

Hmong fear for spirits of the dead after headstones moved

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) — The manager of a cemetery in central California said he will learn more about Hmong culture and traditions after an uproar on social media over headstones that were moved without the proper ritual.

Mountain View Cemetery manager Randy Giovannoni said staff moved four or five upright gravestones to dig a grave for a Hmong burial, *The Fresno Bee* reported.

Hmong believe that moving the headstones without proper ritual disturbs the spirits of the dead, and that could cause harm to living relatives, especially their grandchildren.

Giovannoni said he did not know moving headstones was problematic until a Hmong television station called him about photos of the headstones being shared hundreds of times on social media.

"The last thing I want to do is upset the Hmong community," Giovannoni said. "If this is a cultural issue, it was never brought to my attention. I felt like the guy



in Hawai'i (who mistakenly issued a missile alert)."

Youa Her of Fresno said she saw a photo

on Facebook that showed the headstone of her late husband, Seng Her, had been moved by several feet.

GRAVEYARD GAFFE. Youa Her of Fresno, California inspects the headstone of her late husband after it was moved back into position at Mountain View Cemetery in Fresno, California. The manager of the cemetery in central California says he will learn more about Hmong culture and traditions after an uproar on social media over headstones that were moved without proper Hmong ritual. (Lewis Griswold/The Fresno Bee via AP)

"I came here at 7:00am. I am very upset. I was in shock," she said.

She was one of a number of Hmong families who went to the cemetery to check on the headstones of their loved ones.

"I just saw it on social media," said Kabao Xiong of Fresno, who has several relatives buried there. "It's their home. It's not right to move it. They should notify the families so they are not in such shock."

Giovannoni said he will meet with a representative of the Hmong community to learn about cultural expectations and will make changes in procedures.

"If someone would have explained, I would have done something," Giovannoni said.

Omaha zoo puts red panda on display ahead of schedule

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium in Omaha has a panda on display — but not the black-and-white animal from China.

The *Omaha World-Herald* reported that the zoo has a red panda on display ahead of the completion of the zoo's new home for the animals — set to open in the spring — in its Asian Highlands exhibit.

Zoo officials say the two-year-old red panda named Tofu arrived from the Detroit Zoo in January. Tofu will eventually be joined by another female and a breeding male.

The Omaha zoo first acquired red pandas in 1987, then phased out the species in 1997.

Despite the name, red pandas aren't related to giant pandas. Red pandas are close relatives to raccoons, skunks, and weasels and are the size of a small raccoon.

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With Koreas Olympic thaw, war-split families want reunions

Continued from page 3

slew of unusual steps: a joint march with South Korea during the opening ceremony of the Winter Games; the formation of a combined Korean women's hockey team; and the dispatching of leader Kim Jong Un's sister as part of an Olympic delegation.

South Korea wants full-fledged, regular reunions, but North Korea has used the programs in the past as a way to win aid and concessions from the South. Experts say the North also worries expanded reunions would expose its citizens to influence from the more affluent South.

Past reunions typically involved hundreds of Koreans at the North's Diamond Mountain resort. The techniques of choosing participants differed: Seoul used a computerized lottery system, while the North reportedly picked citizens loyal to the Kim family's leadership. No Korean has ever gotten a second chance to meet a relative.

Before their 2015 meeting, the Koreans' most recent reunion program, Kang's family held a memorial service for Song every year because they thought him long dead. They said they heard from various people that he was conscripted into the North's army while on the way to school in the early months of the war, and that his unit was destroyed by American bombing.

But it was Song who looked for Kang's

family before the 2015 reunion.

By then, Song's parents and elder brother (Kang's husband) and the daughter Song had so enjoyed mounting on his shoulder — all of whom lived at the Gangneung house — had died. So Kang went to the North Korean mountain with her children who had never seen him and a nephew who remembered him as a boy.

"It was like meeting a man who had been dead," Kang says. "He left us when he was young ... Then I met him again when he became an old man with white hair. But he still resembles my mother-in-law so much, who was very beautiful."

Kang's 63-year-old son, Song Young-jin, attended that meeting and became attached to the uncle he never thought much about. "We want to see him 10 more times," he says.

Kang's neighbor, Kwon Sun Ku, 76, met his elder brother for three days at Diamond Mountain in 2005. He learned that his brother, Kwon Sun Oh, who disappeared during the war, had been living on the northern side of the divided Gangwon province, to which Gangneung city belongs. It would probably take an hour or so by car to reach his brother's place if there was no mine-strewn 2.5-mile-wide border.

"I want to exchange letters with him and meet him to find how he's been doing since lots of things have changed over the years," Kwon says.

Philippines objects to China's naming of undersea features

Continued from page 4

research missions in Benham Rise after officials said the Philippines' undisputed sovereign rights in the potentially oil- and gas-endowed body of water off its northeastern coast came under question.

The president followed up with a warning that he will order the navy to fire if other countries extract resources from within his country's exclusive economic zone, a 200-nautical mile stretch of sea where a coastal state has internationally recognized exclusive rights to exploit resources under a 1982 U.N. treaty.

Foreign ships can pass but cannot fish or extract oil and gas from the under the seabed.

There were no immediate comments from Chinese Embassy officials.

Chinese and Philippine officials met in Manila and discussed proposed joint projects in the South China Sea. They said China and Southeast Asian nations would begin negotiations early next month on a "code of conduct" aimed at reducing the risks of armed confrontations in the contested territories.

"Shirtless" Tongan skier, others "live to fight another day"

Continued from page 8

fighting for medals here, but it is good to feel this Olympic spirit. We have had a lot of bad news (in the world) recently, so it's good to keep up this Olympic spirit."

Madrazo was the last competitor to cross the finish line, proudly waving a Mexican flag he grabbed as he was heading to the homestretch.

As he crossed, Taufatofua was there to greet him with a hug.

"Pita and I hugged and said again, 'We live to fight another day,'" Madrazo said. "It made me cry. It was the best feeling ever."

The popular Taufatofua said he will be back. He plans to compete at the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo, but wouldn't say in what sport. He said it may be in something that includes water.

"Three Olympics, three different sports," he said. "Let's see if it can be done." For now, he has another goal.

"My focus right now is to help Tonga get rebuilt," Taufatofua said. "We got hit by a cyclone, so I want to focus on that."

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