



Qingming Meeting and Cemetery Ceremony in Linshui County

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Abstract

With the development of society, family awareness and spontaneous renewal of genealogy among the people in Linshui County have increased drastically. Many clans have begun to hold the Qingming Festival and Cemetery Ceremony again. Taking the Bao family in Linshui County as a case study and focusing on the Qingming Festival and Cemetery Ceremony activities, we analyze the historical changes in its operation mode and the reasons behind the rise and fall of the festival and its significance to the modern society.

Key words: Qingming festival; Cemetery ceremony; Cultural heritage; Social function

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There are fruitful results of researches on “Qingming Festival”. However, most of them focus on the festival in Huizhou area during the Qing Dynasty, and researches in Bayu area are still lacking. Studies on Qingming Festival are often add-ons to other studies and are rarely taken as an independent topic for in-depth and detailed researches. Most of the studies focus on the origin and the rise of Qingming Festival, the impact of the festival on the

society, and its classifications. Many clans in Sichuan and Chongqing have recently held Qingming Festival again. Though its form and content have changed drastically, the festival is being held annually and has become more and more important. It has a strong vitality as Chinese traditional culture. Why? How did the festival change and develop? What is its significant and value for modern society? Here, by investigating the chronical activities of Qingming Festival and Cemetery Ceremony in Linshui County, we analyze the historical changes in its operation mode, explore the reasons for its rise, and deliberate its significance to modern society.

I. OVERVIEW OF QINGMING FESTIVAL

1.1 Origin of Qingming and Qingming Festival

1.1.1 Origin of Qingming and Its Evolution

Qingming, also known as Ancestor Worship Day, Go for A Walk Day, or March Day, is around April 5th and is one of the four traditional sacrificial festivals of China. It is said that Qingming began with the etiquette of “Cemetery Ceremony” of the emperors and generals of the Zhou Dynasty. And later, as folks started to imitate the emperors, that day gradually became a fixed custom. Qingming is a natural solar term, as well as a traditional festival. It is integrated with Qingming, Hanshi (Cold Food), and Shangsi (Double Third) solar terms. (Hu, 2015) Hanshi was based on the story of Jie Zitui “cutting his thigh and fed the Duke” in the Spring and Autumn Period. During that time, Prince Chong²er (later the Duke Wen of Jin) of the Jin state fled. Due to food shortage, his attendant, Jie Zitui, cut off flesh from his thigh and gave it to the Prince. Later, when the Prince became the Duke, he rewarded all his subordinates, but Jie Zitui refused his kindness. The Duke set the mountain on fire in order to force Jie Zitui out. However, Jie Zitui and his mother did not come out and were burned to death. Duke Wen

of Jin regretted his decision and ordered that there would be no fire allowed and serve only cold food on that day to commemorate Jie Zitui. Since then, eating cold food has become the custom on Qingming. Shangsì was when people clean themselves (taking a bath) and ask for long-lasting health in the ancient time. It is mainly a sacrificial day. Because the three solar terms are close in time with similar activities, they were gradually integrated into one fold custom – Qingming Festival.

1.1.2 Qingming and Qingming Festival

With the combination of traditional villages and towns, the family awareness and the spontaneous renewal of genealogy among the people has increased, many clans have held Qingming Festival and Cemetery Ceremony activities again, and a gathered meal on that day has begun to rise in the rural areas. Qingming Festival is a meeting led by the patriarch in the ancestral temple on the day of Qingming. As a spontaneous fold clan organization, Qingming Festival has gathered people from all over the world to participate in ancestor worship ceremonies (tomb sweeping and sacrifice), discuss and solve family affairs together, and have a huge meal together. This festival has played a unique role in strengthening family ties and maintain family unity. However, it also comes with some negative impacts.

2. QINGMING FESTIVAL AND CEMETERY CEREMONY IN LINSHUI COUNTY

2.1 Chronical Transformation of Qingming Festival in Linshui County

2.1.1 Qingming Festival in Linshui County during the Ming and Qing Dynasties

Qingming Festival was relatively prosperous during this period. Most of the people in Linshui County were immigrants from Hunan and Guangzhou Provinces. At the end of the Ming Dynasty and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, Sichuan had suffered from natural disasters and wars, in addition to the epidemic of plague. The population of Sichuan had decreased significantly. The Qing government had advocated immigration moment of “Huguang filling Sichuan” in order to make up for the loss of population. According to the records of “Ba Xian Zhi (Ba County)” during the Republic of China, Sichuan locals were gone, and nine out of ten immigrants were from Hunan and Guangzhou Provinces since Zhang Xianzhong “slaughtered Shu region” in the late Ming Dynasty (Chongqing Yubei District Local Chronicles Compilation Committee, 1996). A large number of immigrants had settled in Linshui through this immigration movement. People from the same ethnic had stayed together (Linshui County Local Chronicles Compilation Committee, 2009), and the distribution of surnames had showed some regionality, such as Guojiapo (Guo’s hill), Wujiashan

(Wu’s mountain), and Lijiagou (Li’s gutter). People had come to unity unconsciously for the sake of survival and security. Chinese society has attached great importance to blood relations since ancient times, and the influence of clans cannot be underestimated. The best way to unite people was to organize clan activities, and Qingming Festival was a great choice.

The population had increased greatly during the reign of Emperor Qianlong, and clans in Linshui County began to build ancestral temples. The patriarch was in charge of the temple and had the power to exercise family law (Chen & Song, 2016). The clans had control over many activities at this time and over social organizations at the most basic level. The elders of clans were responsible for Qingming Festival. They had supervised the implementations of clan rules. In the “Pedigree of the Baos”, “(people) sat according to the order of generation.” (Bao, 2001) If one disobey, the clan leader has the right to dismiss him. The elders had also formulated the sacrificial rules of Qingming Festival. During the sacrificial ceremony, the patriarch of the ancestral temple would preside over the ceremony, recite the clan rules, burn incense and paper, and lead people (women were not allowed to participate at that time) to kneel down to their ancestors. Later, when resolving conflicts in the clan, some people would burn incense and paper and swear in front of the ancestor’s tomb in order to prove their innocence. The elders would judge the case according to the clan rules, and reasoning with both sides. This method was feudal. It is clear that Qingming Festival was a platform for the clan to manage its people; that is, clan activities can only be carried out after the consultation of the ancestral temple. The clan used and formulated rules to reconcile conflicts within the clan and maintain its rule of the feudal clan.

2.1.2 Qingming Festival from the Republic of China to the Founding of New China (PRC)

Qingming Festival during this period had deceased gradually. During Qingming Festival in the Republic of China, the patriarch would arrange sacrifices and banquet and gather the male of families for sacrificial ceremony in the ancestral temple. In 38th year of the Republic of China, there were 148 ancestral temples in Linshui County, with about 300 houses and 1250 mu (~666.667 m²) of farmland (Linshui County Local Chronicles Compilation Committee, 2009). Most of the ancestral temples were with the surnames of Li, Bao, Liu, and Qin. The ancestral temples were often named after the surname, such as “Bao’s Ancestral Temple”. Some of them were named with a beautiful vision for the future, such as Liu’s “Dunmu (honest and friendly) Temple”. Some of them were named after the immigration movement, such as Gan’s “Chengxian (inherit the ancestors) Temple” in Fusheng. The sacrificial procedures of Qingming Festival was similar to that before at this time. After the founding of new China, due to the advocacy of breaking “four olds” and changing customs during the Cultural Revolution,

most of the genealogies were lost or destroyed, the ancestral temples of surnames in Linshui County were destroyed, and Qingming Festival was forced to stop.

2.1.3 Qingming Festival since 1980s and 1990s

Since 1980s and 1990s, with the promotion of household contract system centered on the rural reform, the family awareness has been strengthened. The spontaneous renewal of genealogy in Linshui has prevailed, followed by increasing popularity of Qingming Festival in the rural areas. The compilation of genealogy was often proposed by renowned people in the clan and supported by the people. For example, the 12 volumes of “Pedigree of the Baos”, which was edited by Bao Kuiwen, contained more than ten thousand words. It described in details the immigrating process of the Bao family from Xiaogan, Hubei to Linshui, the family rules and instructions, and name list of people in the Bao family (Bao, 2001). Both the modern reprinted version of “Yulong (Jade Dragon) Manual of the Baos*Recorded by the Shangdangs” and “Pedigree of the Baos” published in 28th year of the Republic of China introduced the origin of the Baos in details. Bao Yuanheng, 12th grandson of Bao Zheng, responded to the call to migrate from Macheng County, Huangzhou to Ludongwan, Xingren Town, Linshui County. The compilation of genealogy has provided the basis for holding Qingming Festival, which has begun to prevail.

Taking the Baos in Shengping Village, Shizi Town, Linshui County, Sichuan Province as an example, we can get a glimpse of the modern process of Qingming Festival. The contents of the festival mainly include the followings:

2.1.3.1 Discuss Affairs in the Clan

During this time, the influence of clan has been greatly weakened. Unlike during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the clan did not hold much power, and the discussion was merely an initiative. Its discussion mainly focused on revision of genealogy and formulation of family rules, of which was not mandatory. Only male were allowed to participate in the deliberations in Qingming ancestral temple during the feudal period. With the development of the society, all people were allowed to participate in the discussion. In the “Pedigree of the Baos” edited by Bao Kuiwen, it said that people shall not commit crimes, take illegitimate occupations, or bully elders and young childrens (Bao, 2001).

2.1.3.2 Cemetery Ceremony and a Gathered Banquet

The ancestor worship ceremony of Qingming Festival was held in the temple, and tributes were placed on the table. The patriarch (Bao, 2001) lit the red candles, incense, and paper money enshrined in the main hall, then talked about new clan rules, and finally led the people kneel down and bow piously. The ceremony of kneeling to worship ancestors was spectacular and serious. People kneeled all over the ancestral temple. The clan leader took the lead, followed closely by the

people based on their seniority, to sweep the ancestors’ tomb and pay their respect. Later, they returned to the ancestral temple and had a big banquet together. Qingming Festival banquet was organized by the people in turn, and the funds were donated by the people in the clan. During the banquet, people took their seats based on their generations. They talked, laughed, and enjoyed the huge meal together.

We learn that During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Qingming Festival was a platform for clans to manage their people. Clans used and formulated rules to reconcile conflicts among the people and maintained its feudal ruling, with a great amount of “politics”. After the founding of new China, Qingming Festival disappeared for a long time due to various influences. With an increase of family awareness and the renewal of genealogy recently, Qingming Festival and Cemetery Ceremony had come back. Now it has become an important platform to unite the clan and enhance family unity.

3. IMPACT OF QINGMING FESTIVAL ON SOCIETY

Qingming Festival has had positive impacts on the modern society, but also brought some issues. We need to consider how to make the festival more peaceful and truly “Qingming (clear and bright)”.

3.1 Positive Impacts of Qingming Festival

3.1.1 Governance of the Basic-Level Society

Clan, village organization, and gentry section constitute important factors of rural social order (Yang, 2012). Clan is one of the three basic elements of maintaining rural social order. Qingming Festival, as spontaneous fold clan organization, has played an important role in standardizing the behavior of clan people and maintaining rural social order. The clan rules recorded in the “Pedigree of the Baos” in 28th year of the Republic of China has stated that the key idea of its family motto was that children and grandchildren shall be honest with clean hands, and shall not covet fame or wealth. Now the Bao clan has established its association. The annual ancestor worship activities will continue to inherit and carry forward its family style and family motto into the new era. For example, under the influence of family rules, Bao Yueding has voluntarily supported 16 widows and elders and raised 12 orphans in the past decades. These new rules and regulations follow the requirement of the development of the times closely and are conducive in building a harmonious and beautiful new society.

3.1.2 Cherish the Memory of the Deceased and Inspire the Love of Life

Offering sacrifices to ancestors during Qingming Festival is not only a continuation of the concept of respecting

ancestors but also a reproduction ceremony of a clan. “The Hundred Families in Linshui” has recorded the deeds of 22 people of the Baos in Linshui, who participated in the Anti-Japan War, the War of Liberation, and the Korean War (aka the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea) and sacrificed their lives for our country (Linshui County Party History and Local Chronicles Office, 2015). For example, Bao Kuiwen joined the Tongmenghui of China after studying in Japan and engaged in the revolutionary movement. His patriotism and willingness to sacrifice are worth learning. By telling the heroic deeds of the revolutionary martyrs and inheriting their patriotism during Qingming Festival not only stimulated the pride of the people but also let them value the victory of revolution more. It made them cherish the memory of past life and inspire their current lives, inherit and carry forward ancestors’ good characters, and enhance their respect and love for life, of which they will pass down from generation to generation.

3.1.3 Strengthening National Collectivity

The Chinese nation, including Chinese people and ethnic overseas, has always valued the traditional custom of offering sacrifices to ancestors during Qingming Festival greatly. The compilers of family genealogies have collected names of people with the same surname from all over the country and established a reliable historical basis for the pedigree of a family. People from all over the world and Chinese people and ethnic overseas were invited to attend Qingming Festival. Many of them travel long distances to return to hometown and worship their ancestors. Qingming Festival has become a symbol and sustenance of home (Dai, 2015). As the general manager of a travel agency in Gutian County, Fujian Province said in an interview, the company has received many “Tomb Sweeping and root searching groups” from Malaysia in recent years, and the number of people increases every year. Ethnic Chinese and people of the same clan worship their ancestors together to strengthen their awareness of communication and unity, enhance their sense of national cultural identity and national pride, and strengthen the national collectivity.

3.2 Negative Impacts of Qingming Festival

3.2.1 Increasing Trend of Keeping up With the Joneses

As a spontaneous folk clan organization, many clans have reorganized Qingming Festival and Cemetery Ceremony activities, and the banquet has sprung up in the rural areas. This has contributed to the trend of “keeping up with the Joneses” among people in the same clan and among different clans (Ji, 1997). Some clans would make great efforts for Qingming Festival, such as “Bei Bei Banquet” (popular in Sichuan), which has too many dishes. The clans often ignore the cost, make huge plans, and compare with each other to show the financial resources and prosperity of the clans.

3.2.2 Encourage the Idea of Superstition

Superstition has a very long history among people in Linshui. After the founding of new China, the government advocated atheism and emphasized elimination of superstition and establishment of a scientific way of living. Most superstitious activities were eliminated. But it soon revived and had a serious effect on people’s thoughts and behaviors. For example, on the day of Qingming Festival, the superstitious concept of immortality of the soul has deeply affected the people (Jiang, 2003). They often prepare luxurious sacrifices, hoping to receive blessing from their ancestors and pass their ancestors the (fake) money. These activities encourage feudal superstition.

Overall, Qingming Festival has both positive and negative effects on our society. We should treat these issues dialectically. We should keep up with the development of times, establish a correct concept of sacrifice, invent a new way of remembrance so that we can make Qingming Festival more peaceful and truly “Qingming (clear and bright)”.

4. CONCLUSIONS

“The major event of a country lies in sacrifice and war” has emphasized the importance of sacrifice and war to a country. Qingming Festival is closely related to sacrifices. Tomb Sweeping Day is not only a traditional custom of the Chinese nation but also an opportunity for people to remember their ancestors, cherish the deceased, and inspire their love for life. Recently, many clans in Sichuan and Chongqing have hold Qingming Festival again. Though its form and content has changed, but its vitality is still very strong. This article first describes the origin of Qingming Festival and its relation with society, then it describes the chronological changes of the festival in Linshui County in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the Republic of China and the founding of new China, and after the 1980s and 1990s, and finally it analyzes the impact of Qingming Festival on the modern society. However, due to the lack of data, it is difficult to describe the full picture of Qingming Festival. With limited information, we can only try to understand the process of local Qingming Festival through the Qingming Festival in Linshui County and descriptions of Cemetery Ceremony activities, study the chronological changes in the organizational mode and function of Qingming Festival, and enrich our understand the significant of Qingming Festival to the modern society.

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