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Traditional Funeral Practices of the '35th Day After Death' Ritual in Manyun Village, Hubei Province, China

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Abstract

The traditional "35th Day After Death" ceremony is a vital component of the broader funeral rituals in Manyun Village, Hubei Province. This ceremony includes key practices such as welcoming the spirit home, returning the spirit to the earth, burning symbolic offerings, and performing the "Top Scholar Returns Home" ritual. Deeply rooted in early religious beliefs and Taoist traditions, it reflects themes of soul reverence, ancestor worship, and a belief in spiritual resurrection. The ceremony is carried out in a structured and orderly manner, creating a solemn and sacred atmosphere. Beyond its ritualistic aspects, this tradition holds rich cultural significance. It serves to preserve heritage, honor ancestors, maintain a connection between the living and the spiritual world, foster community bonds, and express collective emotions.

Keywords: *35th Day After Death, funeral ritual, Manyun Village, cultural tradition, ancestor worship*

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1. Introduction and Literature Review

The "On the 35th Day After Death" funeral ceremony is a crucial component of traditional Chinese funeral rites (Chen, 2000b). Although many scholars have made valuable contributions to the study and classification of funeral ceremonies, specific research on the entire process of the "On the 35th Day After Death" ceremony is still relatively limited. This paper aims to provide a panoramic introduction and a preliminary cultural interpretation of traditional Chinese funeral customs by investigating the "On the 35th Day After Death" ceremony in Manyun Village, Nanzhao County, Hubei Province, in combination with the entire funeral process.

The ritual of sending the soul back on the 35th day after death still exists intact in Manyun Village, Nanzhao County, Xiangyang City, Hubei Province, as part of the funeral ceremony. It is closely integrated with each step of the funeral ceremony and runs throughout the entire process, with a very distinct ritual character (Sh, 2005). Therefore, to fully understand the essential features and meaning of the funeral ceremony, it should be examined and studied within the context of the entire funeral process for an objective, accurate, and meaningful understanding.

Ancient funeral ceremonies were complex (Chen, 2000a), but this research paper mainly introduces one type of traditional funeral ceremony, namely the "On the 35th Day After Death" ceremony. The residents of the Manyun area, due to the geographical factors of being remote, with high mountains, poor transportation, and dangerous terrain, still preserve the ancient cultural lifestyle relatively completely, including the process of the "On the 35th Day After Death"

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funeral ceremony. “The locality of folklore has a very universal significance (Ningsih and Rizki, 2024). No matter what kind of folklore item, it will be restricted by the production and living conditions and geographical relations of a certain area, and will be more or less tinged with local color” Wu (2002). “Without the factors of geography and space, culture becomes abstract and incomprehensible” Qiang (2011). The local dialects and funeral customs of different ethnic groups vary to some extent in ritual arrangements, but the process of the ceremony is still basically similar. The general process of the “On the 35th Day After Death” funeral ceremony in the Manyun area is briefly introduced as follows:

On the 34th day after the elder’s death, the deceased’s sons, daughters, and sons-in-law gradually return home from their workplaces. At 4 a.m. the next day, firecrackers are set off to inform the neighbors in the village that the elder has been deceased for 35 days, commonly referred to as “On the 35th Day After Death.” Upon hearing the firecrackers, relatives, and villagers come to help one after another. The geomancer first prepares the items for the “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony and places them in the main room of the deceased’s home. Then, the younger generations of the family go to the cemetery with the geomancer to bring the deceased’s spirit back home and prepare three meals a day for the spirit. The offerings prepared for the deceased generally include paper horses, paper houses, firewood, coarse paper, paper gold mountains, paper silver mountains, paper child and maidservants, paper televisions, etc. The quantity of the offerings depends on the wishes of the filial sons and daughters. In the new era, the local people mostly regard filial piety in life and simple burial as virtues, and there is no longer the previous blind pursuit of the number of offerings.

During the period when the spirit is back home after the family and the geomancer consult and determine the auspicious time for sending the spirit back to the earth, the ritual of sending the spirit back to the earth begins. It is mainly led by the chanting of scriptures by the geomancer. Accompanying the chanting ritual is the deceased’s son kneeling in front of the spirit tablet to burn paper, offer wine, and kowtow. A tile is also placed on the grave. Generally, paper is burned three times, wine is offered in three cups, and kowtows are made three times. The respect for the deceased is emphasized by the number “three,” which also reflects the profound influence of Taoist culture in the area. Laozi once said, “One gives birth to two, two gives birth to three, and three gives birth to all things.” (Lee *et al.*, 2009). The entire process continues until the ancestral spirit is escorted up the mountain and reaches the grave, accompanied by the geomancer’s scriptures. The deceased’s descendants hold the paper spirit tablet in front, followed by relatives and neighbors, who together move the offerings for the deceased to the cemetery. This is commonly known as “Sending the Spirit Back to the Earth.”

Also known as “Burning on the 35th Day,” the deceased’s sons, daughters, sons-in-law, and neighbors move the offerings for the deceased to the front of the grave. The eldest son places the paper spirit tablet in front of the grave, and the other offerings are placed diagonally behind the grave. At this time, the geomancer chants scriptures for the offerings and the food provided for the deceased, with the general meaning of facilitating communication between humans and deities for the deceased’s journey to the Pure Land and adding blessings to their descendants. All the offerings need to be burned after the chanting of scriptures by the geomancer. Without the accompaniment of the scriptures, the deceased will not receive the items given by the living when they move to the other world. After chanting the scriptures three times, the geomancer holds the “guiding stick” and waves it three times from left to right over the offerings, indicating that the burning of the offerings can begin. The filial sons and daughters also take off their mourning clothes and throw them into the fire. When burning the offerings, there should be no residue left; they must be completely turned into ashes. Especially a large amount of paper money needs to be burned. The offerings are conveyed to the deceased in the form of ashes. Regardless of whether such a ritual is scientific or not, it is the most direct way for the living to connect with the deceased and express their reverence for the dead. As Lévy-Bruhl said, “There is a category of rituals that occupy an important place in the lives of primitives and are particularly capable of explaining the thinking of primitives (Segal, 2007). Therefore, we single them out for a separate study. These are the rituals concerning the dead, or more accurately, the rituals concerning the connection between the living and the dead. These rituals are everywhere: in almost any social collective, no matter what type it is, observers have found customs, taboos, and rituals that must be followed at the moment of death and for a longer or shorter period after death” (Levy-Bruhl, 1981). This is the original intention of the ritual of burning offerings.

2. Top Scholar Returns Home

The last item of the “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony in the Manyun area is the “Top Scholar Returns Home.” Here, the “top scholar” specifically refers to the deceased’s descendants, namely sons, daughters-in-law, daughters, and sons-in-law. When the offerings are burned, the geomancer picks a pine or cypress branch for each of the deceased’s sons, daughters-in-law, daughters, and sons-in-law to hold in their hands. The mourning clothes are taken off and burned together with the offerings, which means that the filial piety has

been fulfilled. The descendants of the deceased continue their careers. At this time, the geomancer takes out a bright red quilt that has been prepared in advance and hangs it on the filial sons and daughters. The neighbors prepare a string of firecrackers, which are immediately lit after the red quilt is hung. The firecracker lighting ceremony has two symbolic meanings. On the one hand, it confirms the identity transformation of the filial sons and daughters and warns the deceased not to harm the descendants in the form of ghosts or to linger in the human world. In the "Jingchu Suishiji" (The Record of Festivals and Customs in Jingchu), it is mentioned: "Get up at the crow of the rooster, first wrap the pillar in the courtyard to ward off the mountain sprites and evil ghosts." The original function of firecrackers was to drive away ghosts and evil spirits (Lai and Brimblecombe, 2017). On the other hand, it is a congratulation to the descendants of the deceased for revitalizing their spirits and moving towards the "Top Scholar's Mansion." The filial sons and daughters, draped in bright red quilts, are led back home by the geomancer. When they return home, the neighbors have already replaced the white couplets, mourning banners, and other items of the host family with red ones, including laying a red tablecloth on the altar table in the main room. The neighbors inside the house block the door, and the filial sons and daughters need to give them five or ten yuan to open the door. In this way, the entire "On the 35th Day After Death" ceremony comes to an end.

3. The Cultural Background of the "On the 35th Day After Death" Funeral Ceremony in Manyun Area

From the above process of the funeral ceremony in the Manyun area, it can be seen that the sacrificial activities in this area are profoundly influenced by primitive religious beliefs and Taoist culture, mainly manifested in soul beliefs, ancestor worship, and a worldview of resurrection (Carpenter, 1996). The people in the Manyun area believe in the soul theory, thinking that the soul does not perish after death. Moreover, they generally worship their ancestors with great reverence and piety. They believe that although the ancestors' bodies are gone, their souls are reborn and will always live with them. In the concept of the people in Manyun, death is not the end of life, but a rebirth in another world. Van Gennep proposed the concept of "resurrection" in his classic work on ritual studies. He believed that "resurrection" is a rule of life and the universe, and that any energy in a system will gradually disappear and needs to be replenished and updated from time to time (Zhang, 2012). In his view, "resurrection" is manifested through rituals in society along with death and rebirth. The local Han people's worldview is also that the soul is immortal, and the relationship between the deceased and their descendants and the local village does not end just because of death. If we examine from the perspective of ritual functions, death means the existence of a new type of relationship, that is, the sacred relationship worshipped by the living: the relationship between gods and ancestors or ghosts and ancestors (Cao, 2023). Therefore, "returning" is the theme of the entire "On the 35th Day After Death" funeral ceremony, running through the entire ceremony and every detail. The process of the "On the 35th Day After Death" funeral ceremony in Manyun Village, through the rituals of bringing the soul back, sending the spirit back to the earth, burning offerings, and communicating with the ancestral spirits through the "Top Scholar Returns Home," is the accumulation of the cultural psychology of fearing ghosts and spirits and worshipping ancestors, thus forming their unique funeral ceremonies and sacrificial activities.

4. The Correlation Between "On the 35th Day After Death" and the Funeral Ceremony

The custom of the "On the 35th Day After Death" is not only prevalent in the Manyun area, but also influences many nearby areas, such as the settlements of the Miao, Tujia, Dong, and other ethnic groups, where the "On the 35th Day After Death" custom is also present in the funeral process (Liang, 2003). After a person dies, the living usually keeps vigil for 49 days. Among them, the "first seven," that is, the seventh day after death, is very important and has certain ritual activities. In addition to the "first seven," there is the "On the 35th Day After Death." According to folklore, on the 35th day after death, the soul reaches the "Hometown Gazing Platform" in the underworld, where the deceased will look back at their hometown and visit their family and relatives. Chinese people have a kind of inexplicable "nostalgia" for their hometowns, and the feelings of homesickness are intricate and complex. Therefore, it is the same for the deceased. The soul moves from one world to another strange world and can never return to its previous home (Kuo, 2021). Thus, "On the 35th Day After Death" is particularly important as the day when the soul gazes at its hometown. The reason why humans hold subsequent funeral ceremonies with reverence is largely due to the worship of ancestral spirits, believing

that ancestral spirits can bless their descendants with prosperity and flourishing through supernatural powers (Carpenter, 1996).

The funeral ceremony process in the Manyun area is a continuous, orderly, and stable ritual structure. The “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony is an important part of the funeral ceremony, and its ritual process is also a continuous, stable, and orderly ritual structure. If the “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony is removed from the entire funeral ceremony, the continuity of the funeral ceremony will be affected. Moreover, the entire funeral ceremony and its cultural structure will need to be reorganized. There will be no more days for the deceased to return to their hometown, and the living will not be able to divide time to perform rituals. The ritual process will seem incomplete. Therefore, to a large extent, the “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony influences the funeral ceremony process. The activities of the “On the 35th Day After Death” are an integral part of the entire funeral ceremony. In this sense, the performance of “On the 35th Day After Death” is ritualized, constrained by rituals, and serves the rituals. The entire funeral ceremony regulates the rules of the “On the 35th Day After Death” performance activities. The size of the entire funeral ceremony framework and the length of its duration determine the progress of each specific ancestral worship activity. Including all the ritual activities from the moment the deceased takes their last breath. The entire performance process of “On the 35th Day After Death” generally goes through a series of patterned links: starting from the “Road to the Underworld,” seeking the Buddha’s guidance for the soul’s return, to the scriptures of “Namo Kaibaojuan Bodhisattva,” and performing rituals and chanting the “Blood Lake Sutra” for each place the deceased goes in the underworld, as well as the “Deep Vows of Maudgalyayana” who sees the suffering in the blood lake at the gates of hell, Maudgalyayana taking his mother’s sins, and saving his mother from the sea of suffering, etc (Berezkin, 2020). These preserve the ancient funeral thinking patterns, which are interlinked, stable, and orderly. “The Sutra of Maudgalyayana Saving His Mother” is the solidified pattern for the chanting of the “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony. These rituals, from beginning to end, basically run through a continuous and stable pattern structure. It is this characteristic of ritualized pattern structure that makes the “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony more coherent. In summary, the funeral ceremony in this area reflects a corner of the local cultural lifestyle. It also reflects the local folk’s cultural view and the view of life. Therefore, the sacredness, mystery, and practical attributes of the “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony play their functions and meanings by being embedded in the entire funeral ceremony.

Since the performance field of the “On the 35th Day After Death” funeral ceremony is in the deceased’s home and extends to the cemetery, and the content chanted is about Maudgalyayana saving his mother from suffering, children and grandchildren showing gratitude to their parents, and entertaining the ghosts in the underworld, it naturally creates a solemn, sacred, and solemn atmosphere. This gives participants an intangible sense of spatial oppression, immersing everyone unconsciously into the sacred and solemn ceremony. From this common history constructed and maintained by the community, a sense of belonging and identity to the community is cultivated and established. The reverence for the chanting words the ritual behavior of the master, and the sacred worship of the ancestral spirits, dominate the entire “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony process. It can be seen that chanting hymns at the funeral is not for entertaining people, but for “guiding the way” for the deceased. This is an indispensable rite of passage for the people of Manyun Village in the transition from life to death. It not only reflects their views on life, death, and the universe but is also closely related to their daily lives. Traditional concepts hold that, generally, normal elderly people who pass away peacefully have supernatural powers and protect their descendants as deities rather than causing trouble as ghosts. One of the performance rules can determine the sacredness and solemnity of the “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony: whether the participants perform appropriate actions in the recognized order. In other words, the actions of the participants are very important in the ritual, and these actions are all related to the theme of death. At the same time, the ritual process also does a good job of dividing people’s roles.

The traditional funeral ceremony also promotes the formation of human relationships and norms of people’s behavior and consciousness. The “On the 35th Day After Death” funeral ceremony is also a manifestation of the local people’s worship of the family’s Zhaomu spirit, and to a certain extent, it maintains the kinship between clans and families.

5. The Orderly Performance and the Stability and Regulation of the Chanting Texts

The “On the 35th Day After Death” funeral ceremony in the Manyun area has inherited the entire process of traditional Chinese funeral ceremonies, forming a stable and orderly patterned mode. The formation of a cultural pattern is a matter of habit. The entire performance process of the ceremony, as mentioned earlier, includes the following steps: bringing the spirit back—sending the spirit back to the earth—burning offerings—and “Top Scholar Returns Home.” No step can be reversed in order; it must be carried out strictly according to the established sequence. If the order is violated, it may offend the deities and result in punishment. Deities in

our world are invisible and intangible, and we can only communicate with them through the master who acts as the medium between humans and deities. If we offend them, it will be a long-term or even lifelong sin. Thus, a habit is formed. The French sociologist Bourdieu believes that actors have a relatively fixed “disposition,” which is not the a priori mental schema mentioned in structuralism but a “habitus” formed under certain objective conditions. Habitus is always the basis for “rational action” Bourdieu (1998). Here, “habitus” means that the personal thinking and cultural patterns of participants in the “field” all follow the traditional cultural direction and order. The scriptures chanted by the master during the process of liberating the deceased have a textual basis. That is, the scriptures passed down from generation to generation, based on the text of the “Sutra of Maudgalyayana Saving His Mother,” which advocates goodness and abandons evil.

Local masters occasionally make some modifications to the scriptures, but overall, they cannot deviate from the main theme of the text. Minor modifications will not affect the stability of the chanting text. As the local master said, other life rituals can have some irregular or non-serious elements, but for funeral ceremonies, there must be a certain normativity, and they cannot be fabricated at will. Otherwise, the soul will not rest in peace and will haunt the human world. Therefore, the scriptures chanted at funeral ceremonies are stable and regulated. Overall, the “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony is still alive and well in Manyun. Although there may be some differences in other versions or texts in other villages in this area, on the one hand, this is due to some differences in wording in different contexts or dialect areas; on the other hand, it is due to the differences in the masters’ educational levels, understanding of the text, and memory barriers caused by aging, which lead to some differences. However, the masters will not subjectively create text differences.

6. The Cultural Significance and Functions of the Funeral Ceremony

Ceremonies are a unique cultural form in a certain society and a social phenomenon. The performance of ceremonies is a cultural performance. Through cultural performances, people can understand the cultural information and conceptual content contained within (Lii, 1998). In the “On the 35th Day After Death” funeral ceremony in Manyun Village, placing a tile on the grave emphasizes the family structure and kinship relations (Metcalf and Huntington, 1991). Tiles are the main material for covering the roofs of local residential buildings. The traditional Chinese practice is to separate stoves but not families. In a traditional extended family, people live together, and the houses are connected by tile gutters, not as independent units but as a joint entity, which can be seen from the local intangible cultural heritage of residential buildings called “Flower Houses.” Living under the same roof emphasizes kinship relations. The master picking pine or cypress branches and handing them specifically to the deceased’s sons, daughters, and sons-in-law are also for the same reason. Pine or cypress branches are evergreen throughout the four seasons, and the folk take the homophonic “green” with “kin” to mean that ancestors “recognize their kin,” and also to mean “everlasting and prosperous,” with ancestors protecting their relatives.

The folk belief is that after death, people will not remember things from their lifetime, nor will they recognize their relatives. Therefore, auxiliary means such as adding tiles, taking pine or cypress branches, and wearing mourning clothes are used to help ancestors “recognize their kin,” to prevent them from turning into ghosts and harming their descendants. Although ancestors are the deceased, “the relationship between ancestors and those who worship them is a blood-related kinship” Zheng and Zhang (1987). The local people’s worldview is divided into three realms: heaven, earth, and humans, which are respectively the gods, ancestors, ghosts, and the world where people live. In this worldview, ancestors are not fixed entities but exist in a dynamic state between deities (gods) and ghosts (spirits). If certain conditions are met, they may be transformed into deities; otherwise, they may fall into the category of ghosts Watanabe (1998). One of the conditions for the latter is the neglect of sacrifices by descendants. Therefore, descendants must be careful when worshipping their ancestors.

The performance of the “On the 35th Day After Death” funeral ceremony allows local people or outsiders to understand the cultural connotations of the nation and the local funeral customs, enhance their knowledge of the local community’s history, maintain the continuity and memory of the local group’s historical traditions, and is extremely important for the material life, cultural life, and social structure reproduction of the community, as well as the survival of the group. It is not only a reflection of the daily moral behavior of the local people but also an interpretation of their attitude toward life.

7. Ancestor Worship and Communication Between Humans and Deities

“Anthropological analysis shows that rituals themselves are the products of the original stimulation of myths.” Peng (2007) The famous American anthropologist Boas believes that a ritual is a performance of a myth. As seen from the previous discussion of people’s understanding of the universe, the belief in ghosts and deities still exists, mainly originating from the primitive religion and the primitive thinking of “animism.” They are very pious to their ancestors but also fear that their ancestors may become ghosts and cause trouble. They believe that the souls of ancestors always exist, hence the prevalence of ancestor worship in the area, and there is also a folk saying “Three feet above our heads, there are deities.” This is also due to the local ancestor worship. Ancestor worship is the worship of the ghosts of ancestors and their personalities. Ancestor worship is a product of the belief in the immortality of the soul. Because the soul is immortal, people often believe that the soul will bless or bring misfortune to the human world to varying degrees.

The funeral ceremony is mainly a sacrificial activity for the deceased ancestors, centered around the deceased. In this sense, the “On the 35th Day After Death” funeral ceremony is a process of communication between humans and deities. The master plays an important role in communicating between humans and deities and is an indispensable medium. If the master cannot communicate between humans and deities during the funeral ceremony or fails to entertain the hosts properly, his reputation in the local area will become increasingly bad, with a wide range of dissemination and fast speed. This is also related to the hosts’ mentality of seeking good fortune. Everyone in the social environment hopes to obtain good luck and happiness. The master acts as an intermediary or messenger between the divine and the human, closely linking the gods, the divine world, and the human world through his role as a “spokesperson.” The master, through his ritual actions, enables the living to communicate with the other world.

8. Promoting Communication and Elevating Emotions

Through the solemn funeral ceremony and the chanting of the story of Maudgalyayana, the kindness of the deceased to the living is vividly remembered, with past scenes constantly unfolding. This evokes the common life memories of family members and local community members, leading to greater understanding and tolerance among individuals and society, gradually reaching a consensus, and warming the relationships between neighbors. The local funeral directly involves hundreds or even thousands of people, covering multiple villages, most of whom have no direct blood relationship with the bereaved family but live in the same village as the deceased. The influence of the funeral is extremely wide. However, most of the participants in the “On the 35th Day After Death” funeral are villagers from the same village. Among them, the deep mutual assistance between the bereaved family and the villagers reflects the strong cohesion of the local villagers and also indirectly reflects the harsh living environment in the Manyun area. On a deeper level, the local funeral ceremony is a process that promotes mutual communication among local community members, continuously generates a sense of group identity, and unites social forces. While mourning and sacrificing the deceased, It can also cohere clan emotions and strengthen the connections between individuals within the clan, which helps the local people to look out for and assist each other in their future lives, thereby promoting the survival and continuous growth of the community. It plays a positive role in the protection and inheritance of the local village.

The reason why the traditional “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony has not been studied as a whole mainly includes the following aspects: First, the continuity of time; generally, funeral ceremonies are from the moment of death to the burial process, while the “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony takes place 35 days after the burial, and the continuity of time poses certain difficulties for researchers. Second, the spatial restrictiveness; the “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony must be completed in specific time and space, which are mainly the home of the deceased and the cemetery, and cannot be completed in any random space. Third, the unfamiliarity of interpersonal relationships; the “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony is mainly participated in by the deceased’s relatives and the local villagers, with few participants from other villages or distant relatives, and even fewer strangers. Such ritual activities rely on “chance encounters,” that is, encountering and recording the activity.

9. Research Questions

1. What are the key practices involved in the “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony?
2. How does this ceremony reflect the beliefs and cultural values of the local community?
3. In what ways does this ritual contribute to preserving tradition and fostering communal relationships?

10. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the “On the 35th Day After Death” funeral ceremony in Manyun Village, with a focus on understanding the cultural, social, and emotional significance of the rituals involved. A case study design is employed to provide an in-depth examination of the ceremony’s rituals, the roles of participants, and the implications for community cohesion and cultural preservation.

11. Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through participant observation and in-depth interviews. The participant observation was conducted during the funeral ceremony, specifically on the 35th day after death, to witness and document the various ritual practices and the symbolic meanings embedded within them. The researcher attended the ceremony in a non-intrusive role, recording detailed field notes on the rituals performed, the interactions among participants, and the atmosphere of the event. In addition to observation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key participants, including family members of the deceased, local religious leaders (the “masters” who lead the ceremony), and villagers who participated in or observed the ceremony. The interviews aimed to gather insights into personal experiences, beliefs, and interpretations of the ritual, as well as to understand the broader social and cultural significance of the event.

12. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method that allows for the identification and interpretation of patterns or themes within the data (Herzog *et al.*, 2017; Metcalf and Huntington, 1991). The analysis followed a systematic process, including familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme identification, and interpretation.

13. Discussion

The “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony in Manyun Village serves as a vital cultural and social practice that deeply reflects the community’s worldview, values, and traditions. The findings from this study indicate that this ritual not only maintains important ties between the living and the deceased but also functions as a powerful tool for cultural transmission and social cohesion. One of the key insights from this study is that the “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony is a multifaceted cultural performance that both reflects and reinforces local traditions. Through the practice of placing tiles on the grave and using evergreen pine or cypress branches, the ceremony highlights the cultural symbolism of kinship, the continuity of family structures, and the community’s relationship with its ancestors. The “Flower Houses,” with their connected roofs, symbolize unity and collective life, suggesting that the local community values interconnectedness, even after death. These practices are deeply rooted in the belief that ancestors’ spirits should not be forgotten and that honoring them through these rituals ensures their continued protection of the living (Devi *et al.*, 2024). The emphasis on keeping the spirits of the deceased “alive” through ancestral worship plays a significant role in the community’s conceptualization of life, death, and the afterlife. As noted, the belief that ancestors may transform into deities or ghosts depending on the descendants’ respect and sacrifices reflects a profound understanding of the fluidity of existence (Puett, 2005). The performance of the 35th-day ritual, as discussed, ensures that the deceased are not forgotten and that their spiritual connection with the living remains intact (Yang, 2021).

The communal aspect of the funeral ceremony is another critical point highlighted by this study. Despite the ceremony’s focus on the deceased, the event fosters a sense of belonging and solidarity within the local community. The participation of villagers, even those who are not direct relatives, underscores the collective nature of the ritual. The exchange of support between the bereaved family and the wider community exemplifies the strong social bonds within the village. The “On the 35th Day After Death” ceremony, therefore, becomes more than just a ritualistic farewell to the deceased; it serves as a form of social reinforcement, fostering unity and mutual care within the community. The shared emotional experience of mourning and honoring the deceased brings individuals closer together, strengthening interpersonal relationships and community cohesion. It also serves as a platform for expressing collective memories and shared values, thus reinforcing the identity of the community.

In a broader anthropological context, the ceremony exemplifies the role of rituals as a form of communication between the human world and the divine. The master, acting as an intermediary between the living and the ancestors or

deities, symbolizes the importance of leadership in maintaining spiritual and social order. Rituals such as these, which are seen as both sacred and social, facilitate a connection with the divine, promoting a sense of spiritual protection and divine favor. This aligns with earlier anthropological theories, such as those proposed by Boas (1911), who argued that rituals are not only mythological performances but are deeply connected to social and emotional needs (Hymes, 1999).

The emotional impact of the funeral ceremony is another area that deserves attention. The ceremony, particularly through its chanting and remembrance of the deceased, evokes a profound sense of continuity and belonging. It provides an opportunity for community members to express grief collectively while celebrating the life and virtues of the deceased. The ritual's ability to bring together individuals from different backgrounds, helping them to mourn collectively and reconcile their feelings, highlights the emotional and psychological importance of such traditions. The positive role of these ceremonies in promoting emotional well-being and healing cannot be understated, as they offer a structured way for individuals to process grief and foster communal support.

14. Conclusion

The "On the 35th Day After Death" funeral ceremony in Manyun Village is a vivid example of how rituals play an essential role in maintaining cultural identity, reinforcing social cohesion, and fostering emotional well-being. The ceremony serves not only as a means of honoring the deceased but also as a vehicle for strengthening family and community ties, ensuring the continuity of cultural values, and reinforcing the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Through rituals that link the living with their ancestors, community members are reminded of their shared history, responsibilities, and connections to the divine. In addition to its cultural significance, this ceremony highlights the multifaceted nature of rituals in small communities. It provides an opportunity to study the intersection of social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of human life and illustrates how deeply ingrained traditions continue to shape the lives of rural populations. While the ceremony remains rooted in local beliefs and practices, it also serves as a universal reminder of the importance of rituals in preserving cultural heritage and promoting social unity. Future research could expand on these findings by exploring how such rituals evolve in response to social and cultural changes, especially in the context of globalization and modernization. Additionally, comparative studies across different regions and cultural contexts could provide further insight into the role of death rituals in fostering community identity and continuity.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw at any time. The researcher maintained the confidentiality and anonymity of all interviewees by assigning pseudonyms and securely storing the data. Efforts were also made to respect the sensitivities surrounding the funeral ceremony, ensuring that the researcher's presence did not disrupt the ritual or cause any distress to participants.

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