

History of Cultural Heritage Inheritors of “Qing Ming Chuntai Fair” in Yuantong Ancient Town, Chong Zhou

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Abstract: Yuantong Ancient Town, located in Chong Zhou City, Sichuan Province, is one of the first historical and cultural cities named in Sichuan Province, it's also located in the west of Chengdu Plain. The Chuntai Fair held in Yuantong Ancient Town during Qingming Festival was listed as the fifth under the Cultural Heritage Project in Sichuan Province. Since the Kangxi period of Qing Dynasty, Chuntai Fair has been held more than 268 years, being the most activities of sacrifice and celebrations. With the impact of multiculturalism, traditional activities have been reformed. With the recent Covid-19 pandemic that swept the world in 2020, Chuntai Fair also faced a new situation of inheritance and development. This essay presents the history and current situation of Chuntai Fair from the perspective of Cultural Heritage inheritors through interviews.

Keywords: Yuantong Ancient Town; Chuntai Fair; Cultural Heritage

1. Concept of Cultural Heritage

According to the definition from the Law of the People's Republic of China on Cultural Heritage adopted at the 19th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Eleventh National People's Congress, Cultural Heritage refers to the various traditions passed down from generation to generation by people from all ethnic groups and regarded as an integral part of their Cultural Heritage, including physical objects and places related to their traditional Cultural Heritage. Includes: Language and literature; Traditional Art, Calligraphy, Music, Dance, Drama, Acrobatics; Medicine, Calendars; Traditional Etiquette, Festivals and other folks customs; Sports and recreations; Other Cultural Heritages.

Cultural Heritage is a nonrenewable precious resource. With the development and advancement of modernization. Since the mid 20th century, the protection of Cultural Heritage has gradually attracted the attention of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and governments, and has made remarkable achievements. On 31 March 2005, the State Council's general office issued the opinions on strengthening China's Cultural Heritage protection (GF [2005] No. 18), which put forward opinions on Further Strengthening the protection of China's Cultural Heritage. Yuantong's Qingming Fair was declared by Chongzhou Cultural Centre and included in the fifth batch of Folk Cultural Heritage of Sichuan Province. (x-93 No. 48).

2. Yuantong's Overview

According to records in the website from Chongzhou People's Government (<http://www.chongzhou.gov.cn>), Chongzhou, known as Shuzhou in ancient times, has a history of more than 4300 years. It's located west of Chengdu Plain with the heart of the land of abundance. It's an important town in Shumen, covering an area of 1089km², has a pattern of “four mountains, one lake and five fields”, with a population of 735,723. It's one of the first batch of historical and cultural cities named in Sichuan province. A national new industrialization base (big data characteristics), a National Smart City pilot. Adjacent to Wenjiang and Shuangliu in the East, Dayi in the West, Xinjin in the South, Dujiangyan in the North and Wenchuan in the North West. The city has jurisdiction over 6 streets, 9 towns, 94 administrative villages and 78 communities.

Yuantong Ancient Town, where Qingming Fair is located, has a history of more than 1600 years. It's one of the four national “AAAA” scenic spots along with Jiezi Ancient town and Zhuyi Village. It is one of the four major market towns in Sichuan province.

3. Verbal Statement of Cultural Heritage of Qingming Chuntai Fair

Beginning in 2020, since the spread of Covid-19 worldwide, the National Festivals have been affected to a certain degree. From 2020 to 2022, Yuantong Qingming Chuntai Fair was heavily affected, and only being able to be held after three years. The author team was lucky to interview the “soul” of the Chuntai Fair in the 268th Qingming Chuntai Fair in 2021, Mr. Lu Congyun, inheritor of the “World Heritage Application”, to better understand the past and present of Cultural Heritage from the perspective of him.

3.1 Relationship between the inheritor and Yuantong Ancient Town

Question: Please introduce yourself

Answer: I am a resident of Yuantong. We have lived in Tuangtong for generations. I am 82 years old, so I am very well-versed in the situation here. My grandfather was a scholar in the late Qing Dynasty, as he was a poor scholar in his family. Yuantong was of great importance to him as he was given a “hometown contract”, which means having culture and prestige and it is necessary to adjust family disputes for ordinary people at ordinary times. They are also responsible for hosting the annual Qingming Fair. Hence, my grandfather began to host the Qingming Fair in Yuantong. So I understand more about Yuantong. When Yuantong didn't build a “AAAA” scenic spot, I organised culture tours. The older people of Ping came back and contributed a lot to the history and culture of Yuantong. Therefore, we have accumulated numerous historical and cultural materials for Yuantong, making the “AAAA” scenic spot relatively smooth.

Last winter, I published a book for Yuantong Ancient Town, which can be a collection of Cultural Heritage of the town. There are ten thousand words published in Sichuan Normal University. I have loved calligraphy and poetry all my life. I am the poet of Chongzhou city, also the founder of Couplet Association.

Question: Wether both Chuntai Fair and Qingming Fair still exist? You must have experienced the whole process of applying for Cultural Heritage by the Qingming Chuntai Fair?

Answer: Qingming Fair used to be Chuntai Fair, because it has a long history and is well-known in many places. After liberation, it was once hosted by the country then handed over to the government. When the country hosted, it was still developing the economy of Chongzhou city. Due to its reputation at that time, it suffered great impact. Therefore, it was organised by the government in order to continue it. Later, it was proposed that Yuantong should declare it as Cultural Heritage. When I first applied for Cultural Heritage at municipal level in Chengdu, I was just the inheritor. Now that it's at provincial level, I am still the inheritor.

Question: Have you planned many special activities during the Chuntai Fair?

Answer: In recent years, why do kindergartens have rabbit lanterns? At that point of time, many said that rabbit lanterns have nothing to do with Cultural Heritage. I said it has something to do with it. Yuantong has a long history. It used to be a water dock as there were many rich people. When the Spring Festival is approaching, the rich will hang rabbit lanterns every night until the Qingming Festival. Therefore, rabbit lanterns are a must, as we kept the custom of hanging rabbit lanterns. Now the kindergarten is continuing this custom.

Question: Other than rabbit lanterns, are there other specialties?

Answer: Yuantong has hold the 268th this year. It was very popular in the Qing Dynasty. In the past, it was last for half a month, or even 20 days. With several troupes performed on Wannian Stage, touring about eight stages from day to night. Infact, Yuantong Qingming Fair lasted more than 268 years. In the first session, our township advocated the “old dragon” with only the head and tail. In the second session, one section was added, one section, which should be two. However, the “old dragon” then stopped halfway for 10-20 years. If the “old dragon” continues, there are now 268 sections, with each section taken. At that time, the venue was just across the river. The “old dragon” is very spectacular. Last year (2020), only a closed ceremony was held due to the pandemic (Covid-19). In the future, the ceremony will be held in Heba(riverside) every year. The City God and his wife will be taken out from Chengdu to Heba every year. They will pave the way for City God and build a platform.

3.2 History of Yuantong Qingming Chuntai Fair and its influence in

Sichuan

Question: Qingming Chuntai Fair has such a long history that it should be very rare to hold 268 gatherings in Sichuan?

Answer: It has been held more than 268 years. In the past, it was called the Farmer's Association. At this time of the year, it's the agricultural tool exchange conference. In order to succeed, the merchants from all over the country will come to Yuantong to set-up a farm. Theatrical troupes, acrobatics and other activities are all concentrated in this river dam. The river is at least two or three kilometres long, making it one of the three grand events in Sichuan province. First is Qingming Fair, second is Baihua Fair in Qingyang palace, lastly is Yandi Fair in Leshan. Out of the three Fair, Qingming Fair takes 10-20 days, as Yuantong used to be a land and water wharf with a history of 1650 years, it has affected all provinces of the country in the past. Businessmen from all over the country doing business in Yuantong rely on the river Yuantong as dozens of boats come and go everyday. Therefore, Yuantong was very developed in the past, it was called "little Chengdu" in the Qing Dynasty. As time passes, it's not anymore. When we successfully built "AAAA" scenic spot, the National Tourism Administration said that Yuantong can restore 1-2 temples. We went to check around but there was no open space available, hence it was not built. Although the prosperity has ceased to exist, there are still many historical relics. It's a pity that Yuantong was demolished. Only one of many platforms has been restored, and four very beautiful guild halls have been built, including those in Shanxi, Jiangxi, Guangdong and Huguang. Fujian and Guizhou have not been built. However, the strength there is weak, and the agencies with contacts and offices can be said to be the best in the country once they are built. I was about 10 years old when we saw the prosperity of Yuantong with our own eyes. Many things have been lost and destroyed in the past. It is a pity. In future, in order to let our descendants know the prosperous history of Yuantong, we established Yuantong Cultural seminars. At that time, older people were gone, so there were few of us left. We still failed to dig out what Yuantong should dig out, so I have to add it to my book.

Question: Are there any special parts of the Qingming Fair that belong solely to Yuantong?

Answer: There was a release link on the sacrificial activities on Tomb Sweeping Day. Each girl carried a bowl filled with fish for the release activities. The fish will then be poured into the river. This does not exist in the past, but was added to the part of "golden bull makes spring". In the past, the Cultural Heritage site was destroyed by the destruction of the river beach. I made 13 books and wrote the preface "How we protect and why we protect", which was taken home by each village, signed and sealed door to door. Later, I spent 10 yuan to send it to the Cultural and Tourism Bureau by express, but failed. In order to meet the requirements of Cultural Heritage, the Chuntai Fair should be held in the river beach. Guangyuan daughter's Day is held in March every year. It is not approved to change the time. The people are calling for and complaining about it. They hope to keep the site and time.

3.3 Affected by Covid-19, Chuntai Fair will face inheritance and protection

Question: Has there been any changes in the organisation of the Yuantong Qingming Chuntai Fair?

Answer: In 2020, a closed ceremony was held. At that time, there were about 100 people. We were all holding it when the pandemic was so serious. The "upper authorities" (the higher government) also agreed, indicating that the "upper authorities" attached great importance to the Yuantong Qingming Fair.

Question How do you think we should protect the folk customs of Yuantong?

Answer: Before the outbreak last year, we have been preparing. First, we have to restore the 268 sections of the "old dragon". There were more than 1000 lanterns with schools participating last time, which was spectacular at the Qingming night parade. We were all ready for it again but due to the pandemic, it was not successfully carried out.

It is necessary to participate. The best place is in Heba. Excellent culture must keep its original appearance and be passed on

Question: Can you share the original intention and completion process of the book, Yuantong Ancient town?

Answer: I am a native of Yuantong. The "top" wants to build Yuantong and it's worth building. There are people from all

walks of life who want to know about the past. Through their memories and the inheritance of their ancestors, Yuantong needs to be written. I can record these things while we drink and chat. Else, the culture of Ancient Town cannot be preserved and it will be broken down in the future and history will be forgotten. So I want to record down for our future generations to know that there are many excellent cultures worth inheriting. For campus, there is a specially written textbook for Yuantong for middle school. As Yuantong residents, we should not forget our past and we should inherit it.

Question: In your opinion, what is the future of Chuntai Fair?

Answer: We try our best to restore the past. The City God's parade is not a feudal thing. This year, we will invite someone to play the role of City God to participate in the parade. We should keep the good things in the past. I believe that next year's Qingming Fair will be better than this year.

4. Conclusion

The team plans to dive deeper into Yuantong Ancient Town in 2022 and continue to record and interview younger people that are involved in the inheritance and protection of Cultural Heritage at the Chuntai Fair. Until before the Qingming Festival in 2022, being affected by Covid-19, the government had no choice but to cancel the Qingming Chuntai Fair 2022. Therefore, the team failed to compare the similarities and differences between the last Qingming Fair and Chuntai Fair, and failed to learn more about the protection of Cultural Heritage through the rally. Fortunately, the team met Mr. Lu Congyun, inheritor of Cultural Heritage, and had an interview with him over lunch in the ancient town. He led the team to visit the streets, appreciate his calligraphy and listen to him talk about the past. Looking at the young team, Mr. Lu said to the younger generations: "young people must have various hobbies and interests, comply with the needs of the times, and persist!".

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