

Funeral Practice between Europe and China

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Outline

- ▣ Comparison of Religions
- ▣ Social value of death between Chinese and Western culture
- ▣ Comparison of Funeral Ritual
- ▣ Similarities and differences of funeral practices
- ▣ Cultural Exchange between Chinese and Western cultures

A Comparison of Chinese and Western Religion

- ▣ Chinese:
 - A combination of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, polytheism

- ▣ Western:
 - Christianity, monotheism

The social value of death between Chinese and Western culture

- ▣ Similarity:
 - belief in souls or spirits and an afterlife.

- ▣ Difference:
 - Chinese Culture: Educate individuals in filial piety

 - Western Culture: Disconnect the last tie between soul & body
Rest in peace and heaven
Salvation from God

A Comparison of Chinese and Western Funeral Ritual

The main features of Chinese funeral ritual:

- Public notification of death.
- i Donning of white clothing, shoes, and hoods.
- n Ritualized bathing of the corpse.
- f *The transfer of food, money, and goods.*
- a The preparation and installment of a soul tablet for the dead.
- s The ritualized use of money and the employment of professionals.
- n Music to accompany the corpse and settle the spirit.
- s Sealing the corpse in an airtight coffin.
- s Expulsion of the coffin from the community.

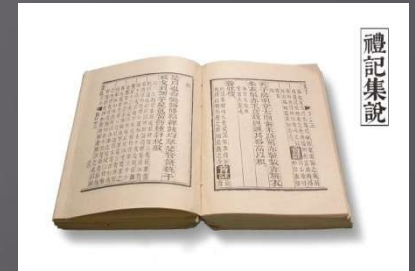
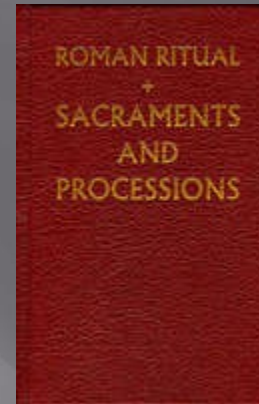


The main features of Western funeral ritual:

- ▣ The bringing of the body to the church
- ▣ The Office of the Dead
- ▣ The funeral Mass
- ▣ The absolution
- ▣ The burial

The similarities between the Chinese and Western funeral practices:

- ▣ Prescriptive text
 - Chinese: Book of Rites (Liji) + Book of Ceremonies (Yili)
 - Western: Roman Ritual



- ▣ Prayers
- ▣ Actors involved
- ▣ Salvation of soul + guidance to life after death

The differences between the Chinese and Western funeral practices:

The time between the moment of death and burial

Chinese:



Western:



The major location for the rituals preceding burial

Chinese:



Western:



The mourning clothes

Chinese:



Western:



The style of corpse

Chinese:



Western:



The main actors in Funeral ceremonies

Chinese:



Western:



The prayer reveal

Chinese:



Western:



A place of burial

Chinese:



Western:



Cultural Exchange between Chinese and western funerals

ACCEPTED

- ▣ 1st-class coffin
- ▣ Bewailing
- ▣ white mourning clothing
- ▣ Choice of burial sites

REJECTED

- ▣ Burning of mock money
- ▣ Paying daoist priest to perform rituals in the funeral

Reason for differences in cultural acceptance

ACCEPTED

- ▣ Confucius ideology
 - filial piety
- ▣ no contradiction
- ▣ no worshipping involved
 - a “as if” matter

REJECTED

- ▣ religious contradiction
 - Buddhist vs Christian
 - Daoist vs Christian
- ▣ false gods

Conclusion

- ▣ Both aim to mourn for those who passed away
- ▣ Very different in practice (e.g. the white dress code of the Chinese funeral is considered to be disrespectful and inappropriate of the Western funeral)
- ▣ Disputes might occur if one does not understand the culture of the other side.

Reference

Standaert, N. (2008). *The Interweaving of Rituals : Funerals in the Cultural Exchange between China and Europe*. The United State : the University of Washington Press.

Watson, J. (1988). *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*. London: University of California Press.