

Death in times of corona**China succeeds in limiting the numbers of Covid-19 fatalities**

The coronavirus pandemic first broke out in Wuhan, capital of China's Hubei province, in January, following the diagnosis of the first cases of an atypical pneumonia in December. As the number of infections increased dramatically, the Chinese government ordered a complete lockdown of the city on January 23. Only after 76 days, on April 8, the lockdown was lifted and life in Wuhan slowly returned to normal. Authorities also put the surrounding Hubei province in quarantine, preventing unauthorized travel from and to the province as well as inside the province. The draconian measures implemented by the authorities succeeded in limiting the number of cases and fatalities. As of April 8, China had reported 81,802 cases and 3,333 deaths of Covid-19, the disease caused by the SARS-Cov-19 virus. This appeared to be a lot until fatalities started to mount in March in Italy, Spain and later in the U.S., quickly exceeding the numbers in China.

As the lockdown was lifted, hundreds of people started to queue at mortuaries to collect the urns containing the ashes of their departed loved-ones. Remains were cremated during the lockdown, but the ashes could not be handed over to family members for burials. The number of urns stacked at mortuaries prompted critics in the West to question the number of deaths reported in China. But during the lockdown
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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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people also died from other causes, which has to be added to the number of urns.

Some reports also questioned the pollution caused by cremations. In mid-February, China's environmental monitor refuted rumors claiming that a huge number of coronavirus cremations in Wuhan increased the amount of sulfur dioxide (SO₂) emissions. "After careful confirmation, we found that the SO₂ rise published by Czech-based Windy.com was a 'serious distortion' and its statistics could not be trusted," according to the China National Environmental Monitoring Center (CNEMC). Emissions data from the Sentinel-5P/TROPOMI satellite also suggested that between February 3 and 9 the SO₂ intensity in Wuhan and surrounding areas remained low.

Recently, grieving families have agreed to donate the remains of loved ones who died from the novel coronavirus for medical research, hoping to benefit the living. The Chinese tradition is for remains to be buried fully intact. Analysis of the remains could help medical workers learn about the pathogenicity and lethality of the virus, which can provide references for saving more critical patients in the future and possibly help in developing a vaccine. An autopsy is the most direct means to uncover the virus, Wang Guoping, co-leader of an autopsy team and doctor at Wuhan Tongji Hospital, told media.

The importance of such studies should not be underestimated. X-ray, MRI and CT scans help doctors to see inside a human body, but they don't provide the advantages of examining an infected body. Such studies are possible only if people donate their remains after death. Even though they suffered because of the disease, their remains will help fight it after death. Autopsies show severe damage to Covid-19 patients' lungs and immune system, according to a doctor in Wuhan, who called for measures to prevent fibrosis of the lungs at an early stage of the disease. "The influence of Covid-19 on the human body is like a combination of SARS and AIDS as it damages both the lungs and immune systems," Peng Zhiyong, director of the intensive care unit of the Zhongnan Hospital of Wuhan University, told the Global Times. If irreversible damage is done to the lungs, other measures, like preventing lack of oxygen, will not be of much use, he said.

On April 4, the traditional *Qingming* festival to remember the ancestors and departed loved ones, the Chinese government declared a day of mourning and three minutes of silence to honor the victims of Covid-19. Usually a time to visit cemeteries, this year most people honored their departed loved ones online as the authorities closed cemeteries to avoid huge crowds. Families could order "cloud tomb-sweeping" services or view cemetery workers online presenting flowers and sweeping the graves of their loved-ones. Nearly 13.4 million people in China used online platforms to mourn the deceased, the Global Times and China Daily reported.

Q&A

How many people visited cemeteries on Qingming last year?

More than 9.7 million Chinese people visited cemeteries during the festival last year, according to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Shanghai's 54 cemeteries and columbariums received 2.19 million tomb-sweepers on last year's Qingming, and 375,400 this year, an 88% drop.

Could people visit cemeteries this year?

Some cemeteries were closed and visits to other cemeteries were discouraged by the authorities amid the coronavirus pandemic. Visitors were only accepted after completing online bookings. Online reservation systems for several Shanghai cemeteries crashed almost immediately after opening. All 160,000 time slots on April 4 were taken in Shanghai.

How long does the tomb-sweeping period lasts?

Qingming fell on April 4 This year – in some years it' on April 5 – but the period lasted from March 28 to April 12.

China observed a day of national mourning on April 4. How many such days were held before?

National mourning days are not held frequently. This one was the fourth in the past 12 years, after the ones held to remember those lost in the Sichuan earthquake of May 2008, the Yushu quake in April 2010 and the Gansu landslide in August 2010.

POLICIES

China refutes lies on organ donation numbers

China's leading organ transplant scholar rebuked a report published in a peer-reviewed medical journal criticizing China's organ donation data, saying the report is laden with logical and academic fallacies. Wang Haibo, head of the China Organ Transplant Response System (COTRS), said that China will lodge a formal rebuttal to the journal BMC Medical Ethics questioning how such a paper came to be published. During the December 2019 Symposium on the Development of Organ Donation and Transplantation in China in Kunming, capital of Yunnan province, Wang referred to the medical journal's report as a "serious accusation, and China felt the need to respond." The paper published by Jacob Lavee, an Israeli scientist, Matthew Robertson and Raymond Hinde, Australian doctoral students, claimed China generated fake organ donation data using a simple mathematical equation. But Wang showed that data from other countries also closely matched the equation, disproving Lavee's report.

Wang outlined how the organ donation data system works. When a donor's name is typed into the system, up comes his or her personal information, ID card number, consent details and other relevant information. The allocation process of the system is real-time and supervised by institutes including transplant hospitals and the Red Cross, Wang said. Jose Núñez, in charge of the transplantation program at the World Health Organization (WHO) said there was nothing that cast doubt on China's data. There were 2,766 organ

donations in 2015, 4,080 in 2016, 5,146 in 2017 and 6,302 in 2018. The number of organ donations in 2018 ranked second in the world, the Global Times reported.

The number of donors per million people increased from 2.01 in 2015 to 4.53 last year, according to the China Organ Transplantation Development Foundation. More than 18,000 people on the mainland made postmortem donations between 2015 and last year. By the end of last year, the mainland had 169 medical institutions certified to perform organ transplant surgeries, with Guangdong province ranking at the top of the list with 19, followed by Beijing with 16. Guangdong also ranked No 1 in the number of donors between 2015 and last year, with 2,400 people from the province having donated organs after death. The median age of all mainland donors in those four years was 44, and those under 18 comprised about 11 percent. Males accounted for 81 percent of all donors. The two major causes of death for donors during that time were injuries from accidents and vascular diseases of the brain, accounting for nearly 87 percent of all deaths. Organ transplant technologies in China have been improving, resulting in a longer and higher quality life for organ recipients. Over 90 percent of all patients receiving heart transplants in China live more than one year after their surgeries, a higher level than in most countries. Still, the number of organ donations cannot meet demand, the China Daily added.

CULTURE

Most Hongkongers don't know enough about end-of-life care services

Almost 80 percent of Hongkongers have no idea where to obtain end-of-life care services, a think tank's survey has found, highlighting the inadequate resources and education devoted to the city's rapidly ageing population. Typically for terminally ill people who wish to stop receiving life-saving treatment if they are expected to die within the next six to 12 months, end-of-life services encompass physical, social, and emotional

support for the patient and their families, so patients can live out their last days with dignity. But, according to a recent survey, 77 percent of those interviewed said they did not know where to find those services, while about 55 percent said they had "little confidence" in making end-of-life arrangements, while 12 percent said they took care of elderly or terminally ill people at home. Government data shows there will be

an estimated 98,000 deaths a year by 2066, up from 46,700 in 2016, at a time when public hospitals already face a shortage of bed space and medical staff. "In order to meet the demands of an ageing population in the future, we need to focus on integrating end-of-life services within the community, instead of relying on terminal illness treatment from public hospitals" said Pamela Tin, who led the survey commissioned by Our Hong Kong Foundation.

Of the 30.9 percent of the survey's 1,001 respondents who had used end-of-life services, about six in every 10 were "not satisfied" with the experience. Queenie Li, assistant researcher at the foundation, suggested elderly care centers run by the districts include services such as bereavement counseling, dying at home support and palliative care, or at least coordinate with elderly homes and non-governmental

organizations to provide such services. Up to 86 percent of those surveyed hoped to stay in their communities towards the later stages of their life, which researchers said could help ease overcapacity in public hospitals. "If people had a choice of where to die, most of them said they wished to die peacefully in the arms of their loved ones, surrounded by people who cared about them," Li said. The Food and Health Bureau prepares to complete its public consultation on passing a law to improve end-of-life care in Hong Kong. The proposed changes include allowing people to write a "living will" – making it easier to refuse certain treatment when they are dying. Lam Ching-choi, a member of the city's Executive Council and chairman of the Elderly Commission, acknowledged that "in the end, people are not aware that they have the option to die at home instead of in hospitals," the South China Morning Post reported.

Innovations added to the traditional *qingtuan* – green glutinous rice balls

Traditional brands of qingtuan in Shanghai have added innovations to the snack of green glutinous rice balls, and moved online amid the coronavirus outbreak. *Qingtuan*, getting its green color from the juice of wormwood leaves, is a seasonal snack associated with *Qingming*, which fell on April 4 this year. The festival is a time for people to sweep family tombs and pay tribute to their ancestors. This year, restaurants have introduced innovative fillings such as butter cashew, cheese beef and durian. "We smash nuts, butter and sesame and mix them as a filling," said executive chef Huang Renkang of the Sunya Cantonese Restaurant in the Nanjing Road Pedestrian Mall in Shanghai. "Sesame has a taste of graininess and enhances the fragrance of the cashews. It's an East-meets-West combination and we have done a lot of trials since late last year on the new recipe. "The flavor is very popular among young people." The restaurant, founded in 1926, also serves other *qingtuan* tastes like salted egg yolk and dried meat floss, sweetened bean paste and *yanduxian*, a typical Shanghai soup with pork and bamboo shoots.

The restaurant is also trying online sales via food delivery platforms for the first time this year due to the coronavirus pandemic. "Our

offline business is getting better day by day, but we've also launched online sales to prevent people gathering," said Huang. Xing Hua Lou, a time-honored restaurant dating back to 1851, offers a cheese beef qingtuan. The ingredients are black pepper from south India, fresh cheese and beef. "We tried dozens of black peppers, and the final selection is both spicy and fragrant," said Xu Yingjun, technical director of the catering department at Xing Hua Lou. "The flavor is rich and silky, featuring light spicy pepper, chewy beef and rich milky cheese." The development of the restaurants' new *qingtuan* recipes started as early as the end of last year's *Qingming*, Xu said. "We developed eight new flavors and finally picked this one based on trial tastings," said Zhi Jing, deputy general manager of Xing Hua Lou. Chicken, pork and beef were all on the table at first but beef finally won out. "We introduce Western cuisine into the traditional Chinese snack, which overturns traditional impressions and attracts young consumers," said Zhi. Another *qingtuan* with shredded chicken and bacon, a popular hit last year, is also served by Xing Hua Lou, together with qingtuan filled with purple sweet potato, salted egg yolk and dried meat floss, the Shanghai Daily reported.

Impressions of yearly mourning activities

As night falls, mourners emerge at crossroads in twos and threes. They draw a circle on the ground using whatever is at hand to separate the "two worlds". Then, within the circle, they set light to wads of imitation paper money. As the offerings burn, people murmur, urging their ancestors to treat themselves well in the "other world" and not be as thrifty as they were in life. They usually assure deceased relatives that they can send a message via dreams any time if they run out of spending money or need new clothes. That is a common scene in Chinese cities during the weeks straddling the Tomb Sweeping Festival on April 4. The participants are mainly middle-aged people or seniors, who have migrated to cities far from their home provinces, where ancestral graves are usually found. Li Aiqun, a truck driver in Beijing, normally burns offerings for his late parents in his home village near Baoding, Hebei province, ahead of Tomb Sweeping Day, and Zhongyuan, the "ghost festival" that is celebrated on the 15th day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar, usually in August or September. He and his wife choose a crossroad to make the

offerings because they believe crossroads are the places most frequented by the postmen of the "other world", and burning offerings there allows them to deliver the offerings to their loved ones.

Yang Anrong, a veteran cemetery manager in Kunming, Yunnan province, said that in Hubei, her home province, people draw the circle with rice. The rice is intended as a token of goodwill and a tip for the ghost postmen so they will not be tempted to steal the items to be delivered. "We used to place the joss paper in an envelope with the address of the departed relatives' ancestral home written on it to avoid errors," she said. Burning offerings is an age-old tradition, but it is banned in most commercial cemeteries in accordance with fire safety regulations. Some local authorities have also banned the practice at undesignated places and introduced policies to allow mourners to exchange joss paper for bouquets of flowers in a bid to promote "civilized mourning" and curb air pollution, the China Daily reported.

BUSINESS

County-level factory is major coffin exporter to Japan

Shandong's Caoxian county's Huifengyuan Wooden Products Co is making wooden coffins engraved with dragons and phoenixes, mainly to be shipped to Japan via Weihai port. Traditionally famous for its timber processing skills, about 70% of its coffins, made by around 2,000 wood processing factories, are exported to Japan annually, which faces a rapidly ageing population. In addition, other items such as cinerary caskets, memorial tablets and sacrificial altars are also popular in many Asian countries. This business received a push from China's cremation policy to save valuable farmland and change traditional burials, as well as from globalization. "Japanese clients are strict with details, from raw materials to sizes and decorations, or

even smells," said Tian Liang, manager at Dehong Wood Product Co in Caoxian county. The company currently partners with four listed companies in Japan, and has exported more than 200,000 coffins to the country, with an annual revenue of more than 90 million yuan (12 million euro). To secure their market share in Japan – the county's biggest overseas market for coffins and related funeral products – many local businesses have also studied their clients' demands relating to coffin weight, carvings, appearance, designs and materials. For instance, they make coffins decorated with sakura elements during the flower's blooming season in Japan, the China Daily reported.

Glimpse at the career of Yi Hua, chief brand officer of Fushouyuan

Yi Hua clearly remembers the morning in 1998 when she arrived at an old building on the Bund to consult with the Shanghai Film Association about the monument for Ruan

Lingyu, the most celebrated actress from the golden age of Chinese cinema in the 1930s. Someone opened the door, and shortly after Yi explained she worked for a cemetery, the door

was abruptly closed. She could only knock her forehead on the solid teakwood door. Her head immediately began to swell and tears dripped from her eyes. She silently walked away. Not only did Yi's head hurt but also her heart. She was then 30 years old in her third year working in the funeral and interment industry. Now 52, she is chief brand officer of Fushouyuan International Group. Recalling that embarrassing moment 22 years ago has kept her vigilant and determined to challenge prejudice. Back in 1996, a job notice in the Xinmin Evening News aroused Yi's curiosity. After working as a model in the fashion industry, then a white-collar worker in one of China's first foreign-funded companies, and later as marketing manager in the real estate industry, Yi joined Fushouyuan Cemetery that year, despite the objections of her parents and friends.

The day after her infamous run in with the teakwood door, Yi returned to the old building and met Ding Yulin, the secretary general of the film association. After a pleasant conversation, Ding introduced Yi to the chairman of the association, Zhang Ruifang, a famous Chinese actress. In 1998, a sculpture of Ruan was unveiled in Qingpu District's Fushouyuan Cemetery. With the help of Zhang, the area around it became a final resting place for many Chinese performing-art celebrities, including Zhang herself. Ruan's project became one of Yi's most important marketing pieces, winning awards in China and abroad. After visiting foreign cemeteries in countries including the U.S., Australia, Japan and New Zealand, Yi realized a cemetery "is not only a place for the dead, but also a place to hold the memories of a city, even a country," the Shanghai Daily reported.

THE LAST WORD

- Strict new curbs on people's movements to contain the spread of Covid-19 in China have forced a number of fugitives to turn themselves in to the police – including a man from Inner Mongolia wanted for stealing a corpse for a "ghost marriage" so that the deceased would not be without a spouse in the afterlife.

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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