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# Imperial Death Ritual and International Relations

## *The Unprecedented Participation of the Diplomatic Corps at Mourning Services in Late Imperial China*

### INTRODUCTION

If anything is essential to describe Chinese culture, it is the ritual, and if anything is central to the maintenance of a unified Chinese culture, it is the standardization of ritual, the correct way to perform rites. In Confucian state ideology, ritual, the performance of rites and roles, was conceived of as essential background of order and unity. Rituals explicitly differentiated the social relations. The correct performance of the prescribed rites functioned as a means to order the family structure, to stabilize the social hierarchy, to consolidate the state, and thus to prevent all these organizations from disorder.<sup>1</sup>

Death ritual, in particular, was an elaboration of filial piety the central Confucian value within family relations, preventing disorder after the death of a family member had struck the hierarchical order of the family. This is also true for the imperial death ritual, which had a similar stabilizing function and – during Ming and Qing times – was of significant importance for the legitimacy of the chief mourner, the heir to the throne, and the ruling family, consolidating the power of the successors. The new emperor had to perform the death rites in filial respect for his predecessor and thus served as an ideal model affirming the basic value of filial piety within family and state. Through the performance of the death ritual he simultaneously reinforced the legitimacy of his reign and symbolically strengthened his own position. Thus, an imperial funeral with all the political threats it brought along for the dynasty was actually transformed into an imperial accession rite.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, imperial death rituals turn out to be fascinating keys to the biography of some personalities and their background.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a wide-ranging examination of Chinese state and court ritual from 1000 BC to AD 1750, see McDermott 1999.

<sup>2</sup> For an impressive case study of medieval China, see McMullen 1999.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed account on (death) ritual within Confucianism, see Rawski 1988a, for the conception of kingship and its ties to ritual, see also Rawski 1988b.

This is especially the case with the funerary rites at the demise of the Empress Dowager Cixi in the year 1908. This was an unprecedented and unique death ritual in Chinese history for several reasons. Firstly, the coincidence in time: Never during Qing times had there been two imperial deaths so close together. Emperor Guangxu died a few hours earlier than the Empress Dowager, so that the officials in charge had to memorialize simultaneous ceremonies. Secondly, the alteration of the ritual prescriptions: on the one hand, the Empress Dowager's dominant position in life was reflected very clearly in her death rites; on the other hand, her successors wanted to affirm the legitimacy of their reign in the way they had Cixi's death rites arranged and modified from common imperial ritual.

Thirdly, the most striking and since then unparalleled event: the participation of the diplomatic body.

It was the first time in Chinese history that foreign representatives participated in a ritual of specific importance within Chinese culture. A close look into the deaths of Mao Zedong and more recently, Deng Xiaoping will show that this really was an event of singularity. Never before and never again in Chinese history until today, had foreigners participated officially in the ceremonies at an imperial/state leader's funeral. Thus, the last two imperial deaths in China, at the gradual waning of the dynasty, gain special significance by the outstanding participation of foreigners.

#### THE DEATH OF THE IMPERIAL MAJESTIES AND THE UNPRECEDENTED VISIT OF CONDOLENCE OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS, NOVEMBER 1908

According to the official announcements, the last two imperial deaths of the Qing dynasty occurred within the space of a single day: The Emperor Guangxu died on November 14, 1908, the Empress Dowager Cixi died a few hours later on November 15. As two imperial deaths had occurred so close together, the Board of Rites, *li bu*, in charge of the entire organization and preparation of the ceremonies had to submit two sets of memorials with the prescriptions for the ceremonies both for the late Emperor as well as for the late Empress Dowager.

It is conspicuous enough that the authority of the late Empress Dowager in her death rites was elevated to a status equal (or almost superior) to the Emperor. The basic mourning regulations for an empress dowager laid down in the dynastic statutes were deliberately altered. In no aspect did the modified mourning prescriptions differ from those for the late emperor: The use of blue ink, the ban on ancestor worship, the suspension of transmitting memorials to the Throne, the rigorous ban on marriages for high- and low-ranking officials were entirely according to the ritual prescriptions for a late emperor, which were even surpassed by the regulation of the three-times-a-day assembly for libation during the whole period

of primary mourning. Another fact made Cixi's death ritual an unprecedented one: Her coffin remained within the Forbidden City until the final entombment, though imperial coffins were usually transferred to a hall on Coal Hill.<sup>4</sup>

But there were no regulations found in the statutes dealing with western foreigners who were urging to participate in an imperial funeral for the first time in the history of China's international relations.<sup>5</sup> This time, not only the Board of Rites, the most prestigious of the government's ministries was kept busy, but also the Board of Foreign Affairs, *waiwu bu*, had a difficult and unprecedented job to do: the handling of the interests of the diplomatic corps, the representatives of the imperialistic nations.

On the afternoon of November 15, 1908, the accredited representatives of the various nations were singly informed by an official note of the Foreign Ministry about the death of the Emperor the day before. There had been lots of rumors earlier, since an official announcement on November 14 stated that the Prince Regent would take over the agenda. At about noon of November 16, 1908, the death of the Empress Dowager was confirmed.

The members of the diplomatic body gathered the same day in the Spanish mission and decided to adopt the court's mourning period, and that the whole staff of the legations had to wear mourning for twenty-seven days. During this period the flags of all the legations were hoisted at half mast; all the consulates had to follow suite. During this meeting the chief of the American mission, William Woodville Rockhill, suggested to ask for a date to officially present the messages of condolence to the Court. The Doyen of the Diplomatic Body, the Spanish minister, Manuel de Carcer y Salamanca, was thus authorized to submit an official note to the Foreign Ministry, expressing condolences, informing the ministry about the mourning regulations within the legation quarter — and asking for a date for the visit of condolence.

The written answer of the Foreign Ministry to the Doyen — setting the date for November 21 — was received about two days later, together with a very precise description of the ceremonious program for the visit. The letter was circulated by the Doyen on November 19 within the Diplomatic Corps.

“On entrera par Tonghuamen et on descendra de chaises devant le Changsseyuan. Les Ministres monteront sur de petites chaises à porteurs; ils passeront les portes Sitchingmen et Houangchimen. A la sortie de cette dernière porte, ils descendront de chaises et iront à pied. Ils passeront la porte Ningcheoumen et se réuniront sous la tente dressée en dehors de cette porte.”

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed study on the death rites at the demise of the Empress Dowager Cixi, see Grieszler 1991a, b.

<sup>5</sup> The most important state rites of imperial China were witnessed by hardly anyone; see Laidlaw 1991.

“A dix heures les ministres du Waiwupu conduiront le Corps Diplomatique jusque devant la porte du Houangtchitien. Ils feront une révérence, entreront dans le pavillon (2<sup>ème</sup> révérence) et s’approcheront de la table des sacrifices dressée devant le cercueil de Sa Majesté l’Impératrice Douairière (3<sup>ème</sup> révérence), ils se tourneront de côté vers le Prince Régent (4<sup>ème</sup> révérence). Le discours funèbre sera prononcé puis traduit. Le Prince rendra le salut et répondra au discours qui sera traduit. La lecture et la traduction terminées, les Ministres feront une révérence en avant (devant la table des sacrifices), ils s’écarteront de quelques pas (2<sup>ème</sup> révérence), arrivé à la porte du pavillon (3<sup>ème</sup> révérence). De là ils regagneront la tente dressée en dehors de Ningcheoumen où ils se reposeront un instant. [...]” (Circulaire no. 112, November 19, 1908 in BA 5760/08)

On November 21, 1908, thirty-nine representatives of fourteen nations – Spain, USA, Austria-Hungary, France, Great Britain, Belgium, Germany, Russia, Japan, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden – headed by the Doyen entered the Imperial Palace from the side of Donghua Men to offer condolences. According to the strict protocol the foreign delegates gathered at Ningshou Men; at 10 o’clock in the morning, they were led by high officials of the Foreign Ministry to the Huangji Dian first, which might be another significant aspect reflecting the Empress Dowager’s dominant position. In front of the coffin of the late Empress Dowager, the Doyen bowed to the imperial remains, then to the Prince Regent, read an address of sympathy, and this address having been translated, the Prince Regent expressed his thanks. Carefully holding to the prescribed ritual program, the foreign representatives left the hall to advance to the Qianqing Gong, where the ceremony was repeated in front of the coffin of the late Emperor Guangxu.

Though since former times, tributary states had sent emissaries or special envoys to offer condolences at an emperor’s death, this was definitely the first time that all the accredited diplomats were permitted to be present at an official ceremony of condolence at the biers of the late Empress Dowager and the late Emperor Guangxu. It was for the first time that representatives of foreign western countries were officially invited to proceed to the Forbidden City for a personal visit of condolence.

Not only had the Court to accept the visit of condolence but it also was confronted with persistent and obstinate notes by the foreigners to obtain permission for participation at the imperial funeral procession. Finally the diplomats succeeded in getting consent, albeit reluctantly, from the authorities and took part in the funeral procession for the late Emperor in May 1909. The foreign diplomats apparently were less interested in insisting upon another troublesome participation in the funeral procession for Cixi, in November 1909.

## THE FUNERAL PROCESSION FOR THE LATE EMPEROR GUANGXU, MAY 1909

The participation of the diplomatic body in the funeral rites was an important affair and involved much negotiation. At the end of January 1909, an imperial decree was issued stating that the funeral procession with the remains of the late Emperor to his temporary resting place at Liangge Zhuang would start at May 1<sup>st</sup>. Intense negotiations were carried out between the diplomatic body and their governments on the one hand, and the Chinese government on the other. According to rumors the Japanese would send a prince as special envoy for the event. Thus the diplomats tried to find out “whether the Chinese government really would be pleased if foreign countries were represented at the ceremony by special delegates” as the German minister wrote, stating at the same time, that he himself “had not the least idea as to the intentions of my own Government”, and that he did not know at all, “whether they will eventually appoint a delegate or not” (Note of February 1, 1909, to the Foreign Ministry in BA 444/09).

The answer was clear:

“Dear Count Rex: The Chinese Government would be pleased if foreign countries sent special delegates at the removal of the coffin of His Majesty the late Emperor. But if it is done on that occasion, we would also expect delegates sent on the occasion of the removal of the coffin of Her Majesty the late Empress Dowager which comes some times in the 9<sup>th</sup> moon.” (Note from the Foreign Ministry to Graf von Rex, February 1, 1909 in BA 532/09)

Was this an elegant attempt to make a foreign participation impossible, being aware that sending a special envoy two times within half a year for a funeral would hardly be acceptable for the foreign governments? But a few days later, the Doyen informed his colleagues of the official communiqué of the Foreign Ministry inviting the foreign governments to send special envoys:

”[...] le Gouvernement Chinois compte inviter aux funérailles [...] tous les Représentants étrangers qui se trouvent actuellement à Pékin et qu'en outre il sera très honoré si les chefs d'Etat veulent bien envoyer des Ambassadeurs spéciaux [...]”.(Circulaire no 17, February 6, 1909 in BA 580/09)

For the period of days around the funeral, between April 26 and May 4, a whole program with entertainment, banquets and visits of places of interest (like the Palace Gardens, the Zoological Garden, the Summer Palace etc) would be arranged, additionally (ibid.).

On April 15, the diplomats gathered at the American mission to further discuss their participation.

To minimize the risk of possible disturbances the Chinese Foreign Ministry had issued a very detailed program and order for the participants. It conveyed a totally professional arrangement: The special envoys would be picked up upon

their arrival into the country, official carriages would be provided for the foreign delegations and official interpreters would be at their disposal for the duration of their stay.

“[...] 6. The Special Envoys will be received in a body on April 26<sup>th</sup> for the presentation of their letters of credence. Each Envoy will present his letter of credence separately. The usual ceremony for the presentation of letters of credence will be observed.

7. On the day after the presentation of the letters decorations will be conferred.

8. A Minister of the Imperial Household will call out the name of the Regent to all the Special Envoys on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April.

9. On the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> the Summer Palace and other places of interest will be visited.

10. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of April the Special Envoys with their suites will pay their respects to the remains of the late Emperor and Empress Dowager. A pavilion will be set up outside the Hsi Ch'ing Gate (in the Palace) where the foreign representatives may assemble. After all are assembled, each Envoy accompanied by his suite will advance separately and pay his respects to the Imperial Remains.

11. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of May the funeral procession of the late Emperor will take place. The Special Envoys and their suites will first gather in the pavilion outside of the east gate of the Coal hill and await the arrival of the Imperial Coffin. They will stand in rank and bow. They will then escort the Coffin on foot as far as the pavilion inside Hou Men. The order of Procession will be as follows:

a. The Wai Wu Pu and members of staff of foreign Envoys.

b. Grand Council.

c. Imperial Princes.

d. Special Envoys in order as decided upon by the Diplomatic Body, i.e., in reverse alphabetical order of the names of their respective countries (Z-A) in the French language.

e. Dean of the Special Envoys and one official of his staff.

f. Japanese Prince.

g. Prince Regent.

h. Imperial Coffin.

On arrival of the cortège at this latter pavilion the Foreign Envoys will retire from the procession taking position in front of the Pavilion. The Prince Regent will bow to the Special Envoys and depart. The Special Envoys will enter the pavilion and the cortège will proceed on its way.

12. A pavilion will be erected beside the pavilion mentioned above (inside the Hou Men), where the ladies of the Diplomatic Corps and the officials of the Legations not in the cortège will witness the funeral procession; admission by ticket only.

13. A pavilion will be erected on the street of the Hsi Ssu P'ai Lou (Western Four P'ai-lous) where foreign guests may gather to await the funeral cortège. They shall stand at the side

of the road and bow as the Coffin passes. Admission to the pavilion will be by ticket only [...]" (Note of April 15, 1909 in BA 1879/09)

On the morning of April 26 at 10:30 the special envoys were received by the Prince Regent to present their credentials in the Throne Hall, the Qianqing Gong, in the following order: USA, Brazil, Spain, France, Mexico, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Portugal, Netherlands (Circular of the American Legation, April 24, 1909 in BA 2039/09).

Later that day the American minister sent out a notification to his colleagues:

"In view of the fact that it has been informally agreed today to issue tickets to the Diplomatic Pavilion (for the ceremonies on May 1<sup>st</sup>) to Consuls-General and Consuls and their wives, and to army officers above the rank of captain and their wives, and to naval officers above the rank of lieutenants and their wives, the American Minister has the honor to request his honourable colleagues who desire, in view of this to revise their requests for tickets to do so as soon as possible, stating the number required for the Diplomatic Pavilion, and also the number required for the Distinguished Guests Pavilion at the Four Western Pavilions. All tickets will be issued on Thursday, April 29<sup>th</sup> in accordance with the requests [...]" Circular of April 26, 1909 in BA 2060/09)

Thus it was not only the special envoys but also an enormous crowd of curious foreigners eager to watch this outstanding ritual intervening for tickets. For the German mission 14 tickets for the Diplomatic Pavilion were issued and 60 tickets for the Foreigners' Pavilion at Xisi (Note of April 29, 1909 in BA 2124/09). This means, taking only the Germans into consideration, there were about 75 people watching the procession; if we assume that every nation would be represented by an average of about 50 people, there were about 500 to 600 foreigners intruding at this core event of Chinese ritual. This must have cost the Chinese a great deal of self-discipline.

The only thing the Foreign Ministry could do was to advise the Diplomats that "there must be solemn silence on all the streets through which the cortege passes. Neither Chinese nor foreigners, military or civilian, are to be allowed on the streets. If there are foreigners who wish to witness the ceremonies they may gather at a place selected by the Board of the Interior, outside the Fu Ch'eng Men to the west of the temporary bridge and the Chiu T'ien Temple." (Note from the Foreign Office to Mr Rockhill, April 28, 1909 in BA sine)

On April 29, the special envoys went to the Forbidden City to pay respect to the late Majesties; on May 1, the special envoys gathered in the pavilion outside of the east gate at Coal Hill and awaited the arrival of the imperial coffin, there. They joined the cortège and accompanied the catafalque to the pavilion inside the Hou Men where they bid the remains of the late Emperor farewell and retired from the procession.

## THE FUNERAL PROCESSION OF THE LATE EMPRESS DOWAGER, NOVEMBER 1909

As to the funeral procession for the late Empress Dowager in November 1909, the foreign diplomats apparently were less interested to accompany the catafalque. This time they did not lay much effort into the negotiations: In their meeting of October 18, 1909, at the Austro-Hungarian mission, the diplomats deliberated upon their participation in the forthcoming funeral procession. The Doyen, Mr Kuczynski, reported the strict regulations of the ceremonies: November 6, at 10.00 a.m., they were invited to pay respect to the late Empress Dowager, whose sarcophagus had been placed until then in the Huangji Dian. November 9, they were to gather at 05.00 a.m. at Donghua Men to join the cortège coming out of the Forbidden City and accompany the procession. They emphatically opposed the early hour, 5 o'clock in the morning. It would be too dark then, they argued, for maintaining order, forming the cortège, even for recognizing each other:

“On aborde ensuite la question de l’heure à laquelle le Corps Diplomatique est convié. Le Doyen déclare qu’il a déjà fait tout son possible pour obtenir un changement d’heure, en faisant valoir toutes les objections à un rendezvous si matinal, l’obscurité complète, l’impossibilité de se reconnaître, de former le cortège, d’assurer le service d’ordre, mais aucune de ces objections n’a suffi pour changer la décision du Gouvernement chinois, qui, de son côté, déclare que cette heure est fixée par la nécessité qui s’impose de faire une certaine étape avant la tombée de la nuit. Le Doyen prie, donc, ses honorables collègues de prendre une décision et de lui indiquer si, dans le cas où ses démarches ultérieures devaient rester infructueuses, il faut accepter l’invitation purement et simplement. Il s’ensuit une discussion générale. De l’avis de tous les Ministres l’heure de convocation n’est pas raisonnable et plusieurs déclarent qu’il leur serait bien difficile de se rendre la nuit en grand uniforme à une cérémonie dans les conditions existantes ici. D’un autre côté il serait également difficile de s’abstenir, si le Gouvernement chinois insiste, puisque, en règle générale il faut se conformer, autant que possible, aux coutumes du pays. [...]”(Séance du Corps Diplomatique du 18 Octobre 1909 in BA 5856/09)

Finally, the Foreign Ministry informed the Doyen on October 21, that to accommodate the foreigners the hour for their participation had been changed. The question arises whether the Chinese had scheduled the foreigners’ participation at that early hour being aware of the fact that the foreigners might oppose; while changing the time of participation to 07:30 a.m. they might have appeased the diplomats and simultaneously minimized their own dislike of the foreign participation.

Accordingly, the place of gathering was changed, as well: they were to await the catafalque at Beixin Qiao and accompany it for a short distance to Yuewang Miao, at Dongzhi Men. Another two pavilions were installed there for the staff of the missions and the rest of the foreigners (Circular no 136 in BA 5180/09).

In another note the Foreign Ministry announced that the diplomats were invited to pay their respects in front of the coffin of the late Empress Dowager, on November 6, at 10.00 a.m., in the order of their seniority. Again even the way they had to go was described in every single detail. A few days before the funeral procession left the Imperial Palace, ninety-eight representatives of thirteen nations proceeded to the Huangji Dian to perform a ritual resembling that of November 21, one year before.

For the day of the funeral procession, it was decreed again, that each chief of mission may be accompanied by one person of his choice to join the procession; all the other foreigners were advised to assemble at the pavilions specially installed for that occasion. But the tickets issued were not sufficient: Only 354 tickets instead of 594 were made available by the Chinese (Circulaire no 145 in BA 5432/09).

In those difficult days of the declining empire and of the growing threat from outside even ritual – for centuries the basics of Chineseness – has lost its stabilizing power. China was not able to keep the foreigners out of its ritualized demonstration of cultural identity which was actually a means of political strategy for internal use. The traditional correct performance of (imperial) death ritual, practiced through hundreds of years, was all of a sudden blurred by the intrusion of foreign participants.

#### THE MOURNING SERVICES FOR MAO ZEDONG, SEPTEMBER 1976

The Communists tried to change the funeral practices in order to get rid off the “superstitious” traditional rituals, which rather strengthen kinship ties and the individual’s family than foster loyalty towards the party and the nation. The procedure was to be simplified, the waste of expenditure reduced, cremation should be adopted instead of burial, and one memorial meeting should replace the elaborated traditional funeral rites. The leaders of the revolutionary movement were to be cremated so that only their ashes remained. They were usually buried apart from their historical monument, i.e. no grave or mausoleum should function as public a shrine. The cremation policy of the communist party was aimed at discouraging any form of a personality cult.<sup>6</sup> Mao Zedong himself declared in 1944:

“From now on, when anyone in our ranks who has done some useful work dies, be he soldier or cook, we should have a funeral ceremony and a memorial meeting in his honor. This should become the rule. And it should be introduced among the people as well. When someone dies in a village, let a memorial meeting be held. In this way we express our mourning for the dead and unite all the people.” (Whyte 1988:297)

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<sup>6</sup> Zhou Enlai was the first leader to be cremated at Babaoshan Revolutionary Crematorium, his ashes scattered thereafter.

But the great Chairman's mourning services went against all the attempts to simplify death ritual. It turned out that death ritual still was the meaningful political instrument that it had been during imperial days. The strong symbolism of death ritual as a means to demonstrate authority and legitimacy to (Chinese) society was still alive and important as ever.

Some 60 years after the last two imperial deaths, communist China held mourning services at the demise of Chairman Mao Zedong who died on September 9, 1976. It was no longer the Board of Rites issuing the mourning decrees.<sup>7</sup> This time, the Central Committee and the Military Commission of the Chinese Communist Party, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and the State Council formed a funeral committee headed by Hua Guofeng, the political heir of Mao Zedong. In order to coordinate the mourning services and to stabilize society two announcements were issued: The first one highlighted the role of Mao Zedong as founder of the Communist Party, praising his achievements and reminding the public to continuously follow his thoughts. The second one declared all the relevant details for the mourning services.

“For seven days Mao Zedong would be laid in state in the Great Hall of the People, mourning services would be held during this period from September 11 to 17. A big memorial rally was to be held in the afternoon of September 18, on Tian'anmen-Square. From September 9 to 18, flags should be lowered all over the country as well as at all the Chinese institutions abroad, embassies etc. A three minute-mourning silence should be the beginning of the culmination of mourning services, of the big rally on September 18. All over the country, sirens would sound in mourning for three minutes. Foreign governments, fraternal parties or friendly personages are not invited to take part in the official mourning ceremonies. Chinese diplomats should inform about this decision.” (Xinhua News Agency 09/09/1976)

Mourning services began on September 11. Mao's corpse<sup>8</sup> was put on public view in the Great Hall of the People, while the leaders of the new government in hierarchical order paid tribute before Mao's bier. “The chief mourners remained the carefully listed state and party leaders, and more important than Mao's relatives were the representatives sent to the services from the areas where Mao had undertaken great revolutionary activities: Shaoshan, the Anyuan Colliery, Ruijin County, and so on. Mao as a person, with family and friends, was displaced by Mao as a transcendent revolutionary leader without a private domain of his own.” (Wakeman 1988:263)

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed study on the mourning services for Chairman Mao, see Wakeman 1988.

<sup>8</sup> When preparing the funeral arrangements for the late Dr Sun Yatsen, Republican China was already inspired by the embalment and public display of Lenin. Communist China followed the example – a team of specialists worked for about ten months on the preservation of Mao's remains.

During the next seven days more than 300,000 people came in a perfectly mobilized arrangement to pay respect to the remains of Mao Zedong. On September 18, at 3.00 p.m., about one million people gathered at Tian'anmen-Square to hold a mass memorial rally. After a three minutes' silence with sirens sounding in mourning, after the national anthem and the "Internationale", Hua Guofeng as political heir of Mao Zedong and his appointed successor delivered the memorial speech. At 3.30 p.m. the rally came to a close.

Again, death ritual was practiced in the traditional Chinese way, the observance of mourning being mainly a means of claiming legitimacy, of stabilizing a society which was threatened to be deteriorated by death, by chaos. Even the ongoing struggle between Hua Guofeng and Mao's widow, Jiang Qing, came to centre upon the Chairman's funeral rites and, at the end, was won by the Chairman's political heir. Mao's physical remains could be used as "a source of charismatic authority" (Wakeman 1988:276); thus Hua was very much in favor for a public memorial enshrining the remains of the Chairman against those who rather would have the tomb and the monument kept apart. But Hua Guofeng managed to get his idea through; on the same day, when the plan for a memorial hall was officially announced, the publication-project of a new selection of Mao's works was started by the editor Hua Guofeng. Thus, Hua Guofeng appears as the legitimized heir of the physical and ideological remains of the late Chairman. On November 24, 1976, construction work on Mao's memorial hall was initiated by Hua Guofeng personally, one year later, at the first anniversary of Mao's death the Memorial Hall was officially opened.

In this account, there was no place left for foreigners. For centuries in practice the death ritual was a political message towards the interior, towards society. The traditional choreography of mourning communicated that the struggle for power had been won, already, and showed in a very precise way who was going to be the leader for the years to come.

#### THE MOURNING SERVICES FOR DENG XIAOPING, FEBRUARY 1997

The most recent "imperial death" occurred when Deng Xiaoping died on February 19, 1997. Though the funeral of Deng Xiaoping was the largest after Mao's in Communist China – and probably also the last great funeral along the line of ancient imperial tradition, the authorities were quite aware of the high risk of public mourning: The emotional public outpouring of grief at Mao's death had brought the country to a standstill; the thousands of people mourning the late Premier Zhou Enlai and placing countless wreaths in Tian'anmen Square in 1976, on grave-sweeping-day while protesting against the growing power of the "Gang

of Four” – clashed with militia members and police; the memorial service for General Secretary Hu Yaobang in 1989 – giving way to pro-democracy protest – ended up in a bloody military intervention and a huge setback in the development of modern China. Thus they tried to prevent public emotion: “The Party Central Committee calls on the whole party, the whole army and the people of various ethnic groups to turn grief into strength, carry forward Comrade Deng Xiaoping’s behest and express our mourning with our concrete actions in redoubling our efforts to do work well in various aspects”(Mufson 1997a), Xinhua stated. On the other hand, the political strategy behind the arrangements of mourning services still followed the important symbolism of highlighting the role of the (legitimate) successor.

The late Deng Xiaoping had insisted on a simple funeral with his corneas being donated to an eye-bank and his ashes cast into the sea. Deng Xiaoping said in 1989, “in assessing me, don’t exaggerate. Some put me above Chairman Mao; this isn’t good. I’m afraid of this sort of thing; too much prestige is a burden. I want to retire simply and after I die I want a simple funeral, I beg you all” (Associated Press Worldstream 02/20/1997).

Against the backdrop of the profound meaning of death ritual, the authorities tried to keep mourning services for the late Deng Xiaoping as simple as possible – to minimize the threatening potential of public mourning, to maximize the political outcome for a stronger position of the successor. The funeral committee was made up out of members of the Communist Party’s Central Committee, the National People’s Congress, the State Council and the Central Military Commission, altogether 459 officials – more than twice the number of the Central Committee’s members were appointed to this committee. As usual an obituary was released, praising the achievements of the late party leader, and again, the committee declared that no foreign dignitaries and no foreign media would be allowed to attend the funeral and mourning ceremonies. The relevant statement carried by Xinhua on February 20, said that in accordance with China’s practice, foreign governments, political parties and friendly personages would not be invited to send delegations or representatives to attend the mourning activities. Instead, Chinese embassies were being asked to prepare to receive condolences. Foreign journalists were notified that they would not be allowed to cover the event; this media ban also included reporters from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. A six-day mourning period was ordered. The only event open to the carefully supervised public was the transfer of Deng’s body from the hospital to the crematory prior to the final official memorial service. The memorial service at the Great Hall was broadcast on all eight Chinese Television channels and on radio live across the country; the committee stated that officials and the masses should be organized to listen to or to watch the live transmission of the memorial meeting at the Great Hall in their

working units. After the funeral, Deng's ashes were to be scattered at sea according to his last wish.

On February 25, at 10 o'clock in the morning, the funeral service for the last eminent figure of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was held in the Great Hall of the People, at Tian'anmen Square, where an urn with Deng's ashes was displayed. The ceremony was led by President Jiang Zemin. And again – as in former times – the ritual aimed at highlighting the role of the successor, legitimizing the rightful heir to the throne.

The ceremony began with a three minutes' silence while throughout the country sirens were sounding as a sign of respect. After the national anthem, Jiang Zemin delivered a 50-minute eulogy to the late party leader. 10,000 carefully invited mourners attended the ceremonies, all former and current top officials with no international dignitaries or international press witnessing. Thus Jiang Zemin followed the path of Deng Xiaoping. There was no need to have foreigners there, the ritual still being a sign strongly demonstrating the stabilization of the Chinese society and the claim of power within the country. The message was clear:

“The funeral will not only be the closing political act for Deng, who entered politics in mid-teens, but it will also be the opening act in a highly political year that will climax in a major Communist Party congress in the fall that is expected to reshuffle several of the top government and party posts. For President and party chief Jiang, Deng's funeral offers an opportunity to further cement his position as the country's top leader. Jiang will be seen on national television inheriting the mantle of leadership from the man who handpicked him in 1989, and leading the Communist Party's call to rally around flag, party and leadership.” (Mufson 1997b)

## CONCLUSION

The “Treaty Century” after 1842 in China has brought along an era of foreign participation in the life of the Chinese people and is considered an era of international history as well as of Chinese history. It is a “high point of cultural interchange in world history” (Fairbank/Goldman 1998: 205).

With the establishment of diplomatic missions in China, the foreigners could not be neglected any longer. The empire was weakened and in decline. When the diplomatic body requested its participation at the imperial funeral rites at the death of the Emperor Guangxu and of the Empress Dowager Cixi, the Chinese Court did not dare to refuse. But the first official participation of representatives of western countries at the last two imperial funerals in China stayed singular and outstanding until today.

A close view on the death rituals for the last two important figures of imperial China and the last two eminent personalities of modern China shows that, despite

the changing position and the active role of China within the international world of today, China still sticks to her own cultural roots, to the tradition of strong symbols. [...] “mourning itself enabled a new emperor to affirm simultaneously the cardinality of filial piety and, by taking the role of chief mourner, his right to the throne” (Rawski 1988b: 253). In imperial China, ritual clearly was “both subject to, and also a central instrument of, bureaucratic administration [...]. Ritual appears to have been distinguished from other branches of government only in being its highest form” (Laidlaw 1999:404–405). Death ritual traditionally was and still is a key in the question of authority, of legitimacy. It is a means to show the rightful succession in power within the remaining community.

While today, it is international common practice that heads of states show respect and solidarity in mourning by their personal presence at the funeral ceremonies of another late state leader, China still keeps the Chineseness of this ritual – despite the increasing openness to foreign contacts during the last years of the recent century.

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