The Observation And Analysis Of Kinship Changes In Traditional Chinese Culture

In traditional Chinese culture, kinship is an important relationship to run the whole society. At the same time, polytheism and ancestor worship are two strong characteristics in the Chinese view of the world until now. In order to commemorate the gods and ancestors, the elder Chinese set three festivals. They are the Lantern Festival, Dead Spirits' Festival and Festival of Rid Calamities. As history developed, the Festival of Rid Calamities was disappeared and combined with the Dead Spirits' Festival. In the symbol of them, the Lantern Festival is the celebration of a new beginning, and the Dead spirits' Festival is commemorating to the end. Both of them contain part of polytheistic beliefs. In below, they would be explained respectively to demonstrate the internal Chinese cultural worldview about kinship.

The Lantern Festival----The plan of New Year and family organization

In history, the Lantern Festival was a religious ceremony for blessing originally. In early Taoism, the strong cosmological and political characteristics are combined together. Therefore, there are many famous ancestors became the gods. For example, the Yao---- a fair ruler had been memorized to a god of blessing. He's birthday which was on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month set as the date of blessing for the population in China.? This is the origin of Lantern Festival which set as a pure religion activity like mass in Christianism. Besides, the modern Lantern Festival was developed in Han Dynasty truly that it held as a public celebration.

In the time of the Zhou Dynasty, the Lantern Festival starts to have kinship meaning as the change of social structure. In 1046 B.C.E, the Zhou Dynasty was found. Unlike primitive society before, this is a typical feudal society in Chinese history which starts the expansive politics. In that time, there are many families and their land had been conquered. Some of the lands were invested to royal family members, some of the families from conquered land had moved to Zhou Dynasty's land.? Based on this social phenomenon, noble families also spread their lands by war. In order to combine the family members together to "develop the corporation efficiency", they used many ways including marriage and title conferment. As a special date, the start of a year which is slack season became a popular time for holding a massive family meeting for the developments. In other words, the Lantern Festival just match to the "seminar" on the calendar.

In the early history above, the kinship development was based on the low economic level, so the Lantern Festival is not only a combination date to organize family, but also became a typical activity for lords to press labor force from his family members. In the politics of the Zhou Dynasty, the king had the ownership of all lands, the higher rank people would get the use rights.? In other words, the base of this policy is to control the human resources to rule the population. It also means the labor were limiting agent in that time. In this environmental situation, the slack season is very important that it is the only chance for leaders to use the labor resource in a year just like other feudal societies in the world.? Perfectly, the Lantern Festival just hold in the winter. As a massive social event, it produced time to do labor works with enough gathered manpower. At the same time, all people in this activity is a member of the

leader’s family theoretically. This is the reason why the festival changed from a religious celebration to the family organization during the B.C.E.

As time goes on, the increase of agricultural production ability also made the Chinese social structure changed from feudal to imperialism. As a perfect instance, the Song Dynasty had the highest economic standard. In agriculture, the Song Dynasty was not only developed the rotational cultivation, but also developed the improved seed from Vietnam and mill.? All of the technological changes made the production of food surged more than ten times from Zhou Dynasty.? This social development made the Chinese family starts to “neutralized” and “minimized” in numerous family members.

Based on the social change above, the Lantern Festival added communication between people from different families. As the economy surged, the shapes and forms of lantern also developed variously in this dynasty. There are many types like fish, vegetables and men.? At the same time, there are festival lyrics had been created. Most of them were the recording of history, felling for the festival and emotional writing.? Both of these cultural phenomenon shown that communication between strangers was very popular. These are the modes that teach people how to start a social connection in the festival environment.

Based on the development of economy, the kinship strength of large family decreased, but in the nuclear family, the kinship became stronger than before and more connects to the property partition. In the Song Dynasty, the nuclear family starts to form because the productive standard was able to support the small population had enough product to feed themselves through the same amount of labor. This is why the people started to have a close relationship with close family members like parents and siblings, but drawing apart to others.

Overall, the meaning of Lantern Festival was changed as the development of production from internal family to external to society in kinship. As the development, the family structure was minimized and the relationship also weakens. In other words, the “atomization” of Chinese society started a thousand years. This phenomenon was shown clearly in the Song Dynasty that it was known as the richest country in the world for a thousand years ago. The reason was the flourishing of commercial activities.? Therefore, there is a negative feedback relationship exists between the kinship and economy.

The Dead Spirits’ Festival----the memory of family history

As same as the Lantern Festival, the Dead Spirits’ Festival also begun as a religious ceremony which for the judgment and peace of the dead. In ancient history, the judgment day of spirits and peace willing to dead had a different date. However, as history developed, these two festivals combined together and have another name called Hungry Ghosts Festival. In the 15th of the seventh month in lunar calendar, all of the family members should do the memorial to remember their ancestors. The Taoism belief the seventh month in lunar calendar is the weakest time for positive power in the world, and the fifteenth day is the strongest time for negative power. In this day, the spirits of ancestors would go back to the human’s world and check their offspring. This is why people choose to hold a festival to welcome the spirits and makes them happy by giving foods.?? Besides, this is the last chance for spirits been welcome because then they would be judged by the god of hill and death for their living life. And get either reward or punishment. So this is a festival that communicates with another world in

religious meaning.

In the early history of China, the Dead Spirits' Festival focused on the mysticism for family relations. In the early history like Zhou, Qin and Han Dynasty, the Dead Spirits' Festival were celebrated by large organizations like government. Everyone pray the gods first for the peace of all dead people, then people gathering by the family to memorize their own ancestors by a street committee.?? In this process, the spirits and gods had been comforted by foods. Then they will give feedback to living people. This is a typical characteristic of original animism.

For the kinship, the Dead Spirits' Festival is an important social activity to reinforce the relationship and build positive rules between family members through the memorize ancestors. It is well known that race is the community based on the same form of imagination. It is similar to ancient China's kinship. In the Chinese traditional kinship, the memory of the same ancestors is the belt to relate family numbers in a wide location that they may communicate with each other hardly in transportation issues. Under the dynasty society, the annual festival became the social activity which is similar to family-nationalistic education in modern society. This maintained the order and justice to a family.

In conclusion, the Lantern Festival and Dead Spirits' Festival described the kinship for both living style and common history of a family in traditional Chinese culture. In past, these two had a strong organizational ability for the population to rule themselves by family. They can be seen as the social culture impact to the family relationship in a positive method. This is the reason why the festivals can maintain thousands of years in history and seen as a part of the culture.