

# コラム Column

豊橋市国際交流員のパーリーン・パーオさんのコラムをお届けします。

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## 第4回 “It was autumn, the springtime of death.” 「秋は死の春期である。」-Tom Robbins 作家トム・ロビンズ

After what seemed like an eternity of summer, the heat has slowly subsided. The days are suddenly shorter, but the weather pleasant. As the autumn leaves fall, I can't help but be stunned by the beauty and wonder if autumn is, in fact, the springtime of death. Death is a phenomenon that is shared across all cultures. How we deal with death, however, is distinct even from person to person. The movie Departures, or Okuribito, showed the world how the traditional Japanese handle the loss of a loved one in Japanese death rituals, which are relatively peaceful and calm; however, what surprised me the most about a Japanese wake is the fact that guests are given gifts from the family of the deceased. It boggles my mind to think that even after dealing with a death in the family and the mental, emotional and financial stress that is caused, the Japanese are still bound to serve their guests in the best way they can.

On the other hand, I grew up in a place where death rituals are an extremely noisy affair. There are a few different types of wakes according to the religion of the deceased, but I was exposed to the Buddhist type of death rituals the most. Since most Singaporeans live in high-rise apartments, these Buddhist wakes are usually held on the first storey of the building that the deceased was living in or in the neighbourhood's multi-function hall. Prayers offered by the monks for the deceased are usually accompanied by loud music played on the gong, flute and trumpet. The rituals last as long as 3-7 days, depending on the financial situation of the family members. Condolence money is also offered to the family of the deceased, similar to the Japanese tradition. In addition, incense, joss paper, etc. are burned continuously during the wake to provide the deceased with sufficient income in the afterlife, which usually meant that the surrounding area would be engulfed by smoke and unpleasant during that funeral.

The Japanese observed Obon in August 13-15 this year, welcoming the souls of their loved ones who have since passed. The observance of obon is peaceful and the days pass without much fuss. On the other hand, in Singapore, a similar event is not as peaceful. The 7th month of the lunar calendar is Ghost Month for most of the Chinese Singaporeans, when the deceased visit their living relatives. In contrast to the peaceful obon, free live entertainment shows are held at night in many different areas during the Ghost month, where the first row of seats is usually left empty for the ghosts. These performances are usually loud as it attracts and pleases the ghosts. Food and drinks are offered to the spirits, just like in Obon. In addition, paper joss items such as paper houses, cars, electronics or jewellery, etc. are burned to please the ghosts. Although I am not superstitious, the festivities during August create a lively, while slightly creepy, atmosphere that can be enjoyed by everyone, alive or in spirit.

Some people say that funerals are for us, the living, and not them, the dead. As the autumn replaces the greenery of summer, and we embrace and witness the gradual touch of death, let us remember that life, regardless of race or nationality, is as the Bible says, 'like a morning fog'. It is my deepest wish that we will treat each other with respect, the knowledge that everyone is essentially the same, help each other out and create a better world for everyone.

日毎に蝉も落ちつき、暑さも少しずつ弱まり、長い夏も終わりそうです。日の入りが早くなり、気持ちの良い風も吹いています。紅葉が始まり、私はその美しさに心を打たれました。同時に、「秋は死の春期である」という言葉を実感しました。人間は、誰にでも死が訪れます。しかし、死に立ち向かう方法は人により違います。映画「おくりびと」は、日本の葬儀の様子を世界の人たちに伝えました。葬式は穏やかで静かに行われますが、その中で私が驚いたのは香典返しです。遺族は精神や感情だけでなく、家計にも負担がかかるはずなのに、来客にも出来る限りの配慮をしようとしている姿は、まさに日本人のおもてなしの精神を表していると思いました。

一方、私が育った環境では、葬式はうるさく派手な行事です。多民族国家であるシンガポールは葬式も多文化的ですが、私にとって一番身近な葬式は仏教です。多くの人は高層マンションに住んでいるため、葬式も故人が住んでいたマンションの一階や近くの多目的ホールで行われます。毎晩、お坊さんがお経を唱えながら、ゴング、笛、トランペット等を組み合わせ合わせてバンド演奏します。葬式は3日~7日間行われます。日本と同じように、香典は遺族に渡します。故人が来生でも余裕をもって生活できるように、線香や冥銭等を葬式の間ずっと焚きます。

また、日本で毎年8月13日~15日に行われるお盆は亡くなった祖先の霊が子孫のもとを訪れます。お盆は平和的ですが、シンガポールの同様の祝祭はまったく逆です。シンガポールの中華系の人たちにとって旧暦の7月(新暦の8月中旬)は「幽霊の月」と呼ばれています。ご先祖様だけでなく、色々な幽霊が帰ってきてしまうのです。幽霊の月には、夜に色々な地域でライブやショーが無料で開催され、一番前の客席は幽霊のために空けてあります。幽霊が楽しめるよう、ライブは必ず大きい音で演奏されます。日本のお盆と同様に、食べ物や飲み物等の供物を供えます。その他、冥銭や紙でできた日用品や家、車、電気、ジュエリー等は幽霊のために焚きます。迷信を信じていない私にとって8月は少し気味が悪くても、賑やかで皆が一緒に楽しめる時期です。

葬式は遺族のために行われるという言葉をよく聞きます。秋が徐々に夏の緑にとって代わり、死の手が少しずつ現れ、国籍や民族を超えて誰の命でも聖書にあるように「朝の霧のように」短いように感じます。「人は誰でも基本的には同じ」という考えをもち、お互いに尊敬し助け合い、もっと良い世界を作りましょう。

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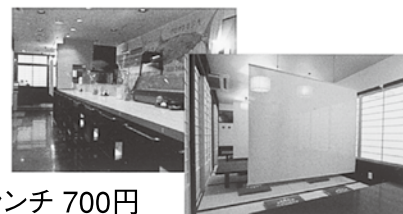
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