

《英语新闻：安徽“掘墓焚尸”揭政策漏洞》

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Anhui incident exposes gap in burial policy

Authorities in Anhui province said on Monday that they are looking into a dispute that has erupted after officials exhumed and cremated a body without the permission of the dead person's family.

The case exposed administrative problems and legal loopholes that challenge China's efforts to move from a burial culture to one of cremation in order to save land, experts said.

The controversy began after Cheng Chaomu, 83, died in Qinfeng village in Jingxian county on Dec 13. His family buried him three days later, saying it was his dying wish.

Shortly after the burial, the family received an order from the Jingxian county civil affairs bureau demanding they make proper cremation arrangements.

On Dec 19, county officials, police and firefighters went to Qinfeng, exhumed the body and burned it.

Under national law, cremation is mandatory in "cremation zones". Local governments can divide their administrative regions into cremation and burial zones, with most burial zones being in less-populated, economically disadvantaged areas, and most cremation zones being in cities.

In the Jingxian case, "They just dug it up, poured on two barrels of diesel and set it on fire," said Cheng Yingfu, Cheng Chaomu's oldest son.

He said no family members were present when the body was exhumed.

Footage from Anhui TV showed a clash between villagers and police after the forced cremation.

The Jingxian county government declined to comment on the matter on Monday. A spokesman from the county's public security bureau said he was unaware of the case.

The Mirror newspaper in Beijing quoted an unnamed county official as saying his authority was asked to report the incident to the provincial government, and a county representative has been summoned to Hefei, the provincial capital, to assist in the investigation.

The official said the county had been talking to family members to reach a settlement, and he insisted they were told ahead of time of the cremation plans.

Cheng's family said the county government acted in "retribution" for a dispute last year over relocation compensation, saying other households had buried loved ones without being punished.

Bao Yuan, director of the Huanqiu Funeral Institute, criticized the local officials' actions, saying, "Digging up a corpse and cremating it immediately at the burial plot was inhumane and showed little respect for the deceased and the family."

Although the case was "rare and extreme", it exposed problems in government administration, said Bao, who has studied funeral reform in China for more than 20 years.

The State Council, China's Cabinet, amended regulations on funeral management in 2012 by abandoning a rule that the government can resort to forced cremation if family members of the deceased refuse to cremate the body or bury the body in a designated cemetery.

However, the revised law failed to clarify the proper response for local governments if residents don't cooperate, Bao said. The result is chaos and inappropriate responses by local governments, he added.

Chen Chunlong, a law professor at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the family could potentially take the county civil affairs bureau to court.

However, the family said it is petitioning for the release of several people detained in the Dec 19 conflict instead.

Funeral reform

The central government asked Party members and government officials to take the lead in promoting the practice of cremation earlier this month.

The cremation rate dropped to 49.5 percent in 2012 from 53 in 2005, Civil Affairs Minister Li Liguo said on Wednesday.

He said promoting cremation is necessary to save land resources, protect arable land to ensure food safety, and to protect the environment.

China began to promote cremation in 1956 after 151 Party and central governmental officials signed an initiative to cremate their bodies and build no graves after their deaths, Li said.

China's funeral reform has faced challenges, including instances of some people in cremation zones secretly burying their relatives. Some officials abuse their power, building extravagant burial plots and holding banquets after the funeral to get envelopes filled of money from attendees, usually businessmen and subordinates, he said.

For these reasons, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council jointly issued guidance this month that require Party members and governmental officials to follow regulations on funerals and set an example for ordinary people.

The guidance stipulated that all Party members and governmental officials must choose cremation if conditions allow and hold a simply ceremony. Both Party members and government officials are encouraged to donate their organs and bodies after death.

