

Ritual Mourning: A Cross-Cultural Comparison

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In an earlier paper two instances of ritualized mourning were examined as examples of crowd behavior. One of these was a Holy Week observance described for Tzintzuntzan, Mexico, while the other was the funeral complex of a small town in southeast Luzon, Philippines.¹ It was hypothesized on this slim basis that crowd behavior was characterized by culturally recognized stimuli, selective response, and the peculiarity of the crowd situation. Further empirical data will now be brought forth to determine in what manner and to what extent this three-fold proposition must be modified if it is to be true of crowd behavior found in the mourning practices of several peoples of the Far East other than the Philippines, in particular, the Todas and the Brahmans of India, and the people of Thailand, Malaya, Vietnam, Annam, Formosa, China, and Korea.²

That the participants of these cultures know when and how to make demonstrations of feeling during the mourning period is clear from descriptions of the peoples in our sample. Although there is some variation in the degree to which the individual is responsible for recognition of signals for institutionalized behavior, still the behavior is generally patterned in a way recognized by all.

¹ Mercedes Concepcion, "Ritual Mourning: Culturally Specified Crowd Behavior," *Anthropological Quarterly* Vol. 35, No. 1 (January 1962), pp. 1-9.

² The assembling of data was simplified by use of the Human Relations Area Files, to which the Harper Library of the University of Chicago subscribes.

Among the Toda the placing of the body of the deceased in the hut or diary is the signal for female relatives and friends of the dead person to gather around the structure "to lament together in the characteristic Toda manner, arranging themselves in pairs and pressing their foreheads together while they wail and weep."³ Again it is the placing of the corpse by the head of an expiring buffalo that brings the Toda to surround the two bodies and lament in the same vigorous fashion.⁴

Among the Brahmans described by Stevenson, silence is prescribed for the first half-hour after death.⁵ Furthermore after the burning of the body on the funeral pyre, the members of the funeral party sit outside the house of the dead person and weep till the new head of the house gives them permission to leave.⁶ Each must purify himself, hand and foot, before entering his own house. Only when all have left is "the son or chief mourner, on whom all the responsibility for the funeral rested, allowed to weep."⁷ Dubois, also writing of Brahmans, says "As soon as the dying person has breathed his last, it is a re-

³ W.H.R. Rivers, *The Todas* (London: The MacMillan Co. Ltd., 1906), p. 345.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 355 See also Wm. E. Marshall, *A Phrenologist Amongst the Todas* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1873), p. 177 J. W. Brecks, *An Account of the Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilagiris* (London: India Museum, 1873), p. 71 W. R. King, "The Aboriginal Tribes of the Nilgiri Hills," *Journal of Anthropology*. 1 (1879), pp. 18-51.

⁵ M. Stevenson, *The Rites of the Twice-born* (London: Oxford University Press, 1920). p. 145.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

cognized custom that everyone present must at once burst into tears; and that in a fashion strictly laid down for the occasion."⁸ Regardless of how the apparent contradiction between Stevenson's and Dubois's testimony on the silent period after death is resolved, it remains true that both report the kind of prescribed behavior mentioned in the hypothesis we are testing.

In Thailand, placing the urn (in which the corpse was contained) on a high pedestal was accompanied by a blast of the trumpets, the sounding of the onch shell, a renewed outburst of wailing by friends and relatives, and the playing of a "weird funeral dirge."⁹ Prescribed behavior includes regular recitation of prayer and lamenting:

At dawn, at noon, and again at early evening, the women relatives and domestics indulge in loud and tearful moans. In the intervals between these demonstrations of sorrow, the priests occupy the room, chanting the prayers for the dead and other stanzas from their religious texts appropriate to the occasion.¹⁰

Graham's description of the washing of the corpse contains the same kind of culturally specified actions.¹¹

Among the Annamese described by Brodrick response to signals was institutionalized to a degree that made conformity extremely easy, for the Chief Mourner and the Minister of Rites led all participants in the rites.¹² Brodrick gives several examples of how the most intense weeping begins and ends on cue

⁸ J. A. Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1906), p. 484.

⁹ E. Young, *The Kingdom of the Yellow Robe. Being Sketches of the Domestic and Religious Rites and Ceremonies of the Siamese* (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co., 1898), pp. 235-236.

¹⁰ Young, *loc. cit.*, p. 239.

¹¹ W. A. Graham, *Siam*, Vol. 1 (London: The de la More Press, Alexander Moring Ltd., 1924), p. 164.

¹² A. H. Brodrick, *Little China: The Annamese Lands* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), pp. 242-250.

from the Minister of Rites. Listen to these instructions called out by the same leader on the day of internment: "Let all stand up! Let all begin to weep! Let all kneel! Let the Master of Ceremonies offer incense! Let all prostrate themselves to the earth!"¹³ Landes reports for Vietnam the same kind of direction-giving as does Brodrick:

The *hoc trò lè* place themselves in front of the altar. Dressed in costumes with wide sleeves and wearing miters, they tell the members of the family in rhythmic speech to arrange themselves in two rows, the women separated from the men and to the rear. The *hoc trò lè* give different commands, ordering those who are present at this ceremony to moan, to weep, and then to stop. One of them must then go and wash his face.¹⁴

Dorgelès says of the Vietnamese that it is customary for the sons who have followed in the funeral procession to "give vent to lamentations and cries in front of the grave," though here there is apparently no ritual leader telling them what they must do.¹⁵

The passing of a corpse along the river en route to burial was greeted by a prostration and the uttering of three great cries, says Petit of the Vietnamese.¹⁶ Petit further elaborates the pre-determination of stimuli during funeral ceremonies when he speaks of non-kin coming to the home of the bereaved Vietnamese family: "If persons not belonging to the family bring presents to offer to the deceased, they must recite the hymn of sacrifice...be dressed in white...They begin by wailing three times, then make two prostrations, and then rise..."¹⁷ Richard had noted the

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

¹⁴ A. Landes, "Notes sur les Mœurs et Superstitions Populaires des Annamites," *Excursions et Reconnaissances*, No. 14 (Saigon: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1882), pp. 250-269.

¹⁵ R. Dorgelès, *On the Mandarin Road* (New York: The Century Co., 1926), pp. 138-139.

¹⁶ R. Petit, *La Monarchie Annamite*, (Paris: Les Editions Oomat-Mon-Chrestien, F. Louitton et Compagnie, 1931), p. 112.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

consciousness of cue when he described a funeral procession in these terms:

When the ceremony was over, the body was taken up among the most deafening wails ever heard. These shouts were intended to frighten and dispel any evil spirits searching for prey around the house . . . The procession moved off to carry the body of the dead man to the place he himself had chosen as his last resting place. During the trip the music and the shouts did not stop for a single moment: the din redoubled in intensity whenever the bearers stopped to rest.¹⁸

Describing the funeral complex in Malaya, Wilkinson captures the spirit of hospitality at a wake when he states: "At nightfall, torches are lit and neighbors assemble, men to pray and women to weep, while the inmates of the house are kept busy providing refreshment for all who come to render the last honours of the dead."¹⁹ Such a picture is reminiscent of the Philippines, where the partaking of food accompanies every folk ritual involving persons beyond the immediate household. The Formosan hill people spoken of by Guerin and Bernard show their grief by weeping and fasting "regulated according to precise ritual," though they have no mourning clothing, according to Wiedfeldt²⁰ (1914:24).

In China, we are told, the monk of the local Buddhist temple says a prayer or reads a selection from a classic. When his chanting ceases the coffin is taken out of the house at once. "At this moment, all the near kin of the deceased

wail loudly and sadly."²² Further indications of the cultural recognition of stimuli for crowd behavior are found in this paragraph from Yang:

Wailing is the overt sign of lamenting. There is, of course, the crying that is completely spontaneous, but in addition there is the ceremonial wailing. When the dying person draws his last breath, the next of kin who are standing beside the bed begin to wail. This is the signal that death has come and the wailing is continued until the corpse is laid in the coffin. Then there is continuous wailing from the time that the sons go to report the death in the village shrine until they return to the house. Other formal wailing is in order when the coffin is finally sealed, when the relatives and friends come to offer sacrifice, when the coffin is carried out of the house on the funeral day, and during the funeral procession.²³

A similar catalog of cues is provided by Day.²⁴

It would be difficult to find more officially patterned mourning behavior than that reported by Griffis for Korea. He writes: "The fashion of mourning, the proper place and time to shed tears and express grief according to regulations, are rigidly prescribed in an official treatise or 'Guide to Mourners' published by the government."²⁵ Moose supports this, but draws a conclusion which does not necessarily follow from the prescription of behavior: "This wailing is done according to fixed rules, and cannot be looked on as an outburst of grief and sorrow."²⁶ Moose forgets that manifestation of emotional response is no less genuine merely because it is culturally channeled in its expression. When Hulbert mentions wailing sessions that continue "fifteen minutes by the

¹⁸ P. C. Richard, "Notes pour Servir a l'Ethnographie de la Cochinchine," *Revue Maritime et Coloniale*, Vol. 21 (Paris: 1867), p. 28.

¹⁹ R. J. Wilkinson, *Papers on Malay Subjects, Life and Customs*, Part 1: *The Incidents of Malay Life* (Singapore: Kelly and Walsh, 1920), p. 53.

²⁰ Guerin and Bernard, *Formosan Aborigines*, 1920.

²¹ O. Wiedfeldt, "Wirtschaftliche, Rechtliche und Soziale Grundformen der Atayalen auf Formosa," *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Natur und Volkerkunde Ostasiens*, Vol. 15, Part C (Tokyo, 1914), p. 24.

²² A. C. Yang, *A Chinese Village: Taitou, Shantung Province* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), p. 89.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

²⁴ C. B. Day, *Chinese Peasant Cults* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh Ltd., 1920), p. 99.

²⁵ Wm. E. Griffis, *Corea: The Hermit Nation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1881), p. 277.

²⁶ J. R. Moose, *Village Life in Korea* (Nashville: M. E. Church, 1911), p. 172.

clock,²⁷ we are not justified in assuming that the situation was therefore an entirely artificial one, for Koreans are not unlike the rest of the world in the institutionalization of their mourning behavior, a fact which we know from experience to have no necessary effect on the sincerity of the mourner's grief.

A brief survey of the behavior of crowds in the context of wakes and funerals leads, then, to the conclusion that in the Far Eastern countries near the Philippines there is the same recognition of signals for crowd response as we had previously reported for the Philippines itself. We go on to consider the two remaining elements of the hypothesis; namely, the differential nature of the response, and the fact that the response takes place only in a crowd.

The first of these two points needs little further demonstration, for it is clear from what has already been presented that there is a difference in the behavior expected of various people at a funeral, the most common axes being those of kinship and sex. The opportunity may be taken, however, to elaborate a sub-hypothesis to the effect that in the countries under consideration one of the main functions of the mourning complex is the advertisement and public restatement of the kinship group to which the deceased belongs, a function of importance in a society where kinsmen are preferred partners in the business of life.

There can be no doubt that kinship considerations are prominent in the selective responses of mourners to the signals provided by successive funeral activities. Rivers makes the point explicitly when he says: "The funeral ceremonies (among the Toda) provide

the greatest number of examples of kinship duties, the parts taken by many of the mourners being determined largely by their bonds of kinship to the deceased."²⁸ But this is not precisely the function to be emphasized here. It is rather that the funeral, like the wedding complex, is an occasion calling for the cooperation particularly of relatives and the recollection, on their part as well as that of non-kin observers and participants, that they are members of a group with definite obligations and privileges within that sub-society. In the United States, I am told, weddings and funerals bring together relatives who see one another on no other occasion in the year. But even in small communities there is a need for regular renewal of the knowledge of relationship, of succession, and of inheritance. This knowledge is advertised to all who attend the ceremonies, for the chief mourner is frequently the person to succeed to the position of the deceased in the bereaved household²⁹ and in any event those most closely related to the dead person are distinguishable from non-relatives by their actions and clothing. You cannot come away from an oriental funeral in doubt as to who were close kinsmen of the deceased.

While it is true that the mourning practices observed in the countries of our sample are found especially in the crowd situation, still a distinction must be drawn between those actions found *only* in the context of the crowd and those found also in this circumstance. Wailing of a special kind seems restricted to a context in which the lamenter knows that he is at least listened to by others, though they may be in the next room or on the other side of a house wall. Crying of a more restrained nature

²⁷ H. B. Hulbert, *The Passing of Korea* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1906), p. 446.

²⁸ Rivers, *loc. cit.*, p. 498.

²⁹ Dubois, *loc. cit.*, p. 486.

might take place when the mourner is alone and presumably in secret, or might occur as well in the intervals between prescribed outbursts of wailing. Wailing, then, is crowd-conditioned, whereas crying is not; wailing is found only in the crowd context, but crying may be observed where there is no crowd. It follows that the third element of the original hypothesis must be adjusted to this qualification: crowd behavior is characterized by responses which are culturally specified for this situation though they may also be found elsewhere.

It was stated at the beginning of an earlier paper that all crowd behavior, spontaneous or not, should be the concern of students of collective behavior, for two reasons: the difficulty of catching spontaneous behavior on the wing, as it were, and the difficulty of drawing a hard and fast line between the spontaneous and the culturally specified. Be-

havior known to be in large part institutionalized was investigated with full realization of its character, in the hope that some clue might be given to the nature of crowd behavior in general.

From the materials examined from Mexico and the Philippines and, more recently, from India, Thailand, Malaya, Vietnam, Annam, Formosa, China, and Korea, we can draw two solid conclusions regarding the behavior of crowds: first, that they react to culturally presented signals in making responses; second, the members react in manners differing according to status and role in the community. An important step will be the testing of these hypothesis against material from situations other than that of mourning. I suspect that the conclusions will need little adjustment to embrace even the seeming pandemonium of a lynching mob.

Persistence and Change In Cantonese-American Gambling

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In his record of travels, Marco Polo briefly observed that gambling was more prevalent in Cathay than in any other part of the world. Accounts of missionaries, foreign governmental officials and other sojourners in China since his day have substantiated its widespread nature. Tiffany's comments following his visit to Canton in 1844 are typical:

"Gambling, I am sorry to say, occupies much of the time that people devote to amusement; there are hundreds of modes of gambling and sums are staked from a few cash up to large

sums of money. The boys learn gambling as soon as they can talk, and pursue it through life."¹

Prior and more recent accounts are similar. While most² lack descriptive detail on the nature of games and the

¹ Osmond Tiffany, Jr., *The Canton Chinese*. (Boston: James Munroe and Co., 1849), p. 195.

² A notable exception is the work of Archdeacon John Henry Gray. See, for example, his two-volume edition of *China*, edited by William G. George. (London: Macmillan, 1878). For comparative purposes, the most extensive materials are found in J. D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements*, (Singapore: Mission Press, 1879), p. 60 ff.