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Between Fear and Respect: Vocabulary and Meanings of the Dead Body in Urban China from the Late Qing to the Early Republican Era

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Abstract

This article explores the meanings and emotions attached to dead bodies in urban China during the late Qing and early Republican periods, through studying the vocabulary for the dead body. A range of words - shi, qu, ti - *were used to denote corpses in the Late Imperial period. These words, with their different connotations, reflected how the corpse always held emotional and spiritual influences over the living, either by arousing a negative emotion of fear, or by bringing a positive meaning of respect. During the late Qing and early Republican era, political revolution, medical development and religious influences imposed new meanings on dead bodies in urban China. Words for dead bodies were reconfigured to adapt to such new meanings. Traditional notions of fear attached to corpses had to be mitigated to pave the way for post-mortem medical study. The new vocabulary did not use invented scientific terms that objectified bodies, but rather incorporated reconfigurations of old words that connoted respect. This reflected a continuity in the meanings and emotions attached to corpses. Dead bodies in the Republican period were sanctified and respected through new ways, as they were incorporated into the narrative of nationalism. The ongoing relationship of the living with the dead was therefore never erased, but continuously reinvented against the backdrop of modernisation.*

Keywords: dead bodies, vocabulary, late Qing, early Republican, fear, respect, sacrality

Part One: Introduction

In contemporary Chinese language, there is a range of terms referring to a dead body – *shiti* 屍體, *yiti* 遺體, *yihai* 遺骸 etc. This range of vocabulary denoting a dead body is formed from Classical Chinese characters with ancient origins; however it is also the product of modern reinvention over the last one and a half centuries. Chinese vocabulary for corpses was reconfigured during this period through arranging existing Chinese characters together or through imbuing existing words with new meanings. This reconfiguration of vocabulary took place against the backdrop of momentous social, cultural, and political transformations. Such transformations brought about changes in the attitude and beliefs towards dead bodies in urban China. The vocabulary for corpses was therefore reconfigured to accommodate the new meanings attached to dead bodies.

Vocabulary is the key subject of this article, taken as a lens to understand the meanings and emotions attached to dead bodies. Vocabulary here refers to the range of words for a particular subject - the dead body in the case of this study. To trace the development of vocabulary, dictionaries prove a useful source to observe the occurrence and absence of particular words, as well as their changing definitions through time. However, more importantly, this study focuses on observing 1) how the words were used in the wider public discourse, and 2) what emotional connotations those words aroused. The connotations, be it

fear or respect, can be gleaned from studying the surrounding texts and understanding the context. For the wider public discourse, this study mainly utilises newspapers and various forms of commemorative writing. These texts were mostly produced and circulated in urban centres by the political or intellectual elites. This study thus limits itself primarily to the linguistic practices of the Chinese urban population as initiated by the urban elites, given the vastness of China as well as diversity of Chinese culture and language(s).

This article argues that despite the pressure of scientific modernity, the dead body was continuously imbued with sacred meanings. The vocabulary for the dead body continued to hold connotations of respect and sacredness, rather than evolving into scientific terminology that implied pure objectification. The newly-reconfigured vocabulary signified the reinvented meanings of respect and sacredness towards dead bodies in the Republican era. During the Qing period, bodies were sanctified for dynastic loyalty and filial piety; in the Republican period, bodies were commemorated for Chinese nationalism and civic contribution.

Death practices and beliefs in China is a large field of research, with a considerable quantity of anthropological work published throughout the years (De Groot, 1892–1910; Freedman, 1966; Watson, 1982). While such scholarship is highly meticulous, it generally takes a relativist approach, by focusing on revealing the uniqueness of Chinese customs and traditions. Such ethnographic works, which often focused on seemingly 'static' rural communities over urban contexts, inevitably downplay the changes over time and influences of modernity, rendering a disjuncture between the study of Chinese death practices and broad questions of modernity. Recent anthropological work by Andrew Kipnis deviates from the conventional rural focus and explores contemporary Chinese funerary practices in a rapidly transforming urban society (Kipnis, 2021). Reorientating the study of Chinese death practices and beliefs in the urban context helps to better engage questions of modernity and social changes. In historical studies, while there have been some recent works on death and the dead in urban China during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century (Henriot, 2016; Asen, 2016), the field is still in its early stages, with few studies taking a discursive approach. The study of death and dead bodies in urban China in relation to the pressure of Western imperialism and the challenges of scientific modernity remains a meaningful subject to explore, helping historians to reflect upon the dichotomy between 'tradition' and 'scientific modernity'. The focus on vocabulary of dead bodies and their connotations is a novel approach unused by previous researchers to study death in urban China during this period. By focusing on linguistic practices initiated by the urban elites, this article offers a fresh perspective on the meanings attached to dead bodies during this period of momentous social and political changes.

Finally, this study acknowledges the diversity of Chinese death beliefs and practices across regions. This study limits itself to discussing the Han Chinese culture with an emphasis on the Confucian belief system, as this article focuses on the linguistic practices of the (coastal) urban Chinese elites. Most of the anthropological research by Western scholars focuses on southern coastal China due to the geographical limitation of their ethnographic work. While there was certainly much regional variance for practices and beliefs, historians like Susan Naquin respond by suggesting that there was an identifiable set of Chinese beliefs on funerary rituals across regions in the Late Imperial period (Naquin, 1988: 52–53). Furthermore, the imperial government enforced state orthodoxy in funerary and burial practices through laws, resulting in a certain level of uniformity across regions. By carefully utilising anthropological scholarship in context and identifying commonality from historical documents, this study tries to trace broader trends during the late Qing and early Republican era, while also avoiding the assumption that beliefs and practices were static over time and homogenous over regions.

In part two of this article, I will first explore the vocabulary used to denote dead bodies during the Qing period, particularly the words *shi*, *qu* and *ti*, which held different emotional connotations respectively. This lays the foundation for the discussion in part three, where I will examine the influences of Western thoughts like body-soul dualism and anatomical science during the nineteenth century. The major transformation of vocabulary of dead bodies will however be illustrated in part four. As my arguments will show, it was the urban Chinese elites during the early Republican era who reconfigured the Chinese vocabulary of dead bodies. Compound words like *yiti* and *yihai* were popularised, balancing the pressure of scientific modernity and traditional sacred meanings of dead bodies, and enabling a continuity of respect towards the dead.

Part Two: Fear and Respect towards Dead Bodies in Qing China

Shi and its connotations of fear

Traditionally, the most common word used in the Chinese language for a corpse was *shi* 屍/尸. The word *shi* was used to denote corpses in most legal, administrative and medical texts during the Qing period. The character *shi* contains the *si* 死 (death) component; its 'deathly' connotations are explicitly evident. The *Kangxi Dictionary* 康熙字典, the authoritative dictionary commissioned by the Qing state, offers a detailed etymology of the character, illustrating examples of different uses of the word in ancient classics throughout a long history.[1] This ancient word, after a long development of its diverse meanings, only had a single denotation to a corpse by the Qing period.

As compared to *shi*, the word 'body' is most commonly used to denote corpses in the medical and legal contexts in the modern English language. The word 'body' itself denotes a wide-range of meanings, referring to either the living or the dead body. The diverse and malleable meanings of 'body' enable the word to be easily used in a scientific-medical context, without any strong emotional connotations. The closest equivalent of 'body' in the Chinese language would be *ti* 體 – which also entails diverse meanings including both living and dead bodies, depending on the combination with other characters. On the other hand, *shi*, in the Qing period and indeed even today, specifically refers only to a dead body. Unlike the English word 'body', the word *shi* did not possess a 'neutral' connotation, by which the referred corpse could be objectified. Instead, the word was intimately tied to the notion of spiritual danger of corpses.

In Qing China, corpses were seen as spiritually threatening to the living if not managed properly. Anthropologists studying death rituals in late Imperial China highlight the traditional belief that the dead body, prior to being permanently settled with a proper fixed burial, is most dangerous to the living spiritually (Cohen, 1988: 189; Watson, 1982: 156–159).[2] This fear was reflected in the Qing state's strict laws in regulating burial, and specifically protecting buried bodies. The *Great Qing Code* 大清律例 severely penalised acts such as uncovering graves, opening coffins, and mutilating buried corpses. Jeff Synder-Reinke suggests that the severity of the crime was not determined by the motive, for example grave robbing or simply mishandling, but by the level of exposure and destruction of the corpse. Penetrating a grave

[1] There are two written versions of *shi* - 屍 or the simplified 尸. According to the Kangxi Dictionary, 尸 and 屍 could be used interchangeably, except in the specific context of ancient sacrificial rites, where only 尸 could be used, as 尸 referred to a person responsible for sacrificial rites rather than a dead body in that specific context. This distinction was largely irrelevant by the Qing era. In most of the Qing administrative and commemorative documents, the two characters were indeed used interchangeably.

[2] James L. Watson defines such spiritual danger of unburied corpses to the living as 'death pollution'; he focuses his study on Cantonese society in Southern China.

and opening a coffin would result in a heavier penalty. According to the code, the most severe crime was mutilating, destroying or discarding a buried corpse (Synder-Reinke, 2016: 6). This reflects the Qing state's ideology, which was preoccupied with the locational fixity and physical integrity of the buried dead. This was to ensure a fixed relationship between the living and the deceased, maintaining a ritual order where the living could reliably worship their ancestors, and thus preserving the Confucian social order (Synder-Reinke, 2016: 9).

Protecting the physical wholeness of corpses was paramount in Chinese death practices during the late imperial period. Somatic integrity - the wholeness of the body – preoccupied the mind of virtually all Chinese at that time. This concept is well explored in the work *Death by a Thousand Cuts*, which studies the Chinese imperial torture execution method of *ling chi* 凌遲 (death by slow slicing of the body). The authors of the work argue that *ling chi*, which was the most severe form of capital punishment above strangulation and beheading, invoked horror not just because of the pain, but more importantly, from the notion that the body was left completely disintegrated after the execution (Brook et al., 2008: 13–14). For many Chinese during the late imperial period, the fear of having their body disintegrated was greater than the fear of death itself. This was tied to the afterlife belief that the body and the spirits of the deceased were still entangled rather than detached after death. This inseparability of body and soul functioned in both the sinicised Buddhist and Confucian belief systems, even though one featured a cycle of rebirth while the other emphasised ancestors in the afterlife receiving offerings from descendants. In the Buddhist tradition, the dead without a complete body are robbed of a chance to be reborn, whereas from the Confucian standpoint, such victims are deprived of receiving offerings from their descendants (Brook et al., 2008: 15). As the corpse and souls of the deceased were entangled after death, the Chinese harboured a strong fear of mismanaging or disturbing corpses.[3] Disturbing a corpse, either by dissection, mutilation or excavation, would severely upset the spirits, causing them to haunt the living.

In the Qing legal and administrative texts, the literati only chose the word *shi* when referring to this notion of potentially dangerous corpses that should be feared and protected. They did not opt for a more encompassing and malleable word like *ti* 體 to denote the dead in the judicial and administrative contexts. In the *Great Qing Code*, only *shi* or *si shi* 死屍 were used to denote corpses when writing the laws of protecting the dead.[4] *Fu hui quan shu* 福惠全書 (*Book of Blessings*, 1694), an early Qing multi-volume publication on local administration, recorded many judicial cases involving murder and deaths. The publication uses these judicial cases as examples to illustrate how to cautiously carry out post-mortem investigations (Huang Liuhong, 1694: Vol 12, 92 - 93). In another example, the author discussed the prevalence of the ill-practice in which people brought a corpse to a neighbour's house to blackmail them for money (Huang Liuhong, 1694: Vol 14, 14 – 15). All these cases depicted the corpse as an undesirable and dangerous entity to be treated cautiously, and *shi* was the only word used for this notion of corpses throughout the publication. Thus, the word *shi* alone took on all the undesirable meanings attached to corpses.

Ti and *qu* – sacred dead bodies

While the word *shi* was 'jinxed' with negative supernatural connotations, reflecting the prevalent fear of corpses, did the words *ti* 體 or *qu* 軀 then play the opposite role, promoting a

[3] Souls [in plural] is used here, as according to traditional Chinese afterlife beliefs, the deceased had multiple souls/ spirits after death. The multiple souls of the deceased rested in separate places, including in the grave with the corpse and around the ancestral tablet for receiving worship (Cohen, 1988: 181 – 182).

[4] The words of *shi* and *si shi* were consistently used in 'Xinglu - zei dao xia zhi er' 刑律-賊盜下之二 (General Public Disorder and Theft: 7) in *Great Qing Code* 大清律例

'neutral' view of the dead body? *Ti* and *qu*, which can be roughly equated with the all-encompassing meaning of 'body' in today's Chinese language, were in fact often loaded with supernatural connotations during the Qing period as well. But in contrast to *shi*, the meanings associated with *ti* and *qu* were positive, implying respect and sacredness. The two words were normally only used to describe sacred bodies that had political value to the dynasty or social significance under Confucian beliefs.

The bodies of the vast majority of commoners would not be described as *qu* or *ti* when they died. During the Taiping Civil War (1850 - 1864), millions perished and the traditionally affluent Jiangnan region was devastated. In the aftermath of the war, the Qing state actively commemorated thousands of individuals who had sacrificed their lives for the regime as martyrs. Hundreds of accounts of martyrdom were recorded in local gazetteers. The gazetteers depicted their deaths using morally and politically charged language (Meyer-Fong, 2013: 2- 3). Here, the word of *qu* or *ti* was reserved for these politically significant dead.

Today, we commonly associate phrases like *juan qu* 捐軀 (to sacrifice one's body) or *wei guo juan qu* 爲國捐軀 (to sacrifice one's body for the nation) with modern Chinese nationalism. We associate these politically charged phrases with the dead who sacrificed their lives in revolutions or wars during the twentieth century. But in fact, these phrases, and the use of *qu* in such a way already existed in Qing imperial discourse. In one of the post-Taiping commemorative publications, the *Gengxin qi Hang lu* 庚辛泣杭錄 (*Tears for Hangzhou in the Gengxin Year*), which documents the fall of Hangzhou, the phrase *juan qu* was used a total of twenty-three times across the sixteen volumes of the publication. The more specific phrase *wei guo juan qu* was used twice in the publication as well (Ding Bing, 1895). *Juan qu* was used to describe many different cases of martyrdom, for example, chaste women who committed suicide in the face of rebels, generals and officers who died when defending the city etc. The use of *qu* in this context signified that the word was reserved for bodies of martyrs.

In an earlier period, as reflected in the aforementioned Kangxi-period *Fu hui quan shu*, *juan qu* was also used. Compared to the commonplace employment of *shi* in every volume of *Fu hui quan shu*, *qu* only appears three times throughout the whole publication. In two of the three occurrences, it appears as *juan qu*, highlighting the noble nature of the deaths. In one case, it was used similarly to its employment in post-Taiping commemorative literature, and described sacrificing oneself in the name of loyalty to the imperial dynasty (Huang Liuzhong, 1694: Vol 24, 122). But on another occasion, *juan qu* was used to describe sacrificing oneself for the Confucian doctrine of filial piety, in an instance when a son died when avenging his father's death (*Fu hui quan shu – Volume 12*, 1694: 95). The rare occurrence of *qu* in *Fu hui quan shu* reflects that very few bodies were sanctified as sacred bodies in the official imperial discourse during the early Qing period.

Similar to *qu*, *ti* was used to denote sacred bodies in Qing commemorative literature. Tang Yifen 湯貽汾, a Qing official, poet and artist, was commemorated in *Jiang biao zhong lüe* 江表忠略 (*Stories of Loyal Martyrs from along the Yangtze*), a twenty-volume publication that memorialises many generals, officials and gentry who perished in the Taiping Civil War. Tang Yifen committed suicide when Nanjing fell to the rebels. His daughter hastily buried the body and used a branch to mark the burial spot before escaping. Ten years later, when the city was recovered by the Qing, the body was dug up. According to the memorial account, people discovered that the body was already wrapped in growing branches. The body was then properly reburied (Chen Danran, 1900: Vol 1, 49). The account here uses the word *ti* to denote

his body.[5] The word *ti* here possesses sacred meaning. The story emphasises how, despite great odds, the *ti* was miraculously preserved and recovered years after. The word *ti* as used here therefore has supernatural connotations of miracle and sacredness.

Tobie Meyer-Fong suggests that in Qing imperial discourse, the ideal state of the body after death reflected the virtue of the deceased person. Stories of bodies being perfectly preserved or bodies being miraculously recovered were reserved for exceptionally virtuous deceased individuals (Meyer-Fong, 2013: 108 – 109). These tales served as an encouragement for the general population, both morally and politically, at a time when the regime was delegitimised by long-lasting rebellions and society had been traumatised by massive loss of lives. In the late Qing period, as Meyer-Fong suggests, the imperial state was increasingly lenient in granting sacred status to the deceased in order to salvage the regime's dwindling legitimacy (Meyer-Fong, 2013: 142 – 144). Compared to the early Qing period, ever greater numbers of deceased men and women who died demonstrating loyalty to the regime were commemorated as sacred *qu* or *ti* in the imperial discourse.

In contrast to the *qu* or *ti* reserved for martyrs, the massive numbers of anonymous corpses abandoned during the Taiping War were referred to as *shi* in the post-war literature. Thousands of bodies scattered across battlefields; corpses were left exposed in devastated cities; streams were clogged with cadavers - all these scenes commonly appeared in post-Taiping literature to showcase the magnitude of destruction and suffering. *Shi* here was used to denote these anonymous corpses when describing such disturbing sights. Classic phrases like *shi heng bian ye* 屍橫遍野 (bodies scattered across the wilderness) or *shi hai zhen ji* 屍骸枕藉 (bodies piling over each other) were commonly used in the commemorative literature to bring out the horrifying images of seas of cadavers or piles of corpses.[6] All these corpses denoted as *shi* were merely nameless components of a disturbing sight. These bodies were stripped of their individuality, let alone having the sacred value that martyred bodies of *qu* or *ti* possessed. *Shi* here represented undesirable corpses that evoked horror and suffering.

In the Qing period, different words denoting dead bodies, be it *shi*, *qu* or *ti*, all had emotional connotations. *Shi* aroused feelings of fear and repulsion, as the word was constantly used for corpses in relation to spiritual danger. *Qu* and *ti* on the other hand brought connotations of respect, as the words were used for sacred bodies. The meanings of the words reflected that, either positively or negatively, corpses were constantly loaded with spiritual and emotional meanings in Qing China. The corpse was never simply a 'neutral' objectified entity. The spiritual and emotional meanings held power over the living as the living had to treat the corpse cautiously, either out of fear or out of respect. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, facing the influences of Christianity and medical science, an objectified view of the dead body came to seem necessary. Would these traditional spiritual and emotional meanings attached to corpses diminish? How would the vocabulary transform to adapt to the new meanings associated with corpses?

Part Three: Body-soul Dualism and Anatomy: Western Influences during the Nineteenth Century

At the entrance to the St. Michael Catholic Cemetery in Hong Kong, there is a Chinese couplet inscribed on the walls on both sides of the entrance. The couplet reads: *Jin xi wu qu gui gutu,*

[5] The exact wording is "後十年城復改葬之 藤已發連枝抱其體"

[6] For example, the phrase *shi hai zhen ji* appeared on *Gengxin qi Hang lu – Volume 2*, 1895: 20 and *Gengxin qi Hang lu – Volume* 5, 1895: 8.

ta chao jun ti ye xiangtong 今夕吾軀歸故土，他朝君体[體]也相同. It could be translated as, 'today my body returns to the ground, tomorrow your body will share the same fate'. It is unknown when exactly the couplet was inscribed, but it was most likely around the turn of the century, when the cemetery started to welcome more burials of Chinese converts. We also do not know whether the author of the couplet was a European missionary or a Chinese convert. In any case, the couplet uses the words *qu* and *ti* to describe the dead in a way unique to Chinese Christian expressions. The couplet delivers the underlying religious message that our physical bodies will inevitably perish one day, implying that it is only our souls that could be eternal through the acceptance of God and ascent to Heaven. *Qu* and *ti* here therefore refer to the buried physical body, which is detached from the soul after death.

As mentioned, traditional Chinese afterlife beliefs emphasised that the body and the spirit(s) of the deceased were still intimately entangled after death. Christianity, on the other hand, maintained the notion that the soul of the deceased would immediately detach from the body at the moment of death. While this by no means implied that Christians held no regard for the well-being of dead bodies, the corpse in general held much less power over the living when beliefs in body-soul dualism were present. This notion of body-soul dualism was accentuated in many evangelical works written by nineteenth-century missionaries for Chinese audiences.[7] In nineteenth-century China, many Western missionaries not only sought to spread the Christian faith, but also stressed bringing Western science and culture to the Chinese population (Bays, 2012: 71). Many prominent Protestant missionaries were also medical missionaries who emphasised the importance of bringing Western medicine to China. Anatomy, and specifically a scientific objectified view of the body, was regarded by the missionaries as a key component of Western knowledge. Missionaries thus believed that the notion of body-soul dualism could coexist perfectly with anatomical science, combating the 'superstitious' fears towards corpses and enhancing scientific learning. In order to promote anatomical science, would the missionaries avoid using the word *shi* in their writing and opt for a new word that could lessen the fear of corpses?

Vocabulary adopted by Western missionaries

First and foremost, in the early nineteenth-century, missionaries' understanding and use of the Chinese language were influenced by both the official Qing Chinese lexicography and their daily interactions with local Chinese people in various dialects. For instance, Robert Morrison compiled his magisterial Chinese-English dictionary over the years 1815 to 1823 based on the *Kangxi Dictionary*; however, he also compiled his *Vocabulary of the Canton Dialect* in 1828. For the written Chinese language, the magisterial Chinese-English dictionary based on the *Kangxi Dictionary* was far more important. In other words, missionaries' written Chinese was directly influenced by official Qing Chinese lexicography. In Morrison's Chinese-English dictionary, specifically in part III, the English-to-Chinese section, 'corpse' was translated as *shi* (Morrison, 1822: 91). 'Body' was translated as *shen ti* 身體 (Morrison, 1822: 46). Missionary-translators like Morrison thus subscribed to the notion that the word *shi* denoted dead bodies. But at the same time, they also sought to illustrate body-soul dualism within the confines of existing Chinese lexicography. For instance, in Morrison's dictionary, in the entry for the English word 'flesh', he noted that "the body as distinguished from soul or spirit is

[7] For instance, *Quan shi liang yan* 勸世良言, written by Chinese missionary Liang Fa and edited by British missionary Robert Morrison, was an early Protestant evangelical work that gained popularity among the Chinese due to its easily accessible language. The work heavily criticized traditional 'superstitious' practices among the Chinese. Body-soul dualism was accentuated in the work as the author highlighted that the soul independent from the material body needs salvation (Liang, 1832).

called *shin* 身 (*shen*), te 體 (*ti*), keu 軀 (*qu*)" (Morrison, 1822: 171). This shows that British missionaries were keen on using existing characters - *ti*, *qu* and *shen* - to illustrate the concept of body-soul dualism.

In subsequent decades, with the colonisation of Hong Kong and establishment of treaty ports along the Chinese coast, British colonial authorities began to dissect Chinese bodies on legal grounds. Chinese bodies in these colonial urban spaces were increasingly medicalised and scrutinised by the colonial authorities. This fitted the broader picture of the British imperial project of 'colonising the body', in which the physical body of the colonised people became a subject of state medical intervention (Arnold, 1993). In colonial Hong Kong, and to a lesser extent in treaty ports like Shanghai, British colonial authorities governed Chinese bodies through coroner investigations, the establishment of mortuaries, through enacting laws for birth and death registration, and the regulation of burial practices etc. These state interventions on dead bodies, often justified by either medical or judicial rationales, were based on a scientific and objectified view of bodies.

While British colonial authorities had increasingly intervened in Chinese burial practices within the colonial urban sphere since the mid-nineteenth century, missionaries also printed Chinese-language serial publications to introduce Western medical knowledge to a Chinese readership during the same period. In 1853, English missionary Walter Henry Medhurst founded *The Chinese Serial* (*Xia'er guan zhen* 遐邇貫珍) – the first Chinese-language newspaper in Hong Kong. The subsequent editors of this pioneering publication were colonial administrator Charles Batten Hillier and missionary James Legge, until it ceased publication in 1856. All three of them had an excellent command of the Chinese language, and wished to disseminate Western scientific knowledge to the Chinese people through their language abilities. In the issue of October 1855, there is a long essay introducing anatomical science and advocating the usefulness of dissection (*The Chinese Serial*, October 1855: 3-11). The essay was based on *Quanti xinlun* 全體新論 (*A New Treatise on Anatomy*), a pioneering work of anatomy in Chinese by medical-missionary Benjamin Hobson (Hobson, 1851). The writer of the essay began by explaining why Western hospitals practiced post-mortem dissections, then proceeded to elaborate how useful dissection was in enabling us to study the human body. Despite the attempt to promote a scientific objectified view of the body, the word *shi* was used throughout the discussion of dissection. *Yan shi* 驗尸 (autopsy) and *pou shi* 剖屍 (dissection) were used to denote post-mortem dissection (*The Chinese Serial*, October 1855: 3; *The Chinese Serial*, May 1856: 9). Missionaries chose to stick with the traditional common word in the medical context despite its 'dangerous' and 'fearful' connotation.

The choices of vocabulary made by these medical-missionaries were most likely influenced by the works of their predecessors such as Robert Morrison, who were directly influenced by the official Chinese lexicography as mentioned above. Nineteenth-century missionaries, despite their convictions toward the introduction of anatomical science and an objectified view of the body, had little desire and agency in altering the Chinese vocabulary for dead bodies in the medical context. When Westernised Chinese elites participated in this medical discourse, they also continued to use *shi* throughout the nineteenth century. Towards the late nineteenth century, more Chinese-language newspapers were founded in Hong Kong and Shanghai – including the *Xunhuan ribao* 循環日報 (*Universal Circulating Herald*) founded in Hong Kong in 1874 and *Shen bao* 申報 founded in Shanghai in 1872. These Chinese newspapers, managed and edited by Westernised Chinese elites, had a much larger readership than the earlier missionary publications. The newspapers reported the Westerners' measures for treating corpses, often expressing awe towards Western technologies. In reporting about

colonial autopsies or Western scientific techniques in preserving corpses, *shi* was still commonly used to denote the dead in these newspaper articles.[8] The persistent use of *shi* was not shaken by the introduction of anatomical science and post-mortem dissection in urban China. This old word remained dominant in the scientific anatomical context until the emergence of other alternative terms in the early twentieth century.

On the other hand, the characters *qu* and *ti*, which occasionally appeared in Christian writing such as the aforementioned couplet in the Catholic Cemetery, were rarely used by nineteenth-century Westerners or Westernised Chinese to denote dead bodies in the scientific anatomical context. Nineteenth-century Western missionaries were unable to make use of compound words to denote the scientifically objectified dead body either. The compound word *quti* 軀體 would occasionally appear in newspapers during the first half of the twentieth century. In newspapers, *quti* was normally used to denote the living body, for instance in writings about health or human biology.[9] And whenever *quti* was used to denote a dead body in the newspapers, it was almost always used within Western philosophical and religious discussion, and used simultaneously with the word *linghun* 靈魂 (the soul), illustrating body-soul dualism.[10] Hence, Westernised Chinese or Chinese Christians did employ the compound word of *quti* to denote dead bodies in relation to body-soul dualism during the first half of the twentieth century. However, during the nineteenth century, Western missionaries did not make use of this compound word in their scientific-medical texts to promote body-soul dualism and an objectified view of the body.

Old vocabulary inertia and limited lexical change during the nineteenth century

Compound words only solidified their presence in the Chinese language in the early twentieth century during the advent of *baihua* 白話 (written vernacular Chinese), a phenomenon that will be discussed in the next section. Nineteenth-century missionaries and Westernised Chinese elites did not yet have the momentum to transform vocabulary in the popular public discourse, as they still subscribed to the official Qing lexicography. This echoes with the argument proposed by Lydia Liu that the Chinese language itself, as the host language, remained the main arena wherein the contestation and negotiation of meanings played out. Western influences could not dictate the transformation of vocabulary, as translation was not simply a process of obtaining the 'authentic' meanings from the 'source' European languages (Liu, 1995: 27). It would be the Chinese intellectuals, together with their audience, who determined the extent to which foreign influences were incorporated into their language. In the case of dead bodies, compound words were not made use by the Chinese intellectuals until the twentieth century.

Here we observe a contrast between the vocabulary for dead bodies and many scientific-medical terminologies. Many scientific-medical terms in the modern Chinese language were created simply through adopting 'phonemic loans' from European languages, as they were Chinese characters based on transliteration of European languages. This did not just include names of common medicines from the West like aspirin (*asipilin* 阿斯匹靈) and

[8] Examples of *shi* used in the Western post-mortem medical context include:
Report on a coroner investigation of a body discovered in the Shanghai French Concession (*Shen Bao*, 12th November 1874).
Report on the death of the French consul in Hong Kong, in which his body was preserved by medical chemicals. (*Universal Circulating Herald*, 26th February 1880).

[9] As an example, an article in *Shen bao* used *quti* in discussing obesity (*Shen Bao*, 1st October 1919: 14).

[10] As an example, an article in *Central Daily News* 中央日報 entitled '*linghun he quti*' 靈魂和軀體. (*Central Daily News*, 2nd April 1947: 6).

penicillin (*pannixilin* 盤尼西林), or common diseases like cholera (*huoluan* 霍亂), but also fundamental modern medical concepts like the gene (*jiyin* 基因) (Liu, 1995: 354, 361, 368). The invention of these new terms reflected that these medical concepts or entities were viewed as completely foreign to Chinese knowledge, hence a foreign transliterated term was needed. In contrast to these medical terminologies, there had never been a phonemic loan in the Chinese language for dead bodies from European languages, nor was there a straightforward creation of new words for corpses in the name of science or Christianity. Therefore, while missionaries and Westernised Chinese elites attempted to heavily medicalise dead bodies, the promotion of a scientific view of dead bodies never reached the point where new scientific terminologies were needed to denote corpses. In other words, corpses were never seen as a purely scientific-medical entity that required an invented scientific term.

The persistent use of *shi* throughout the nineteenth century, despite the influx of Christianity and anatomical science, reflects that the traditional connotations of corpses remained dominant in Chinese society. Apart from the missionaries and a handful of Westernised Chinese elites, the vast majority of Chinese people held to the traditional spiritual view of corpses – namely, that corpses were spiritually dangerous and not to be disturbed. This included Chinese people living in the colonial urban sphere where Western influences were strongest. As a result, post-mortem dissections and other forms of interventions on Chinese bodies by colonial authorities continued to stimulate widespread fear and anger among the Chinese throughout the second-half of the nineteenth century. For example, in Hong Kong, when the colonial government introduced a system for registering deaths, many Chinese did not cooperate, as they feared judicial inquiry and subsequent post-mortem dissections (Tam, 2018: 81-83). Many Chinese also refused to be admitted to Western hospitals when dying, fearing their body would be dissected after death. During an outbreak of plague in 1894, thousands simply fled the colony, as they wanted to avoid the fate of having their bodies managed by the colonial authorities after death (Sinn, 2003: 167). All these reflected the fact that the traditional fears attached to corpses had barely dissipated throughout the nineteenth-century, despite the Westerners' ambition to promote an objectified view of the corpse. The word *shi*, accompanied by its connotations of fear and danger, dominated the Chinese language until the twentieth century when newly reconfigured vocabulary began to offer an alternative.

Part Four: The Reconfiguration of Vocabulary and the Reinvention of Respect

A new era: popularisation of anatomy, *baihua* and compound words

It was not the Western missionaries, but the progressive Chinese elites during the early Republican period that played the principal role in transforming the vocabulary of dead bodies. At the turn of the century, more reformist Chinese intellectuals, convinced by the importance of Western science, also actively promoted the study of anatomy. Motivated by a strong desire to strengthen China, these reformist intellectuals saw anatomy as one of the sciences that would lead the nation out of backwardness. Tan Sitong 譚嗣同, a prominent reformer during the waning years of Qing who helped initiate the failed Hundred Days' Reform and was later executed as a result, argued for the necessity of anatomical science. He criticised the Confucian taboo of cutting up bodies. Like many other reformist intellectuals, Tan saw the human body as the microcosm of the nation: feeble Chinese bodies signified a weak Chinese nation and a lack of anatomical knowledge of the human body meant a lack of correct understanding of the realm, resulting in poor governance (Luesink, 2017: 1013-1014).

After the collapse of the Qing dynasty and with the resultant abandonment of the Qing Code that had severely prohibited cutting up corpses, some reformers immediately proposed

to legalise anatomy. Tang Erho 湯爾和, a medical doctor and later a politician, was determined to set up an anatomy law soon after the collapse of Qing. After a year of active petitioning by Tang, an anatomy law was enacted in 1913 which made routine dissection possible (Luesink, 2017: 1019-1020). In the early Republican era, the Western scientific view of the body began to gain prominence with the rising power of medical professionals like Tang and with the institutionalisation of dissection. Western medical schools were established, where students could practice dissection to learn anatomy. With this unprecedented development of anatomical science among the urban Chinese population, would new terms that denoted an objectified corpse finally arise?

Yiti 遺體 and *yihai* 遺骸, both of which are specifically used to denote a dead body, were two terms that gained prominence in the medical context during the early twentieth century. My article's central contention is that these newly reconfigured terms were not denoting an objectified dead body, but rather can be seen as reinventing meanings of respect and sacredness attached to a dead body. This reflected a continuity in the meanings and emotions attached to the dead body, such that dead bodies during the early Republican period were sacralised and respected in new ways, even against a backdrop of rapid modernisation.

This reconfiguration of vocabulary through the development of compound words has to be understood in the context of the reformation and popularisation of *baihua* (written vernacular Chinese). *Baihua* was already used by some writers during the Ming and Qing period, for instance in novels. However, it was significantly reformed during the early Republican era by progressive intellectuals, as they sought to simplify and modernise the written Chinese language to enhance literacy. One major reformation was to simplify the character system by relinquishing complicated archaic characters and restricting the number of characters in daily usage. Linguistic historian Jerry Norman illustrates that the number of disyllabic words increased, "as the phonological system of Chinese underwent simplification and the total number of phonologically distinct syllables decreased" (Norman, 1988: 112). In other words, since the range of commonly used Chinese characters was reduced, compound words were now in greater demand and thus solidified their presence in the written Chinese language. This is also reflected in the differences between Qing-era dictionaries like the *Kangxi Dictionary* and early twentieth-century dictionaries like the *Ciyuan* 辭源; (*Source of Words*) in the former, the dictionary entries list only the characters with descriptions and example usages of the characters; in the latter, although the dictionary entries are also based on single characters, each character entry contains all the common compound words that are based upon that character. This shows that compound words were accepted as fixed vocabulary during the advent of modern *baihua* in the early twentieth century.

The *Ciyuan* was one of the most significant dictionaries during this era of the advent of modern *baihua*. Compiled from 1908 and published in 1915, it was the first Chinese dictionary that focused on compound words (*ci* 辭/詞), rather than individual characters (*zi* 字). The term *quti* was absent in the original 1915 edition, showing the marginality of that particular Christian-influenced term in daily Chinese language, as argued earlier. On the other hand, *yiti* was included in the dictionary, with a brief etymology description (*Ci yuan - You ji*, 1915: 216-217). Although *yiti* was not commonly used during the Qing period, the dictionary acknowledged that the term originally appeared in the *Liji* 禮記 (*Book of Rites*) during ancient times. This original use of *yiti* in the *Liji* however did not denote a dead body; it referred to one's own body as left by one's parents that should be treasured, thus reflecting an attitude of

filial piety.[11] Since the word *yi* 遺 means left over or remained, the literal meaning of *yiti* would be 'the physical body that remains'. While the original use of *yiti* in the *Liji* did not specifically denote a dead body, it still conveyed a meaning of respect – the body was something given by one's parents, and that required respect.

The use of *yiti*

In the Republican Era, *yiti* was increasingly used to denote dead bodies in public discourse such as newspapers, both in a medical context and a political one. Newspapers circulated in urban centres - for example, *Minguo ribao* 民國日報 (Republican Daily), founded in Shanghai in 1916, and *Yishi bao* 益世報 (Welfare of the World), founded in Tianjin in 1915 – popularised terms like *yiti* and *yihai*. While *yiti* had been occasionally used in Classical Chinese previously, it assumed new meanings to specifically denote the dead body during the Republican era. The term could be comfortably fitted in the context of anatomical science. One could argue that the literal meaning of *yiti* – 'a body that remains' – could be interpreted as in accordance with the notion of body-soul dualism, as the term could entail that the soul departs the body, and the body remains. This arguably enabled a more materialist view of the body in the medical context, detaching the corpse from its associations with dangerous spirits. Nevertheless, *yiti* did not exactly represent a purely objectified body devoid of meanings, as *yiti* was also used to denote dead bodies that had sacred political value. Secular political values were often bestowed on *yiti* to maintain their sacredness. The simultaneous use of *yiti* in both the medical context and the sacred political context signified a new hybrid meaning conferred on dead bodies.

The most iconic use of *yiti* in a political context was by the most iconic Republican figure – Sun Yat-sen. When Sun passed away in 1925, the press closely followed the news about the status and location of his body. Immense effort and attention had been put into preserving and ultimately interning this sacred body of the Republican regime. Throughout March and April 1925, there were reports about Sun's body published in *Minguo ribao* and *Yishi bao* on a daily basis. The news reports all used *yiti* to denote his body when discussing news concerning the preservation, treatment and movement of his body.[12] Sun's body was the most sacred body of the Republican regime; the body was interned in the newly-constructed Sun Yat-Sen Mausoleum in Nanjing in 1929 and a massive memorial ceremony was held. The mausoleum and the memorial service embodied hybrid elements from both Western influences and the older imperial legacy; the commemoration of Sun was a modern reinvention of the imperial funerary rituals conducted in order to maintain the legitimacy of the Republican regime (Nedostup, 2009: 259 – 262). The sacred political meaning attached to the *yiti* of Sun Yat-sen, was therefore a reinvention of the sacredness attached to bodies commemorated by the Qing imperial state. The commemorated *yiti* of the Republican-era might not possess the

[11] The original phrase from *Liji* is as follows*:* '身也者,父母之遺體也.行父母之遺體,敢不敬乎?'

[12] Examples of news articles using *yiti* in reporting about Sun's body:
"Jueding jieshou guozang yiti shang zai xiehe yiyuan cheng lian hou zan"
决定接受國葬遺體尚在協和醫院成殮後暫 (Decision in organising a national funeral while the body remains at the hospital waiting to be placed inside coffin) (*Minguo Ribao*, 14th March 1925: 2).
"Zhongshan yiti zuori rulian" 中山遺體昨日入殮 (Sun's body was put inside coffin yesterday) (*Yishi Bao*, 16th March 1925: 3).
"Quanshijie tongku Sunxiansheng yiti rulian xiangqing" 全世界痛哭孫先生遺體入殮詳情 (Whole world weeps; the details of Sun's body getting into coffin) (*Minguo* Ribao, 19th March 1925: 3).
"Sunxiansheng yiti yibin" 孫先生遺體移殯 (The transfer of Sun's body) (*Minguo* Ribao, 21st March 1925: 3).
"Sunxiansheng yiti gai lian" 孫先生遺體改殮 (Transfer of Sun's body into coffin) (*Minguo* Ribao, 7th April 1925: 2).

miraculous elements that Qing commemorative writing had promoted, but the body of Republican martyrs and heroes were equally sanctified, and made distinct from the *shi* that represented the ordinary dead. In other words, despite a change of regime, the linguistic categorisation of corpses based on a political hierarchy was not fundamentally altered.

While *yiti* was used to represent politically sacred bodies, the term also simultaneously functioned in the medical context. The *yiti* of significant political figures were often discussed through a medical lens in newspapers. For instance, one report in *Minguo ribao* in 1925 discussed how the *yiti* of Sun was medically preserved (*Minguo ribao*, 16th March 1925: 2). Another report on *Yishi bao* in 1931 mentioned that the *yiti* of the Japanese Prime Minister was medically dissected (*Yishi bao*, 28th August 1931: 4). This simultaneous use of *yiti* reflected that many political elites in Republican China had already accepted Western medical interventions to the body, including dissection. They did not view such medical interventions as harming the sacredness of the bodies. Instead, the two were seen as compatible; the *yiti* could be sanctified, respected and mourned by thousands from the public, but it could also simultaneously be medically studied.

The use of *yihai*

The similar term *yihai* also functioned effectively in both the political and medical context. *Yihai* was popularised in the Republican-era political discourse slightly earlier than *yiti*. While *yiti* was popularised in the political discourse during Sun's death in the 1920s, *yihai* was used to denote the body of another iconic Republican hero – General Cai E 蔡鍔. Similar to *yiti*, *yihai* was not commonly used in earlier Classical Chinese texts, and it was also a reconfiguration produced through combining existing characters. In Classical Chinese, *hai* 骸 was originally used to refer to skeletons or remains, often specifically in the contexts of battlefields or wilderness. Traditionally, *hai* was often used interchangeably or simultaneously with *gu* 骨 (bones). In the aftermath of battles or disasters, when the abandoned corpses were collected and buried, often the flesh had already rotted away and the bones were the only undamaged part of the body that could be preserved. The dry bones were regarded as the core sacred part of the remains for purposes of ancestor worship (Reeves, 2007: 41). Similar to *yiti*, by adding *yi* to *hai*, a newly reconfigured term emerged – accentuating the sacredness of the bodies or body parts that remain. And just like *yiti*, *yihai* also represented more respected bodies, in contrast to the ordinary and unwelcoming *shi*.

The use of *yihai* for Cai E's body epitomised how the term could function well in both the Western medical context and the sacred political context. Cai E was known for leading a military campaign against Yuan Shikai when Yuan attempted to become emperor. He was thus venerated as a military hero who had saved the Republic during what became known as the *Huguo zhanzheng* 護國戰爭 (National Protection War). However, he suffered from tuberculosis and died in Japan in 1916 shortly afterwards. Similar to Sun's death, the press closely followed the status of Cai's body. *Minguo ribao*, which was founded initially to promote Republicanism against Yuan's imperial ambitions, reported on the funerary arrangements and the body of Cai on a daily basis. According to a report on 11th November 1916, Cai's *yihai* was soaked with formalin in order to preserve it, so that it could be later repatriated from Japan to China (*Minguo ribao*, 11 November 1916: 2). *Yihai* was used under this Western medical lens, and yet simultaneously maintained its sacred political meaning.

Medicalisation and sacralisation of the dead body under nationalism

The uses of *yiti* and *yihai* reflected that in the minds of the urban elites of the Republican era, political sacredness and Western medicalisation of a body were not mutually exclusive. Instead of adopting a purely objectified view of dead bodies to further medical science, the urban Chinese elites promoted ongoing respect towards medicalised bodies. The practices within medical schools in Republican China reflected such respect. As mentioned earlier, educated elites like Tang Erho promoted anatomical science through the establishment of medical schools. The teaching and practicing of dissection attracted hostility from traditionalists and the general public. The pro-anatomy educators thus needed to promote an image of respecting the dead while carrying out medical interventions upon them. Memorial services for the medically-studied bodies were held by the National Medical College starting in 1915; they were sacred rituals which all students and staff were required to attend (Luesink, 2017: 1023). These practices reflected the attempt of the reformist elites to balance traditional notions of respect with the need for the medicalisation of corpses. Instead of treating dissected bodies as meaningless objects, they tried to cultivate a form of ongoing spiritual connection with the medicalised corpses.

On a personal level, the body was not just an object, but a spiritual and emotional entity that the student should cultivate an ongoing relationship with. On a societal level, the body was revered as a contributor to the development of science. With this approach to sanctifying the medicalised dead, in a way, more corpses would be respected as sacred bodies that had contributed to the public good. In comparison to a smaller number of sanctified bodies during the Qing period, as medical schools in the twentieth century carried out sacred rituals regularly, thousands of medicalised bodies could be revered as sacred entities, which embodied a social meaning of contribution to the cause of scientific development.

This phenomenon could be understood as part of a continuous process that had broadened the sanctification of bodies during the Republican period. As mentioned earlier, the late Qing period already saw the imperial regime trying to sanctify many more dead bodies as compared to the early Qing period. In the Republican period, the definition of sacred bodies was further loosened; many thousands of bodies that were previously only regarded as 'ordinary' *shi* were given social or political meanings. Commemorating medically-dissected bodies as contributors to science was one example. In the broader political context, many 'ordinary' dead were elevated to the respected status of *qu* or *ti*, as they were incorporated to the grand narrative of nationalism.

As discussed earlier, phrases like *juan qu* or *wei guo juan qu* (to sacrifice the body for the nation) were already appearing regularly in Qing commemorative writings. Since the 1910s, these terms started to commonly appear in newspapers that were sympathetic to the Republican cause, for example, *Minguo ribao* and *Yishi bao*. Not surprisingly, these phrases were used for those fallen during the revolution and the many subsequent revolutionary wars. But on top of that, even individuals, particularly young persons, who died from illness during work or study, were sometimes commemorated through use of such politicised phrases, as they were seen as having sacrificed their bodies by working tirelessly for the nation. For example, in the summer of 1919, when Chinese nationalism heightened during the May Fourth Movement, a student named Liu Jialin 劉家麟 was commemorated as *wei guo juan qu* on *Yishi bao*, after succumbing to heatwave related illness in Shanghai (*Yishi Bao*, 28th July 1919: 3). Another student from the city of Yueyang, who died from heatstroke while busy participating in political activities, was also commemorated as *wei guo juan qu* (*Yishi bao*, 14th September 1919: 3). These youths, who died under circumstances that would previously be considered

'normal', were commemorated as martyrs as their deaths were incorporated into the narrative of nationalism.

Republican-era political discourse greatly loosened the requirement for the dead to become politically meaningful bodies. Apart from these nationalistic students, on the battlefields, not just exceptional generals, but thousands of ordinary fallen soldiers, achieved *wei guo juan qu* as well. Caroline Reeves has studied how the Chinese Red Cross Society actively collected and buried many abandoned corpses on battlefields during the early Republican era; the collected dead were then commemorated in the monthly magazine that was published by the society (Reeves, 2007: 33-49). Reeves suggests that the task of burying the unclaimed dead was a process of incorporating the deceased individuals into a newly created national identity. The unclaimed dead were buried as Chinese citizens and the act of burial was a "performance of citizenship" (Reeves, 2007: 51–52). The active politicization of the dead during the early Republican era had elevated many corpses that would previously be deemed 'ordinary' to become sacred bodies. Whether these were dissected bodies for medical study or collected corpses on battlefields, they were not treated as 'undesirable' *shi*, nor were they purely objectified. Instead, they were given sacred meanings, and were respected for their contribution to the greater society and nation.

Reinvention of sacredness

The very meaning of sacredness in the political context was also reinvented under the pressures of secularisation. A modern form of 'political sacredness' was advocated. This article has discussed the sacredness of the dead body and respect towards the dead body, often interchangeably. There were however differences between the two concepts: sacredness is connected to religious and spiritual beliefs; it signifies a realm not to be intervened in by secular concerns and administration; respect on the other hand is not necessarily tied to religious or spiritual beliefs. Respecting a significant political figure can simply be a secular affair. So, respect towards the dead does not automatically translate into sacredness. But in the Republican era, despite the pressures from scientific and secular modernity against traditional spiritual beliefs, the political elites were able to sacralise the dead in new ways.

Traditional 'superstitions' were discouraged by the Republican regime, which was preoccupied with leading the Chinese people out of 'backwardness'. Traditional funerary ritual specialists were labelled by the Kuomintang Nationalist government as the embodiments of superstitious backwardness (Nedostup, 2009: 191–226). With the decline of traditional practices, the sacralisation of dead bodies found its way in the modern political ideal of nationalism. This echoes with the observations illustrated in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* – that the cenotaphs and tombs of soldiers have become the emblem of the modern culture of nationalism, as the myth of the 'immemorial nation' replaced traditional 'superstitious' beliefs to become the new religion of the twentieth century (Anderson, 2006: 9). In the context of contemporary urban China, anthropologist Andrew Kipnis suggests that "ideas about soul are often political because powerful people and organizations assert that they represent something that is immortal, unchanging, and everlasting. Such permanence adds to their mystique" (Kipnis, 2021: 27). In the twentieth century, the political elites therefore tried to reinvent the sacredness of dead bodies by tying the immaterial spiritual meanings of the bodies to the 'immortal' nation. The respect towards the politically significant dead surpassed the secular domain and was elevated to a form of worship of the sacred. This is reflected in both the mausoleum of Sun Yat-sen in Nanjing and the mausoleum of the Seventy-two Revolutionary Martyrs in Guangzhou, as those sites were sanctified as the holiest places of the Republic.

Ongoing spiritual values of dead bodies in the present

In contemporary urban Chinese societies, despite the persistent medicalisation of dead bodies, bodies continue to be bestowed with spiritual meanings. The concept of *da ti lao shi* 大體老師 (corpse teacher) in contemporary Hong Kong and Taiwan reflects this trend. In contemporary Taiwan, there has been a Buddhist movement that has promoted the sacralisation of medical science. Traditional spiritual beliefs are made to fully engage with medical science. Dissection becomes the focal point of such sacralisation. The identity of the corpse is known to the medical students, so that the students can establish a connection with the dissected body; the body is respectfully addressed as *da ti lao shi*; each body is commemorated by ceremonies before and after dissection (Huang, 2017: 84). This approach, which echoes with the memorial services for dissected bodies held in the early Republican era, in fact has popularised anatomical science and body donation. The number of voluntary corpse donations surged under the Buddhist medical institutions (Huang, 2017: 83). Medical professionals have continued to imbue medicalised bodies with spiritual meanings and the general public have welcomed it.

In mainland China, after 1949, the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has attempted to revolutionise and regulate the management of dead bodies to an even greater extent than the previous regimes. Martin Whyte documents that traditional death rituals were indeed under much pressure in the urban areas during the first few decades of the PRC. However, he argues that despite a radical break in ritual forms, the urban population still adhered to the core elements of the traditional beliefs. In other words, 'orthodoxy' (beliefs) persisted even though 'orthopraxy' (practices) changed. Whyte observes that although the Chinese urban population were pressured to simplify their traditional rituals and adopt cremation, there were no signs that they cared less about the treatment of the remains of their loved ones; indeed, considerable efforts were made to ensure bodies were treated properly even though options were limited (Whyte, 1988: 313-314). Many of the urban dwellers in China today still view the dead body as a spiritual rather than an objectified entity. Andrew Kipnis's very recent ethnographic study also suggests that Chinese urban dwellers today still widely hold spiritual beliefs about the entanglement of dead bodies with souls, spirits or ghosts (Kipnis, 2021: 114–115). Whether they refer to the bodies as *shi* or *yiti*, dead bodies are never devoid of spiritual meanings.

Conclusion

Thomas Laqueur's magisterial work on the cultural history of the dead ambitiously argues that humanity has universally cared for and given meanings to the dead. No culture throughout history or in our modern age is indifferent to dead bodies; the dead body still matters greatly for individuals, communities and nations in this supposedly secular and scientific era (Laqueur, 2015: 1). Through this study of vocabulary and meanings of dead bodies, this assertion is proven to be true in the context of late imperial and early Republican urban China. Dead bodies did not lose their spiritual and emotional meanings when political revolution, scientific development and cultural transformation took place.

Fears associated with the corpse, which were manifested by the word use of *shi*, dominated the Chinese society throughout the late imperial period. Such fears of disturbing corpses went against the development of anatomical science. Yet, the vocabulary of dead bodies remained largely unchanged throughout the nineteenth century. Western missionaries had limited influences over altering the vocabulary of dead bodies, and no Western scientific terminology was invented to denote the corpse in a scientific-medical context. It was the

progressive urban Chinese elites during the Republican era who reconfigured the vocabulary to incorporate new meanings for dead bodies. Terms like *yiti* and *yihai*, both of which were reconfigurations of existing characters, functioned well in both the sacred political and scientific-medical context. This showcases that the urban Chinese elites of the time saw post-mortem medical study and sanctifying the dead as very much compatible.

The sacred meanings of dead bodies were reinvented as regime changed and science developed. How Chinese vocabulary was reconfigured signified a continuity of respect towards the dead – a respect that persisted and grew in face of modernity. The urban elites did not choose to promote a purely objectified view of dead bodies. Instead, dead bodies were sacralised and respected through new hybrid ways, blending the traditional spiritual beliefs with the new dominating narrative of nationalism. Many more bodies, whether they were medically-dissected corpses or collected battlefield remains, were sanctified as contributors to a greater social good or martyrs to the nationalist cause. Under the pressures of scientific advancement and secularisation, the meaning of sacredness, particularly in the political context, was also reinvented. The immaterial spiritual value of the dead was tied to the myth of the 'immortal' nation. In this era of rapid political and cultural transformation, the relationship between the living and dead bodies was never erased, but was continuously reinvented.

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