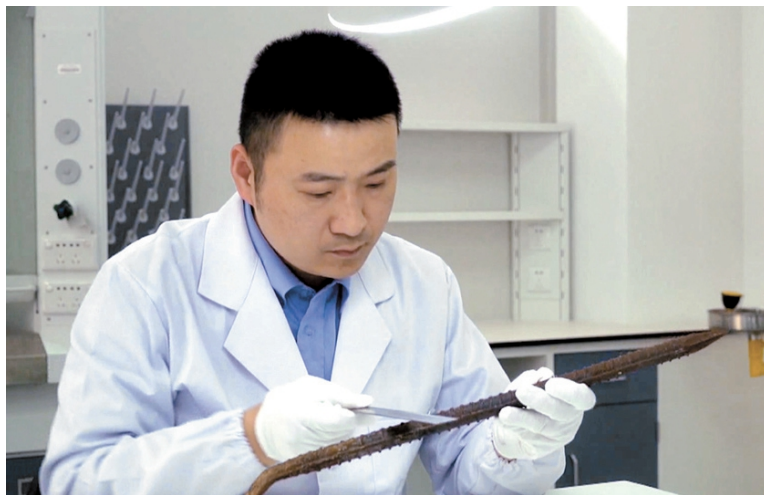


The work of a Chinese coroner explained

Helping the deceased to tell their last words to the living



Coroner Du Ming scrutinizes a tool used for criminal purposes

A coroner “helps a dead person tell his last words to the living” is what Du Meng’s mentor once told him when he was pursuing his second degree at the Criminal Investigation Police University of China in Liaoning province. Du is now an inspector with the forensic group at the Jiading Public Security Bureau in Shanghai and has solved thousands of wrongful death cases. He sees through fake scenes and works to see that justice is done for those who have died unjustly. Du graduated from Bengbu Medical College in Anhui province with a degree in clinical medicine in 2006 and received a second degree in forensic medicine.

On September 21, 2009, Du saw his first crime scene. A young woman was lying on the road on her side, a deep wound piercing her body and a pool of blood underneath her. It was obvious she had been caught unaware as a pair of white earphone cords were drooped around her neck. Forensic work continued until 2 a.m. the next day and was followed by a case analysis. When Du at last had time to take a break, the scene of the dead woman still lingered in his mind. But he overcame all his fears in his desire to become a coroner. After a senior member of the forensic group retired, Du had to carry out surveys by himself. In the first 10 months after he was recruited by the bureau, he attended to more than 300 death scenes.

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THE ROSEATES NEWSLETTER

Your guide to human remains repatriation

The Roseates Newsletter aims to update our clients and contacts on various topics related to the death of foreigners in China and Chinese abroad. The target audience includes consulates, foreign funeral directors and insurance companies. We welcome our readers to provide questions, comments and insights.

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An unnatural death case reached Du on a scorching summer day. A construction site said that one of its workers had died of heatstroke during work. After an autopsy, Du had three doubts. First, the deceased was alleged to have been moving sandbags before his death, but there was not a single grain of sand on his gloves or clothes. Second, a spiral imprint was found on the back of the dead man's body, but there were no spiral objects at the scene, suggesting the body had been moved before the police arrived. Third, there was a small yellowish spot on the dead man's right hand forefinger, its circumference slightly swollen and its center sunken and hard. Du suspected that the deceased had died of electric shock and the claim of heatstroke was false.

As Du walked around the construction site, a screw-threaded steel bar attracted his attention. The spiral pattern on the steel bar matched the spiral imprint on the deceased's back. He then asked people to move the pile of debris. Underneath was a cutting machine, part of its cable being bare copper wire. Faced with ironclad proof, the manager of the construction site admitted they had faked a scene to avoid punishment. They were then asked to suspend operations and the deceased's family, who had been kept completely in the dark, received compensation.

Another time Du was told that an elderly man had died of an accident at home. When he arrived at the house to make his inquiries, the dead man's stepson and daughter-in-law told him that he had slipped in the yard and had died as a result. It was raining outdoors and the alleged death site in the yard had been washed clean. However, during the autopsy, Du found a subcutaneous hemorrhaging around the elderly man's ankles, neck and wrists, and he had a broken rib. After questioning, the stepson and his wife revealed the truth. The stepson had wanted to renovate the house and asked the elderly man to move away. But when he refused, the stepson became violent, knocking the man down, tying him up with ropes and sitting on him. The elderly man died as a result.

Du's motto is "to become mentally stronger." To do so, he taught himself psychology and gained a national secondary qualification in psychiatry. But one thing keeps on frustrating him during his service as a coroner. One day on arriving home, Du hugged his 3-year-old daughter and held her face fondly with his hands. Then his daughter frowned and ran away. His wife explained that the child had found his hands smelly, after he had dissected highly decayed remains earlier that day. His daughter was especially sensitive as she had once seen pictures of dead people on his computer screen when she was with her mother during a visit to his office. "Dedication to one's job is hard but rewarding. The difficulties of a job and the joy it rewards one are inseparable. Being a coroner is like tasting a jar of the best old wine of mixed flavors," said Du, as reported by the Shanghai Daily.

Q&A

Has the number of organ donors been increasing in China?

Yes, China has seen a marked increase in organ donors in recent years, with the donor rate reaching 3.72 percent in 2017, compared with only 0.03 percent in 2010, according to national health authorities. But the number still ranks among the lowest globally.

Do organ donors still need the consent of their next of kin to donate their organs?

Yes, this rule is still in force, but an amendment is being debated by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) to make organ donation possible without their consent if the donor had not ruled it out explicitly during his lifetime.

Are there any books on Chinese funeral culture?

"Buddhist Funeral Cultures of Southeast Asia and China" by Paul S. Williams and Patrice Ladwig compares Buddhist funeral culture in South-East Asia and several regions of China, while "How a Theravadin Buddhist Chinese Funeral May Be Conducted" by Phikku Suwanno and Bhikkhu Visudhacara provides more information about Chinese funerals.

POLICIES

Heilongjiang cracking down on organized crime in the funeral industry

Authorities in Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang province, launched a campaign to overhaul the funeral industry and crack down on organized crime. The campaign began at the end of July and will last till the end of the year. Purchasing and selling information about the deceased, illegally transporting human remains, building cemeteries without approval, and violating price regulations when selling or renting tombs, are major problems they uncovered through tips from the public. The effort targets offenders who operate funeral-related businesses without approval or exceed the authorized scope of operations. Those offering funeral services and selling items without a clearly marked price and who mislead buyers or bundle sales to force purchases would also be targeted.

In May, police in Wuchang city, under the administration of Harbin, arrested six people, including former and current leaders of a local funeral parlor, on charges of monopolizing the market and forcing sales of caskets for urns.

Furthermore, city authorities are going to investigate tips and audit agencies in the industry. The campaign would also expose people who take bribes for cemetery construction and provide shelter to illegal funeral-related services and activities. The city's authorities have set fixed prices for four basic services — storage of remains, transportation, cremation and ash storage. Other optional services are open to the market, but the price must be clearly marked. Offenders would be punished, said Chang Liping, director of funeral affairs management of Harbin.

In June 2018, nine departments, including the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Public Security, released an action plan for punishing misconduct in funeral services, the sale of funeral items, ash storage facilities and the construction and operation of cemeteries, the China Daily reported.

Six doctors arrested for illegally transplanting organs

Six doctors were arrested in Anhui province after a woman's kidneys and liver were illegally transplanted. Yang Suxun, former director of the Intensive Care Unit at Huaiyuan County People's Hospital, and five other doctors from a hospital in Jiangsu province, were arrested, local police confirmed. The donor, Li Ping, 53, was pronounced brain dead on February 15 last year, five days after being attacked by her eldest son during a family dispute. Her husband and younger son were also severely injured. The eldest son was sentenced to 14 years and eight months in prison for intentional homicide. According to her medical record, her husband and daughter agreed that her liver and kidneys be donated. The consent form, which they signed, aroused suspicion from the younger son, Shi Xianglin, who noticed that the form had no seal or donation number. "According to my sister, doctors informed her that our mother's condition was serious and she could not be saved. If they agreed to donate her organs,

our family would get 200,000 yuan (25,400 euro) as a subsidy," Shi said. Three months after he recovered from his injuries, Shi visited the China Organ Donation Administrative Center in Beijing. "Staff from the center told me that information about organs donated through regular procedures can be traced in their system, but they couldn't find my mother's information," he said. Organ donations should be free and voluntary, and the health department will not give subsidies to a donor's family. Police records show that hospitals in Beijing and Tianjin conducted examinations on Li's liver and kidneys. According to Shi, his family members received 200,000 yuan (25,400 euro) from a person named Huang Chaoyang one day after the donation and 460,000 yuan (58,500 euro) through a third party as hush money. In April this year, the central government sent a supervision group to Anhui to crack down on organized crime, and Shi reported the case to the group, the China Daily reported.

Action taken to preserve the embalmed remains of Vietnamese founding father Ho Chi Minh

Vietnam has formed a special team of experts, including four Russian scientists, to help preserve the embalmed remains of the country's founding leader, Ho Chi Minh. The special council has been created to assess the condition of Ho's remains, which were first embalmed nearly 50 years ago. The council started its work in July. "The council is tasked with proposing plans and scientific measures to preserve and protect the absolute safety of Chairman Ho Chi Minh's body for the long term," according to a government decision. The remains require regular and expensive upkeep and occasional re-embalming. The official decision did not provide details on the condition of Ho's remains. The remains of late leader, affectionately known as "Uncle Ho" in Vietnam, are preserved in a large mausoleum in the capital, Hanoi, where they are displayed in a glass coffin in a dark interior. The site attracts thousands of visitors a year. Ho died

in September 1969. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Russia started to charge Vietnam for its supply of a unique chemical mixture required to embalm Ho's remains, according to the mausoleum's website. In 2003, Vietnam asked Russia to move the production of the chemical solution to the South-east Asian country and dispatched scientists to Moscow to learn the secrets of the Lenin Lab. "In the early days, Russian experts produced the chemicals secretly, without letting us know," Cao Dinh Kiem, an official at the museum, told state media in April. "When they finished, Vietnamese workers were assigned to clean up the site, and we got the chance to study the gauze and fluids that remained." Vietnamese scientists have now mastered the art of mummification, but Russian scientists are still regularly called on to help with the annual maintenance of the remains, the Global Times reported.

CULTURE

Next of kin of deceased Australian face hurdles to donate his organs

An Australian family expressed their appreciation for China's organ donation system, saying that they believe efforts are being made to ensure that it is "supervised, open and lawful." The remarks were made by family members of Ken Storey, an Australian who died of heart failure at the age of 74. Storey was hospitalized on May 30 after suffering a heart attack in Shanghai while traveling with his wife. Storey's family decided to donate his organs on June 6. But the donation was not performed as Storey died before procedures and paperwork, including kinship and marriage certificates, were finished. The decision was made unanimously by the family. Storey's eldest daughter said that it would have also been her father's decision, who had a great passion for China and love for its people. As there is no specific law or regulation on foreign donations in China, the procedures are done with reference to that of Chinese donors, Zhang Jidong, vice president of Renji Hospital, where the surgery was scheduled to take place, told the Global Times.

The procedures include obtaining unanimous consent from the patient's immediate family members and strict medical assessments, Zhang said. Storey was about to donate his liver and both kidneys. As of June this year, 10 foreigners have voluntarily donated their organs in China. They were from the U.S., the UK, Australia, Japan, the Philippines and Greece, according to the China Organ Transplantation Development Foundation. It shows that China's organ donation and transplant system is being recognized by more and more people worldwide, who are impressed by the reforms and consider donating organs in China as an honorable move, said Huang Jiefu, former vice minister of health and current head of the foundation based in Beijing. Storey's daughter Myfanwy said that "the stigma of organ procurement from prisoners in China is something of the past and we felt China has made efforts to make organ donations an open cause". Every part of the process was explained, supervised and done with the support from hospital staffers, she said. China banned the use of donated organs from executed prisoners in 2015 and required donated organs to be

distributed through a computerized system to ensure a fair, transparent and traceable process. Myfanwy said she believes China is taking steps to do the right thing and that foundations are engaged to make sure that organ donations are legal. Storey's two daughters said they decided to register as organ donors after their father's death, the Global Times reported.

The total number of registered organ donors in China exceeded 1.35 million as of June 15, with the majority of them young people under the age of 30. By June 15, more than 24,000 people in China had donated a total number of 69,302 organs after death, said Zhao Hongtao, vice president of the China Organ

Transplantation Development Foundation. Most of the donor registrations were made after 2014 following the establishment of a special online registration platform operated by the foundation. Data showed those born after 1990 have become the majority of donors, accounting for 54 percent of the total, while those born after 1980 account for nearly 30 percent, Zhao said. Despite the increasing number of registered organ donors, it is still far short of what is necessary for organ transplant surgeries in China. Last year, 6,302 people donated organs after passing away, a rise of 22 percent on the previous year. About 20,200 transplant surgeries were completed last year, a rise of 21 percent year-on-year, according to the NHC.

End-of-life care slowly gaining ground in China

China's pilot end-of-life care program in Shanghai and more than 70 other cities and municipal districts is a success, according to the National Health Commission (NHC). The pilot program was first launched in five cities and municipal districts, including Putuo District in Shanghai, Haidian District in Beijing and Changchun City in the northeastern province of Jilin in 2017. The NHC released a circular on the pilot program in May, calling for more research, recruitment of more talented staff members, as well as improved mechanisms to serve the program, said Wang Haidong, an official with the commission. End-of-life care, which is not yet common in China, provides palliative care to terminally or seriously ill patients and meets their physical, mental and spiritual needs, aiming to help them die with comfort and dignity. A total of 283,000 patients received end-of-life care across the country in 2018. Wang noted that around 75 percent of China's elderly suffered from chronic diseases. China had about 170 million people aged 65 or above as of the end of 2018, which accounted for nearly 12 percent of its total population. The NHC will

release guidelines for end-of-life care services that include recommended medication, Wang said. "We will make efforts to enable access to end-of-life care across the country as early as possible," he added. With around 40 million disabled and semi-disabled senior citizens, China sees an increasing need for health-care services for elderly people.

"Health care, rehabilitation, nursing and end-of-life care facilities for seniors are in serious shortage," Wang said. He added that facilities do not have sufficient capacity to provide qualified services. Wang Haidong is director of the Commission's Department of Aging and Health, which was set up in September 2018 to improve elderly healthcare and focus on other senior-related issues. China is also carrying out a psychological care program for the elderly in 1,600 urban communities and 320 rural villages. The program will provide mental health services to seniors through training sessions, assessments, interventions and referrals, as reported by the Shanghai Daily and China Daily.

BUSINESS

Registration of wills gaining popularity

Zheng Xiaoyu, an 18-year-old woman in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, recently hit headlines in the city as she made a will to leave all the 10 houses under her name to her mother. She is among the 200 people who have come to the Urumqi branch

of the China Will Registration Center since it opened to the public. According to the center, it expanded its branches from large eastern and southern cities to Xinjiang in the hope that it can benefit more people as the region's population and wealth continue to grow.

Zheng has lived with her mother since her parents divorced. She said that if she has an accident, other relatives including her father and grandparents would inherit her properties legally. "My mother purchased these properties through years of effort, so I can't leave them to others. A will can help me clarify the inheritance," she said.

Zhai Wei, director of the Urumqi branch, said that making a will is not unique to the elderly. According to Zhai, an internet celebrity in her 20s also came to the branch. Since she makes frequent business trips nationwide, she is afraid of having an accident. "She has a number of virtual properties online and she

wanted to let her parents know about them by making a will," Zhai said. "Wills can help people figure out how many properties they own and avoid disputes if they have legally binding documents. For those who have two houses or fewer of no more than 140 square meters and fewer than two bank accounts, we provide the service for free," she added. The average age of those who make a will is dropping. The average age was 71.2 last year, down from 77.4 in 2013. By June, about 145,000 wills have been deposited at the center's branches nationwide since its establishment in 2013. The center now has 12 branches.

THE LAST WORD

- Two men in Guangdong province were jailed for stealing human remains and selling them to local residents to replace those of recently deceased relatives, as the government requires bodies to be cremated. In September 2016, a man planned to pay the two accused 85,000 yuan (10,800 euro) for a set of human remains. After the case came to light, another villager turned to the two accused for help to bypass the cremation process for his father, at the price of 165,000 yuan (21,000 euro).

FIXED GUIDELINES IN CASE OF DEATH

- Provide the complete name, date of birth and nationality of the deceased.
- Provide the name and telephone number of the person in China who first reported the death (hospital, public security bureau, embassy, travel agent, friend,...)
- Provide the place of death: district, city, prefecture and/or county and province.
- Indicate, if known, whether the deceased was covered by an insurance policy.

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PARTNER OF THE CHINA NATIONAL FUNERAL ASSOCIATION

Coordination and management of the entire repatriation process of human remains from/to mainland China:

Hospital – Public Security – Consulate – China Funeral Home – Crematory – Airline – Funeral Director at Destination – Insurer – Next of Kin

Legal Formalities – Storage – Autopsy – Embalment – Coffin – Cremation – Urn – Inland Transportation – Quarantine – International Transportation – Daily Update of Progress

THE ROSEATES NEWSLETTER

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