

A Qualitative Study on the Death Attitudes of Old Buddhist Believers in Rural Areas of Zhejiang Province

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Abstract

Objective To explore the inner feelings and real attitudes of the rural senior citizens Buddhist believers towards death, as well as their expectations for the excellent death, so as to provide reference for the work of death education and hospice care for the rural elderly. Methods from March to June 2021, 19 elderly people who believed in Buddhism in rural areas of Quzhou City, Zhejiang Province were interviewed face to face with semi-structured interview to understand their attitudes towards death. The data were analyzed by Colaizzi 7-step analysis method. Results through sorting, analyzing and refining, the senior citizens attitude towards death can be summarized into six themes: negative attitude towards death; Not actively thinking about the cause of death; Suicidal thoughts linger; Practicing Buddhist rituals to ease the anxiety of death; Positive attitude towards life; Hope for the best. Conclusion most of senior citizens Buddhist believers in rural areas hold the attitude of karmic avoidance, extreme fear, reincarnation acceptance and Escape from misery, and hope to live happily in their later years. It can not be ignored that there are still some old people who tend to commit suicide. All sectors of society should take the initiative to pay attention to the inner feelings of senior citizens and help them establish a scientific outlook on life and death.

Keywords: Rural area;The elderly;Death attitude;Buddhism;Qualitative research

1. Introduction

Global aging is becoming increasingly severe. According to the seventh national census, there are approximately 190 million people aged 65 and over in my country, accounting for 13.5% of the country's total population. my country has become the country with the largest number of elderly people in the world, and one of the countries with the fastest population aging development^[1].

Compared with cities, the current situation of rural aging is more severe, and the number of elderly suicides is also increasing year by year^[2]. Therefore, it is particularly urgent to carry out Death education for senior citizens in rural areas. Due to the influence of the traditional Chinese view of life and death of "Enjoy Life and Death"^[3], there are few related researches on death. my country's Buddhist culture is a folk culture that has been accumulated among the people through a long history. It is a true reflection of the people's expectations, needs and ideals, and it directly shows the people's psychology and emotions^[4]. For thousands of years, Buddhism culture has become one of the cultural genes of the Chinese nation, the belief tradition of the nation and folks, and the most inherited and influential folk culture. Therefore, the view of life and death of the rural elderly is deeply rooted in Buddhist culture. Therefore, the author believes that qualitative research can dig out more profound problems, and adopts qualitative research method to study the death attitude of rural elderly in Quzhou, Zhejiang Province, aiming to provide a basis for carrying out death education for rural old people.

2. Research Objects and Methods

2.1. Research objects

The author selects a total of 22 eligible rural elderly people in Quzhou, Zhejiang Province were selected using the purpose sampling method, from March to June of 2021. Guided by the phenomenological research method. The purpose sampling method is adopted, and the interview is completed when the qualitative research data is saturated^[5]. Screen the selected subjects and set the inclusion criteria: : rural resident population, believers in Buddhism, age ≥ 60 years, and volunteers to be interviewed. Exclusion criteria: suffering from mental illness, intellectual disability, communication disability or dying. The general information of the interviewees is shown in Table 1

Table 1 General information of the interviewee

| No. | Age | Gender | Conscious health status | Approximate time to believe in Buddhism (years) Number of visits to temples since last year (years) |
|-----|-----|--------|-------------------------|---|
| N1 | 89 | Male | Healthy | Since childhood |
| N2 | 88 | Male | Normal | Since childhood |
| N3 | 83 | Male | Normal | Since childhood |
| N4 | 79 | Male | Normal | Since childhood |
| N5 | 91 | Female | Healthy | Since childhood |
| N6 | 90 | Female | Normal | Since childhood |
| N7 | 86 | Female | Health | Since childhood |
| N8 | 77 | Female | Health | 40 |
| N9 | 64 | Male | Health | Since childhood |
| N10 | 78 | Female | Health | Since childhood |
| N11 | 81 | Female | Poor | Since childhood |
| N12 | 83 | Female | Health | Since childhood |
| N13 | 78 | Female | Health | Since childhood |
| N14 | 61 | Female | Health | Since childhood |
| N15 | 65 | Female | Health | Since childhood |
| N16 | 70 | Female | Health | Since childhood |
| N17 | 63 | Female | Health | Since childhood |
| N18 | 62 | Female | Normal | 22 |
| N19 | 60 | Male | Healthy | Since childhood |

2.2. Method

2.2.1. Survey tools

This study is based on the literature review method and the STAR tool^[6] to initially develop the interview outline. After two rounds of expert consultation and pre-interview with three senior citizens, the interview outline is finally determined. Including:

- ① What do you think of death?
- ② What do you think about other old people's "suicide" behavior? If you can choose, how do you want to leave the world?
- ③ Do you think people will go to another world after death?
- ④ What are the main ways or methods to relieve death anxiety?
- ⑤ How do you hope to spend the rest of your life?
- ⑥ What kind of medical care do you hope to get in the end of life?
- ⑦ Do you have anything else to say to us?

2.2.2. Data collection method

This study uses face-to-face semi-structured depth interview to collect data. Before the interview, the researcher established a trust relationship with the interviewee, explained the purpose of this research, confidentiality principles, recording and other issues, and signed Study the informed consent form^[5], and conduct the interview at the agreed time and place for the interview. Researchers are trained before the interview, and the interview skills are practiced in the pre-interview. During the interview, the researcher listened attentively, respond promptly, and provided emotional support in a timely manner. The duration of an interview is approximately 60-90 minutes. Among the twenty two senior citizens interviewed, two people withdrew due to emotional fluctuations, and one left because of an emergency at home.

2.2.3. Data analysis

Write interview notes within 24 hours after each interview, record non-verbal information, environmental information, etc. At the same time, the recording content was transcribed into a text manuscript, and other researchers were asked to check and correct, mark the interview time, location and situation, and conduct privacy treatment, and use the serial number N1-N19 to replace the name of the research object. Data collection and analysis are carried out simultaneously. The qualitative data is analyzed using the Colaizzi 7-step analysis method^[5], and the theme is extracted. ① Read the interview records carefully and repeatedly; ② Refine the information; ③ Code the opinions of the research value; ④ After the collection and coding ⑤ Write a detailed description; ⑥ Sublimation theme; ⑦ Finally return to the interviewee for verification.

2.2.4. Quality control

① After reviewing the literature and after two rounds of expert consultation, formulate the final interview manuscript; ② The official interview time is guaranteed to be more than 60 minutes; ③ The researcher transcribes the interview on the same day, and returns to the research subject to check the authenticity after finishing; ④ The research team will analyze the same data together.

3. results

3.1. Negative attitude towards death

3.1.1. Karma avoidance

This study found that the vast majority of senior citizens have an avoidance attitude towards death, especially when referring to themselves. N5 (frowning): "Nothing to talk about." N10 (waves his hands repeatedly): "Talking about this topic, the Bodhisattva is afraid to blame me." N13: "I am born with a path he should take, think about this Do you want to defy the destiny?"

3.1.2. Extreme Fear

Some interviewees expressed that they are very afraid of their own death. N16: "How can people not be afraid of death? Those who say they are not afraid of death must be deceiving people!" N6: "Last year, I had a serious illness, but I was lucky. The rescue is in time. I'm still scared now. Sometimes I'm too afraid to close my eyes and I'm afraid I won't wake up again." N3: "As long as I feel a little uncomfortable, my child will send me to the hospital, even if the doctor says I am It's okay, I also have to fight to live in the ICU ward."

3.1.3. Acceptance of reincarnation

Some interviewees said that life is a destined reincarnation and cannot stop the arrival of death. Death is the passage to the afterlife. N8 (calm face): "When it's my turn, it's the end of this life, and it's time to go to the next life." N1: "Human! You should go to the underworld to line up after a walk in this world."

3.1.4. Escape from misery

Some interviewees said that death can help them escape from the difficulties of real life. N13: "If you die, you don't have to worry about the trivial things at home." N10: "You have died a hundred, otherwise you have to think about paying off your debts every day. It's a good thing to go to Xitian to see the Buddha earlier."

3.2. Not actively thinking about the cause of death

3.2.1. Daily taboos

Most interviewees said that they are very taboo about death in their daily lives. N2 (frowning): "I usually see sacrifices, and I feel uncomfortable." N7 (waves my hand again and again): "When I see the funeral procession, I will quickly close the door to avoid entering the house in bad luck." N19 (shaking his head, Sigh): "There are many deaths in the hospital, and I don't want to go when I'm sick."

3.2.2. Blindly optimistic

Some interviewees said that their bodies are very healthy, death is too far away from them, and the Bodhisattva is always blessing him, he does not need to think about this. N1: "I'm still doing farm work in the field, digging fields, fertilizing, etc. It's no problem at all. How could I die!" N9: "I went to the x temple a few days ago and asked for amulets, my Bodhisattva will bless you Mine. "N19: Why do you want to die? Do you think it's a problem? I don't have any serious problems with my body now. Last time I was told by a fortune teller that I could live more than 90 years old."

3.2.3. Death reminder

Most interviewees said that death is an irresistible natural development process, but they would not take the initiative to think about this aspect. Only when they saw the death of others, especially when they saw the death of an elderly person of their own age, or It is when I am sick that I think of my own death. N17: "I don't usually think about this kind of topic. I only think of myself when I see someone about my age pass away."

3.3. Suicidal thoughts linger

The vast majority of interviewees stated that they are neutral on the suicidal behavior of others, but will not take extreme measures to end their lives. Among the 19 interviewers, 7 mentioned suicide and suicidal thoughts. The main reasons for their thoughts are as follows:

3.3.1. Escape from suffering and suffering

Some interviewees with suicidal thoughts said that long-term illness has consumed their hope of survival. N11 (hidden face and sobbed): "It hurts all over. I am being tortured when I live, but my grandson is too young, and no one will take care of him when I die." N17 (gasp, shake his head): "When I am sick, I can't breathe at all, and feel that sooner or later I will be suffocated alive!"

3.3.2. Revenge for posterity

Some interviewees said that their family interpersonal relations are tense, making themselves suicidal. N8 (full of anger): "I gave birth to a beast and stole my coffin to gamble on money."

I don't want to live anymore." N4: "My son and daughter-in-law don't care about me. I am disgusted every day at home." N14 (excited) : "If you want to drink pesticides, you just die, so that they can bear the reputation of being unfilial."

3.3.3 . Stay away from loneliness and loneliness

Some interviewees said that they have no children, have no concerns in this world, and do not know how to deal with boring and lonely days. N7: "Every day is boring, walking back and forth on these small roads, I hope the Buddha will take my lonely soul soon!". N9: "Life is hard, people don't need to live so long, it's better to be rescued by the Buddha earlier."

3.3.4. Practicing Buddhist rituals to relieve death anxiety

Worship to the gods Daily worship to the gods is the main way to alleviate death anxiety. Almost all the interviewees said that they are physically and mentally incomparable when "Called jai"(be a vegetarian for religious reasons), listening to Buddhist music, worshiping the gods, chanting, and meditation. Relax. N2: "When I was chanting, I felt that the Buddha was talking to me. After he finished speaking with me, the feeling of boredom in my heart became much better." N7: "When I can't sleep, I get up and worship the person in the living room. Bodhisattva, listen to the music of the Buddha, and you can fall asleep soon." N17: "I have to eat fasts on the first and fifteenth day of the lunar new year. Eating fasts is to accumulate virtue for myself and my descendants. I believe that when I leave, the Bodhisattva will If I accompany me on the road to Huang quan, my children and grandchildren will also be taken care of by the Bodhisattva."

4.4.2 Belief in the afterlife

During the interview, it was found that many interviewees believed that there was a world after death. This belief greatly eased their death anxiety. Some interviewees said that they thought of being able to reunite with their deceased relatives after death. Death is worth looking forward to. N9: "Many things cannot be explained by existing science. I believe that I can get together with my deceased wife after death." Some old people talked about going to Xitian to meet Buddha, and death is not terrible. N8: " my Buddha is compassionate, and my heart yearns for it." There are also senior citizens who have the idea of early death and early reincarnation. They think that it is a good thing to complete the reincarnation early and end the suffering. N10: "After people leave, someone from the prefecture will bring them."

3.5. Positive attitude towards life

3.5.1. Labor is the inertia of life

The vast majority of interviewees in society expressed their hope that they can continue to work while they are able to take care of themselves. N19: "I've been used to work all my life, and now I can't let go of "this axe" when I'm old." N1: "I have nothing to do when I am idle, and I feel uncomfortable." N15: "We can earn money to support ourselves. When speaking in front of your children, you can straighten up a little bit!"

3.5.2. Busy life can alleviate death anxiety

Some interviewees said that they would use daily activities to relieve anxiety. N13: "Go to the fields to grow vegetables or do some other farming work, to keep myself busy and to save yourself from thinking about it." N14: "I will transport the chickens and ducks I raise to the market to sell, earn a small amount of money, while I still work. When you have to move, save some gift money for your grandson, so you can live with hope."

3.5.3. Learn new things and stay young

Among the 19 interviewees, 10 elderly people expressed the hope that they can learn to use smart-phones. N1: "Looking at how convenient you young people use mobile phones, I also want to learn." N13: "My friend can listen to Peking Opera on mobile phones, and I can only use radio." N7: "My daughter taught me to use WeChat to video chat. Now we often video chat."

3.6 Expectation to die

3.6.1. Way of death

Regarding the way of death, most interviewees believe that the best way to die is to leave the world in a comfortable, pain-free sleep, accompanied by a psychic goddess or monk to help them recite the "death words".

N8: "There is a goddess who reads words to myself, and I feel that my soul is accompanied on the way to the underworld. At the same time, elderly people who have been bedridden for a long time and become family burdens are considered to have the worst quality of death. N18 (eyes flooded with tears):" I'm paralyzed in bed, I have to wait for my excrement and urine, I don't have dignity, my family is tired, so let's go early. "In addition, many interviewees expressed that they do not want to receive excessive medical care measures in the end of life. N6: "People always have to go. There is no need to suffer for that time. "

3.6.2. Place of death

Most interviewees can get special care at home when they cannot take care of themselves. N6: "I still prefer to stay at home, hoping to die at home, N8: "I don't have my own home anywhere, so I can walk safely at home. "But there are also some interviewees who have no one to look after, such as those who are unmarried all their lives and whose children have passed away early, hoping to die in a hospital or nursing home. N7 (sighs): "There is no one in my home, and my neighbors are almost gone. Yes, if a person dies at home, I am afraid that no one will collect the body for me. "

3.6.3 Arrangements for funerals

Most interviewees expressed their hope that their funerals can be held in a grand and polite manner. N16: "Whatever you do, it means you are not filial, and you have to be scolded by neighbors in the neighborhood!" N12: "If there is a little pomp, I will walk with face." A few interviewees said that it doesn't matter, according to their children's own wishes. make arrangements for. N5: "Everyone is gone, so they can do whatever they want with their children!"

4 Discussion

4.1 Carry out death education of Buddhist culture with Chinese characteristics

This study found that most of the rural old Buddhist believers interviewed hold an avoidant and fearful attitude towards death, which is consistent with most studies^[7,8,9]. It should not be ignored that some rural elderly people will "free", The idea of "excuse from death" to escape the pain in real life, and even regard death as a means to retaliate against others and escape from real life. Pesticides, hunger strikes, refusal of medical treatment, etc.^[9] are common phenomena. How to guide the rural elderly in our country to establish a good, A healthy attitude towards death is one of the important issues for good old-age care. In addition, this study found that most of the rural elderly Buddhist believers interviewed held a vague attitude towards Buddhism, and only regarded Buddhism as their main way to relieve death anxiety. Western Christianity regards survival as suffering, and even life is worse than death. It cannot be "liberated" until after death^[10]. Compared with Britain, which is dominated by Christianity, my country's death culture incorporates the Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucian beliefs about death. Buddhism regards transcending death as the ultimate goal of life; Taoism believes that life and death are natural and should be treated with confidence; Confucianism The "three immortals" means "dealing, meritorious, and advocating" to confront death with a positive attitude of joining the WTO^[11]. Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism continue to collide and merge with each other along with the history of our country's development, creating a unique view of the death of the Chinese elderly. The daily Buddhist practice methods such as "Called jai", listening to Buddhist music, and worshipping are very popular among senior citizens in rural areas. Therefore, the method of death education for senior citizens can be combined with the daily practice of Buddhism. This study also found that the longer you believe in Buddhism and the more religious you are, the more you believe in the afterlife after death, which is consistent with the research of MacLeod^[12,13]. In addition, the expectation of being able to meet with relatives after death also makes senior citizens more able to face death more calmly.

Therefore, actively constructing and perfecting a death education system in line with the background of Chinese characteristic Buddhist culture is the direction that Chinese scholars are striving to move forward.

4.2 Pay attention to the construction of the spiritual home of the rural elderly

This study found that rural elderly people generally have an empty and barren spiritual world, and lonely and hopeless senior citizens have serious suicidal tendencies. In addition to family harmony, various social activities can also improve the quality of life of senior citizens in their later years^[14,15,16,17]. Organizing and carrying out various recreational activities This study found that most rural senior citizens said that there are few recreational activities in rural areas, and hope that their recreational life in their later years is rich and colorful, which is consistent with the research of Qianpin^[16,17].

For example, organize and carry out entertainment activities for senior citizens such as theater performances, chess, and square dancing. Encourage senior citizens to actively participate in recreational activities, and meanwhile, take the initiative to care about the inner feelings of the elderly, listen to the distress of their later life, and guide them to establish a correct view of life and death.

Carrying out the "Volunteer Service Activities for senior citizens in Rural Areas" Divide senior citizens into optimistic and pessimistic elders according to their psychological state, focus on the pessimistic elders group, organize the optimistic and self-care elders to visit the pessimistic elders group, at the same time, people from all walks of life are encouraged to actively participate in voluntary service activities for senior citizens in rural areas, such as helping senior citizens learn the simple use of smart phones, and promoting health care knowledge. In addition, this research shows that some rural elderly people want to continue to participate in social work. Therefore, the development of the "silver economy"^[18] also to be particularly important. Localities adapt measures to local conditions and rely on local cultural characteristics to develop senior citizens economy to meet the financial independence needs of some old people with good physical and mental health. For example, they are engaged in handicraft production, vegetable and fruit planting, and light physical work such as courier collection.

4.3 Encourage Advance Care Planning of medical care plans

The Advance Care Planning refers to the medical care measures that the individual wishes to obtain in the end-of-life period to the medical staff and family members when the individual has a clear consciousness and has the ability to make behavioral decisions^[19].

This study found that most of the interviewees not only had Buddhist cultural features and expectations about the method of death, place of death, and funeral arrangements, but they did not take the initiative to talk about it with others. Most of the interviewees choose to stay at home. Some elderly people living alone hope to stay in a hospital or nursing home, but almost all old people want to die in a comfortable sleep. Therefore, caregivers should take the initiative to understand the senior citizens arrangements for their own death, and try their best to meet the needs of the elderly, such as reducing pain and accompanying children. In addition, many interviewees expressed that they were unwilling to accept excessive treatment and hoped that they could die safely, which is consistent with most studies^[20,21]. Regrettably, "euthanasia" in our country has not been legislated^[22]. The situation is even more difficult. The survey also found that the families of rural senior citizens do not allow the dying aged to give up hope of treatment. This may be related to traditional ideas such as the "filial piety culture" in my country. Therefore, to help senior citizens in rural areas realize their deaths, it is necessary not only to do a good job in the ideological work of senior citizens, but also to do a good job in the ideological work of the relatives of the elderly. It is worth learning that Advance Care Planning^[23] are popular with patients and are widely used in various medical places. Therefore, encouraging senior citizens to ACP and create a corresponding medical environment will help senior citizens to achieve their ideals of death to a large extent.

5. Conclusion

"Enjoying life and fearing death" is a traditional Chinese culture. Although the vast majority of old Buddhist believers in rural areas rationally know that death is a normal process of life, their attitude towards death is mainly taboo and fear. This study also shows that daily Buddhist practice methods such as "Called jai", listening to Buddhist music, and worshipping are the main ways for old Buddhist believers to alleviate death anxiety. Therefore, it is very meaningful to carry out death education under the background of Chinese characteristic Buddhist culture for senior citizens Buddhist believers in rural areas. Limitations of this study: The research object is limited to the Quzhou area of Zhejiang Province, which has geographical limitations; the study uses purpose sampling, which is not widely representative.

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