

Subject: Qing Ming Festival - a little bit of culture

There are many interesting festivals in the Chinese Culture. One of them is the festival of Qing Ming or Tomb Sweeping Day. Interested to learn more about this Chinese festival?

An Introduction to Qing Ming Festival



One of the most important festival in the Chinese calendar is the Qing Ming or Tomb Sweeping Day.

The concept of filial piety or obedience to one's elderly or ancestors is a very important concept in the Chinese culture. Traditionally, the Chinese believed that the spirits of deceased ancestors will look after the family even when they are gone. Hence, offering of food and spirit money could keep them happy in the spiritual world, and in turn, the living family will continue to prosper through good harvests and more children from the ancestor's blessing.

Till today, this is still a very important cultural concept for the Chinese.

The ancestor's altar or photo is commonly found in the family home and offerings and incense is always provided.

Once a year, during Qing Ming, the Chinese visit their family graves to tend to any underbrush and weeds that has grown out of hand around the grave. Weeds are pulled, dirt swept away and joss sticks, food and paper money is offered to the departed.

Generally, a week before and two weeks after Qing Ming is acceptable to honor the ancestors at the temples, grave site or crematoriums. This is also a practical measure as these places will be utterly packed during Qing Ming and to spread the prayer days out makes a lot of practical sense.

Burial Traditions

In the early days, before the concept of cremation, dead Chinese are always buried. Middle income and well to do families will ensure the deceased get as good a coffin and as good a grave that they can afford. Even when they are old, sick and far away from home, they will try to return to their birthplace or hometown to spend their dying days, so that they can be buried at their hometown.

The Chinese believe that to be buried at one's hometown will mean that the spirit will rest well and in turn bless their surviving children and their families.

Today, due to globalization and the trend of cremation, being buried, especially in one's hometown, is no longer practical. Hence, in place, on the burial tablet or the ash holder, the hometown and birthplace is always inscribed in addition to the deceased name and date of birth and death, so that the spirit can find their way home.

Honoring Ancestors

Honoring ancestors begins with proper positioning of a gravesite and coffin. Rich families will believe in the concept of "feng shui", or geomancy and as far as possible, will choose an area that faces south, with groves of pine trees to create the best flow of cosmic energy required to keep ancestors happy.

A "happy ancestor" will in turn, bless the living family! Family members will visit the gravesite of their ancestors at least once a year to tend to the tombs, especially on Qing Ming. The Chinese will cook up good food to their ancestors at altar tables on Qing Ming in their homes. The food usually consists of chicken, eggs, or other dishes a deceased ancestor was fond of. Accompanied by rice, the dishes and eating utensils are carefully arranged according to a certain position so as to bring good luck.

Many times, incense or paper offerings are burnt and offered to the ancestors as well. These are known as "hell money" or "paper money" in the belief that the dead needs to spend money in their afterlife as well.

Family Traditions

Because many graves or crematoriums are located in remote locations, and sometimes a family has more than one grave to visit, a trip to clean and pray at ancestral graves during Qing Ming can be a trip at the crack of dawn and to end only late at last light.

Many times, this is a entire family trip, whereby parents will share the value of Qing Ming with their young children and impressing onto them the Chinese tradition of honoring their ancestors.

It is not uncommon to find traffic jams and chaotic mess at these remote temples, graveyards and crematoriums which are normally quiet throughout the entire year but tend to see massive crowd whenever Qing Ming comes about.



Want to learn more? Here are some helpful links:

<http://chineseculture.about.com/library/weekly/aa031201a.htm>

http://www.nychinatown.com/qing_ming_festival.htm

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qingming_Festival

http://www.edhelper.com/ReadingComprehension_42_12.html

<http://www.chinapage.com/festival/qingming.html>

<http://www.c-c-c.org/chineseculture/festival/qingming/qingming.html>

The information posted above was found at the following site:

http://www.chinese-culture.net/html/Qing_Ming.html

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