots, as most people prefer to be buried in a traditional tomb. They do not divide their cemeteries into sections for people with different types of careers. At most, sections of such cemeteries may be differentiated by the period in which the tombs were sold or the design of the tombs. The tombs rarely display information on the careers of those buried there. Rather they memorialize the dead as family members: as mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters. At less elite graveyards, a wider range of sacrificial activities, such as burning paper offerings and setting off firecrackers, is accepted, and fewer workers are employed to keep the grounds spotless. In most of the non-elite cemeteries I visited, the grounds were relatively clean, but in a few of the least expensive ones there were weeds growing between grave plots, leftovers from sacrificial offerings scattered about (if foodstuffs placed on graves are not removed soon after they are offered, animals will approach and make a mess), and even litter. Those who cared about the upkeep of their family members' tombs and the adjacent grounds sometimes gave small red packets of money to graveyard personnel, as did the daughters of Mr. Wang. But not everyone did so and some tombs received little care.

Perhaps the ultimate contrast to cemeteries like the Fu Shou Yuan are those that memorialize events and people that the Communist Party would like to be forgotten. In Chongqing there is a small cemetery devoted to Red Guards who died during armed battles during the most violent year of the Cultural Revolution (1967). At the time, their bodies were given rushed burials in a park in an out of the way location. During the Cultural Revolution decade (1966–76), the work units of the dead built large tombstones for many of those buried there, as they had died in battles fought on behalf of those units. Many of the tombstones have





FIGURE 12. Tombs in a non-elite graveyard. Photo: Andrew B. Kipnis.



FIGURE 13. Trash in a non-elite graveyard. Photo: Andrew B. Kipnis.

Cultural-Revolution-era sayings etched onto them, and treat the deceased like wartime martyrs. During the 1970s, there were more than twenty such small cemeteries in Chongqing, but most were razed. The one that survived was located in a relatively remote corner of the city and received the support of a tolerant Party Secretary during the 1980s. After a period in which it was forbidden to mourn the dead in the graveyard, during the late 1990s and early 2000s families with loved ones buried there began to visit and conduct sacrifices and other mourning activities more openly. In 2009, the park in which the cemetery was located even managed to have the cemetery declared a local level site for historical preservation. However, since then, restrictions on visiting the cemetery have re-emerged. Under Xi Jinping, the cemetery has been surrounded by barbed wire. It is completely closed except for the Qing Ming holiday, when only relatives are allowed to visit. No photography of the tombstones is allowed.<sup>10</sup>

#### CALENDRIAL CYCLES IN THE SPACES OF THE DEAD

Activity at cemeteries follows an annual cycle. For much of the year, the only people there are those burying their relatives or visiting on death anniversaries (commonly observed dates include the seventh day and every seven days after that for seven weeks, the hundredth day, and the yearly anniversary). Often only a few groups of people will visit a cemetery on a given day. But on certain days marked in the Chinese traditional calendar, including Dong Zhi (the winter solstice), Zhong Yuan Festival (the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month), Chong Yang Festival (the ninth day of the ninth lunar month), Winter Clothes Day (*Hanyi* 寒衣, the first day of the tenth lunar month), and Qing Ming (April 4 or 5), grave visits are common. Of these Qing Ming is by far the most important.

As China has urbanized, Qing Ming has become a more important holiday. While it has long been an occasion for “sweeping graves” (that is, cleaning and tidying up tombstones and carrying out simple ancestral sacrifices at gravesites), when graves were located close to the home, these activities were relatively routine. They could be done by a single person in the family (often the eldest woman able to walk), hardly interfered with her daily routine, and were activities that might be carried out on many other days during the year as well. But for people who live in a part of the country that is distant from their ancestral home, perhaps even in another country, or even for those who live in the city where they were raised, but whose parents are buried in a cemetery far from the urban center, visiting the grave becomes a major outing. It is often combined with visits to relatives living in the place where one’s parents are buried, or family outings to urban gravesites with siblings, children and spouses. China made Qing Ming into a national holiday in 2008.

On Qing Ming, traffic jams around major cemeteries become so intense that many people elect to do their grave visits during the preceding weeks. Even then,

on weekend days during the month before Qing Ming, traffic jams are common. Vendors line the streets near the entrance to the cemetery selling flowers and (at non-elite cemeteries) spirit money and other paper offerings. Families will often buy some flowers or paper offerings and bring some sacrificial food (fruit, rice, steamed bread, or dumplings, and the favorite dishes of the deceased), and sometime liquor and cigarettes for male ancestors. They will clean up the grave a bit, removing any leaves that have fallen on it and pulling up any weeds that are growing near it. They will lay the food and flowers on the grave and bow or kowtow in front of the grave, usually one at a time in age order. While performing bows, they will often speak to their deceased ancestor, using an appropriate kinship term to address her or him, announcing who they are, and perhaps telling the ancestor a bit of family or personal news. If the cemetery is a non-elite one that allows the burning of paper offerings, they will take turns burning paper offerings in a bucket (provided by cemeteries at the entrance) that is placed in front of the tombstone. Finally, they might give a graveyard attendant a tip in a red envelope and ask him or her to keep the grave clean during the coming year. Afterwards, those who have come by car in family groupings will often go out to a rural restaurant or another rural destination in the vicinity of the graveyard, turning the outing into a day-long event. Those who are not able to visit their ancestor's grave on Qing Ming might hire someone else to do the grave sweeping and sacrifice for them, and many cemeteries have even set up ways of doing so by smartphone.

It is difficult to say exactly what percentage of urban people who visit graves on Qing Ming literally believe that their ancestors are present in another world or that the items burned for them and sacrificially placed on graves actually do these ancestors any good. But the practice is taken as a display of filial piety, and many Chinese do believe this virtue is an important one. The link of ancestral sacrifice to filial piety is a delicate issue for the Chinese Communist Party. On the one hand, it wants Chinese adults to take good care of their aging parents, as the government fears needing to provide healthcare and significant pensions for all aged people. On the other hand, some in the Party have long campaigned against spending money on funerary activities, and try to dissociate filial piety from activities devoted to the care of ancestors after their death, constantly repeating the slogan "Thick Care, Thin Funerals" (厚养薄葬). Nevertheless, cemeteries often claim that they are promoting the virtue of filial piety in their attempts to legitimate themselves in the eyes of the government, and the public itself clearly views proper treatment of deceased ancestors as an outward sign of filial virtue. The internet is full of advice on how to act properly during Qing Ming grave visits.

Just as elite cemeteries reveal complex mixtures of Party propaganda, strategies of social distinction, and popular desires to memorialize ancestors, so does the rise in importance of Qing Ming as a national holiday involve an intricate mixture of commercial, popular, and state support. The popularity of the festival suggest that people embrace certain forms of filial piety and familial activity. The

state itself promotes filial piety and has made Qing Ming into a national holiday. Commercial actors, from cemeteries to street vendors, seek ways of profiting from the enthusiasm.

## CONCLUSION

As China urbanizes, the spaces of the dead have been increasingly separated from the spaces of the living. This separation is a global phenomenon. Philippe Aries (1975, 1983) depicts death as becoming invisible in Western societies, while Thomas Laqueur (2015) traces the rise of the modern cemetery as a sanitized, park-like space in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As death is separated from life, it arguably becomes more fearsome, more unknown, and more haunting.

But this separation should not only be seen in a negative light; it is also productive. Cemeteries are spaces to contest the politics of memory. In the case of Fu Shou Yuan, a cemetery actually houses a museum. In providing a platform for public memory, cemeteries also provide a platform for practices of social distinction. Claims to elite status can be made by memorializing one's ancestors in a glorious manner. Finally, the very fact that the spaces of the dead are haunted creates the need to deal with ghosts. This makes visiting cemeteries a semi-heroic deed in itself, a sacrifice that is worthy of being labelled with the virtue of filial piety. It also creates the grounds for practices to neutralize the haunting, such as visiting a bustling district of the city or stepping over fire and consuming warm sugary drinks after visiting a cemetery.

Though the separation of life from death in urbanization is a global phenomenon, we should note the ways in which this transformation involves culturally specific Chinese elements. The concepts of filial piety and Yin energy have long histories in China, while the role of Communist Party propaganda in cemetery construction and management reflects the place of the Party in twenty-first century China.