

# Research On The Rise Of Ancestral Hall Culture In The Qingshuijiang River Basin From The Perspective Of Cultural Integration

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**Abstract:**

*The study of ancestral hall culture has always attracted much attention from the academic community. The ancestral hall culture in the Qingshuijiang River Basin is unique among China's ancestral hall cultures, yet there has been relatively little research on it. The ancestral halls in the Qingshuijiang River Basin are concentrated in the middle and lower reaches, mainly in Tianzhu County and Jinping County, supporting the social transformation in this region. The ancestral hall culture in the Qingshuijiang River Basin is a cultural entity resulting from the integration of Han culture and local cultures. It demonstrates the cohesive force of the Chinese nation, highlighting the shared roots, origins, and chains of Chinese culture. It is a living fossil that has come down through history and helps to strengthen the consciousness of the Chinese nation community.*

**Keywords:** *Ancestral hall culture in the Qingshuijiang River Basin; exchanges and integration among ethnic groups; strengthening the consciousness of the Chinese nation community; cultural integration*

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## I. Introduction

The Qingshuijiang River Basin is located in the southeast of Guizhou Province, mainly flowing through the Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture. There are numerous ancestral halls in the middle and lower reaches of the Qingshuijiang River Basin, distributed in a chain along the river, mainly concentrated in Tianzhu and Jinping Counties. According to incomplete statistics, there were once 108 ancestral halls in Tianzhu County and over 100 in Jinping County (Yuan, 2018). Among them, Tianzhu County has the highest density. The large-scale construction of ancestral halls in Tianzhu County took place during the reigns of Emperor Kangxi to Emperor Daoguang in the Qing Dynasty (Yang&Yang, 2016). Among the 55 ancestral halls whose construction dates can be determined, 45 were built in the Qing Dynasty, accounting for 81.9% of the total; 7 were built during the Republic of China period, accounting for 12.7% of the total (Yuan, 2018). From a diachronic perspective, the construction of ancestral halls in Tianzhu County was mainly prevalent during the Qing Dynasty, which coincided with the prosperous period of timber trade. Ancestral halls sprang up like mushrooms; during the Republic of China period, although some ancestral halls were still built, the number was relatively small.

Lin Yaohua, a Chinese anthropologist, pointed out that "The family ancestral hall was originally the religious institution of the family. As the family gradually developed into a clan, the ancestral hall also

gradually expanded to become a social, economic, political, and educational institution. (Lin, 2000)" Moreover, the ancestral hall is also the cultural entity of the traditional belief of ancestor worship in China. The scale, delicacy, and grandeur of the ancestral hall construction reflect the financial resources, manpower, and social influence of a clan. Regarding the study of ancestral halls, the South China School has described the ancestral halls in Guangdong and Fujian as a property control mechanism, and Maurice Freedman has discussed that the clan society is based on blood ties. However, are the ancestral halls in the middle and lower reaches of the Qingshuijiang River Basin consistent with what predecessors have described? The ancestral halls in the middle and lower reaches of the Qingshuijiang River Basin are located in the intermediate zone between the upper reaches of the Yuan River and the Miao Frontier. The further one goes into the hinterland of the Miao Frontier, the fewer ancestral halls there are, and there are almost none in the hinterland. Why are there so many ancestral halls in the transition zone between the Yuan River Basin and the hinterland of the Miao Frontier? In this context, what differences exist between the study of the ancestral halls in the Qingshuijiang River Basin and the study of clan society in the southeast region?

Starting from this question, this paper analyzes the social transformation in the Qingshuijiang River Basin and the reasons for the rise of ancestral halls from the perspective of social transformation and the rise of ancestral halls, aiming to expand two perspectives: one is to expand the perspective of previous studies on clans in the southeast region, and the other is to expand the view that all previous clan cultures are marked systems based on blood ties.

### **Social Transformation and the Rise of Ancestral Halls**

The numerous ancestral halls in the middle and lower reaches of the Qingshuijiang River Basin are inseparable from the political factors of the state's presence. Why does the state promote the establishment of genealogies? It is because the state also hopes to be integrated with local areas. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the Qingshuijiang River Basin was located on the border. In addition to institutional guarantees such as the lijia system in the Ming Dynasty and the policy of abolishing the hereditary chieftain system and replacing it with direct imperial rule in the Qing Dynasty, which were oriented towards state power, folk forces were also needed to more closely connect local areas as a whole. Yang Chunhua et al. also believe that the spontaneous recognition based on the public is more vital than the forced recognition under state power (Yang, 2019). Under the restriction of "imperial power not reaching the county level", the clan is the main body that can gather folk forces to achieve spontaneous recognition. Folk forces need specific people to promote them. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the exchanges among multiple ethnic groups happened to have a connection point in various aspects such as economy, politics, society, and culture—timber trade. The "flow of goods" in timber trade led to the movement of people, causing Han culture to flow into the folk, including two major representatives with Han cultural characteristics. The first is education—Confucianism, and the second is the ancestral hall.

Confucianism is dominated by settlement society, while the ancestral hall is dominated by clan society. During the social transformation period in the Qingshuijiang River Basin, these two social norms coexist. Confucianism is carried out in ancestral halls. Through cultural exchanges, the ancestral hall has become an inevitable way to carry culture. The continuous repair of ancestral halls and genealogies can establish a stable social interaction system, solidifying the internal forces of the family to compete with external forces. The external social forces are powerful and exist in the form of groups, such as chambers of commerce and guild halls. There are many chambers of commerce and guild halls in Yuankou. According to the author's field investigation, there were once Jiangxi Guild Hall, Hunan Guild Hall, Two-Hu Guild Hall, Hengyang Guild Hall, Five-Province Guild Hall, and Guizhou Guild Hall in Yuankou Town. What forces do these chambers of

commerce and guild halls rely on to make a living? They rely on collective strength. What do the local people rely on to cope with them? In the past, they relied on kuan agreements and village organizations. However, these village organizations and kuan organizations seem rather loose in the face of external forces. In particular, the trade circulation brought about by the rise of timber trade has broken the original village clustering, changing people's livelihood patterns. As a result, the kuan organizations can no longer effectively restrain their members or gather them. With the weakening of the binding force and the disappearance of the influence of the kuan organization, the clan forces connected by surnames have emerged (Office of the Compilation Committee of the Annals of Jinping County, 1995). Therefore, the local society has adopted the combined strength of both the kuan organization and the ancestral hall to compete with external forces. The ancestral hall is a clan organization that strengthens unity and consistency through blood ties. It can compete with external chambers of commerce and guild halls as a whole, ultimately achieving the result of power integration. The reason for forming such group strength is that the social background at that time required groups to correspond with each other. Since the new forces brought by timber trade are collective and holistic, the local ethnic minorities also need corresponding organizations to communicate with these groups. As a result, forms of dialogue such as clan leaders with presidents and kuan chiefs with curators have emerged, with each being the legal representative of their respective groups. Therefore, in the ethnic minority areas, it is necessary to develop clan organizations on the basis of the past kuan organizations. The clan organizations that absorb Han culture also reflect the results of exchanges, communication, and integration with external forces.

In addition, the flow of timber trade has led to changes in the entire social economic structure. In the past, the timber in the Qingshuijiang River Basin was not only worthless but also a stumbling block to people's survival. For local farming, tall trees were not useful but needed to be cleared. Only by removing the trees could people cultivate the land and open up farmland. Therefore, the forest was not a resource but an obstacle for local residents at that time. However, after the timber trade began, people's livelihood patterns changed. The forest became a resource, a product, and a value that could be increased. It can be said that what was once "waste" has now become "treasure." In this context, what was once an obstacle has now become an effective resource, and the social structure has also begun to change significantly. The ethnic minorities have shifted from relying on plants grown on the land, such as millet, or the domestication of other wild plants, to cultivating trees to obtain greater economic benefits. The traditional slash-and-burn society has transformed into an economic trading society. In this economic transformation, people's survival patterns have changed from being mobile in the past to being stable. Before timber became an important economic value, the local people practiced shifting cultivation, and people were mobile. Under the shifting cultivation pattern, women's gathering work was stable, while men's hunting was unstable. Therefore, it was a matriarchal social lifestyle. This can be seen from the ancient songs, customs, beliefs, and worships passed down locally, which are cultural remnants with the matriarchal system as the main body in society. As society has shifted from being mobile to fixed and from food production to trade production, men have taken the lead in timber trade transactions, while it is difficult for women to participate in transactions such as selling, cutting, and transporting timber. These tasks fall on men, and women retreat to the domestic sphere. Women's roles have changed from being the main laborers to household managers, engaging in household chores or farming at home. Men, on the other hand, have begun to leave their homes to engage in business outside, obtaining a large amount of money, goods, and property through timber trade. The economic benefits obtained can be used to purchase more material goods for the family, such as products, food, daily necessities, and even clothes, as well as public goods. As a result, the power of men in society has been rising, and the matriarchal society has gradually transformed into a patriarchal society, ultimately forming a male-dominated society.

The most basic foundation of a male-dominated society is to confirm the stability of land resources,

that is, the stability of real estate, namely the stability of land. This is because the stability of what grows on the land, such as timber, oil tea trees, and tung oil trees, cannot be easily changed. Another significant change with the formation of the patriarchal society is the change in the marriage system. From then on, women would marry into their husbands' families and become members of their families. Since girls are to marry into their husbands' families, they cannot take real estate away from their maternal clans. The real estate resources of the family can only remain within the family and cannot be taken out, but they can take their dowries, such as silver ornaments, clothes, and furniture. Since land is the foundation of property in a male-dominated society, in order to ensure that land property remains in the male brothers' families and is not taken away by sisters, it is necessary to establish the foundation of a male-dominated society. What can be used to establish this foundation? It is the clan society, because the clan organization is based on the blood ties of men. The orthodoxy of blood ties ensures the stability of property in the male family society. Therefore, due to both the economic transformation brought about by timber trade within the society and the clan system introduced by external forces, people in ethnic minority areas need the clan system as a guarantee. As a result, the economic structure has transformed from a shifting cultivation economy to a trading economy, and the social system has been supported from a matriarchal society to a patriarchal society. In other words, the clan system has supported and maintained such a social structure. Therefore, the clan system has been greatly developed and consolidated in the Qingshuijiang River Basin, where timber trade is prevalent.

#### **Ancestral Hall Culture Strengthens Collective Consciousness**

Durkheim pointed out in “The Division of Labor in Society” that the various changes experienced by individuals and society are actually the result of the continuous changes in the social environment (Durkheim, 2017). In other words, it is the internal members' subjective initiative to transform the social environment under the stimulation of external factors. In the context of timber trade in the Qingshuijiang River Basin, a large number of Han people migrated here, bringing stimulating factors in economy, society, and culture, causing changes in the social structure and promoting the adaptive development of the local society. Ancestral hall culture is one of the paths for this adaptive development and a product of social transformation in a specific historical period. In the initial stage of social division of labor, since the division of labor is not yet complete and is still in the process, to ensure that the division of labor becomes possible and plays a role in society, collective consciousness is needed to maintain the system in the initial stage of division of labor. Therefore, during the social transformation period when the division of labor is not yet completed, collective consciousness must be relied on to support the social division of labor. Only in this way can there be enough time, space, and resources to ensure the completion of social division of labor. Therefore, during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, when industrialization was underdeveloped and the division of labor was not yet complete, the imperial regime vigorously promoted the construction of ancestral halls, imposing this collective authority on everyone's consciousness through ancestral hall culture and obtaining the power to promote the completion of social division of labor.

After social transformation, how can the past property and resources be transformed into legitimate rights and interests in the present? Institutionally, a patriarchal society must first be established and transformed into real estate. In the inheritance of real estate, the collective consciousness based on men is established in the form of clan genealogies, generation names, and surnames that continue the bloodline. Female members within the family do not have the inheritance rights to such real estate. They can only take away movable property in the form of dowries when they get married. Therefore, this is a male-dominated collective consciousness. The clan strengthens the collective consciousness that property should not flow out and real estate should be stored through the male-dominated social consciousness, while women only have the collective consciousness of

possessing movable property. When a unified impression is formed within the group, the collective impression will have a fixed form and object (Durkheim, 2017). The ancestral hall is this fixed object, and the ancestral hall culture developed from it is the concrete manifestation of strengthening the male-dominated collective consciousness.

### **Ancestral Hall Culture Demonstrates the Cohesive Force of the Chinese Nation**

The ancestral hall culture in the Qingshuijiang River Basin is a cultural weapon by which clan power resists the external environment in a circular social pattern, aiming to achieve internal unity within the clan, optimize the allocation of resources, and resist external forces to ensure its own advantages, internal unity, and the optimization of diversified resources. This is mainly achieved through four approaches:

For example, in the context of the timber trade in the Qingshuijiang River Basin, in the resource allocation where the Han nationality dominates and the Miao and Dong ethnic groups follow, by uniting the clan forces, they can gain a higher advantage in this resource allocation to conduct timber trade with Han merchants. And within their clans, they will re-optimize the allocated resources to ensure that every clan member can benefit.

The power resources obtained through clan forces are integrated within the family and become the capital for the family's social development. For example, the economic capital accumulated from timber trade is used to build ancestral halls, and through the culture of ancestral halls, descendants are educated to optimize the reserve of human resources.

The prosperous development of the ancestral hall culture in the Qingshuijiang River Basin is guided by the power of the Chinese nation. The reason why the Han, Miao, and Dong ethnic groups have not deviated from Chinese culture during their exchanges, interactions, and integrations is due to the role of the ancestral hall culture in embodying the cohesive force of the Chinese nation.

The ancestral hall culture in the Qingshuijiang River Basin has developed Han culture and incorporated it into the social space of the Qingshuijiang River Basin, completing the spatial embedding under ethnic exchanges, interactions, and integrations. It continuously integrates the small traditions of the Miao and Dong ethnic groups under the great tradition of Chinese culture.

The reason why the ancestral hall culture in the Qingshuijiang River Basin can be regarded as a manifestation of the cohesive force of the Chinese nation is, on the one hand, the relationship of the same root, the same function, and the same chain in culture. On the other hand, it is the result of inter-ethnic evolution. The cultural same root is like the relationship between the trunk and branches and leaves of a tree. Although the tree has luxuriant branches and leaves, the trunk connecting the branches is interconnected and the same. The cultural same function is reflected in that culture has functions, although the functions produced by different cultures vary. And because of the relationship of the cultural same chain, culture can serve as a medium to connect local culture with the Han culture from the outside world, and complete the interaction of synchronic culture in diachronic development. In addition, inter-ethnic exchanges enable culture to achieve the integration from inter-ethnic to intra-ethnic, as well as the evolutionary development from intra-ethnic to inter-ethnic, thus creating exchanges, interactions, and integrations among the Han, Miao, and Dong ethnic groups.

## **II. Conclusion**

Bourdieu pointed out that society is composed of a network of tension relationships among various classes and groups resulting from power struggles, full of various fields of power struggles (Gao, 2004). Before the entry of the central dynasty's forces, the area along the Qingshuijiang River Basin was the natural settlement area of the Miao and Dong ethnic groups. Each Miao and Dong settlement had its own systems and cultural characteristics, which were different from the Han culture represented by Confucian culture, mainly manifested

in differences in clothing, language, and customs. The Miao and Dong ethnic groups were interdependent, forming two harmonious and stable social main bodies. During the Hongwu period of the Ming Dynasty, in order to suppress the peasant uprising led by Lin Kuan among the Dong and Miao ethnic groups, Han culture entered the Qingshuijiang River Basin with a strong stance, thus beginning the ethnic exchanges, interactions, and integrations in the Qingshuijiang River Basin on the southwestern border.

In the power struggle between the Ming Dynasty and the peasant rebel army of the Miao and Dong ethnic groups, the Ming Dynasty won with the suppression of the rebel army, which also marked the arrival of the dominant position of Han culture in the Qingshuijiang River Basin. To strengthen the governance of this region, the officials dispatched by the Ming Dynasty carried out regional governance with the dynasty system characterized by Han culture, making Han culture a new force in the Qingshuijiang River Basin. This force is manifested in the unity of the Ming Dynasty's regime in terms of the system, causes social changes in society, and shows the cultural integration of the Han, Miao, and Dong ethnic groups in culture.

The main factor causing this power struggle was the emergence of the rebel army. The reason why the rebel army could gather people into an army was that the shortage of means of production and living resources led to a difficult life. Although the rebel army was suppressed in the short term, eliminating the hidden danger of reaction against the Ming Dynasty, the key is to meet the production and living needs of the people by tracing back to the root cause. The main body of the rebel army was male forces. To meet the resource guarantee needed by these male forces, the ancestral hall culture, represented by the symbol of patriarchal power, came onto the historical stage with the promotion of the Ming Dynasty. Therefore, the ancestral halls symbolizing Han culture were rapidly established and developed in the Qingshuijiang River Basin, which was also a manifestation of the central dynasty's power penetrating into the border areas, providing an institutional guarantee for the rise of the ancestral hall culture in the Qingshuijiang River Basin. The ancestral hall culture is a symbol of the patriarchal system, which determines the legitimacy of male family members inheriting property through genealogies and generation names, ensuring that resources circulate among family members and do not flow out to other non-family members. Therefore, in addition to the external factor of the promotion of the Ming Dynasty's system, as far as the internal social structure of the Qingshuijiang River Basin at that time was concerned, the timber trade gave rise to a social and economic system dominated by male forces. The increase in population mobility forced the original kuan organizations in the villages to disintegrate. The entry of foreign populations with economic advantages and advanced culture broke the traditional marriage circle, and the marriage system also changed. To ensure that resources remained within the family, the Dong and Miao villages actively absorbed and learned from the Han patriarchal system, changing from the original kuan organizations to clan organizations, and also realizing the gradual transition from the matriarchal system to the patriarchal system in the Miao and Dong societies in the Qingshuijiang River Basin. Therefore, under the dual effects of external influence and internal cultural absorption and learning, the ancestral hall culture became a carrier for social governance and maintaining social stability at the beginning of the opening of the Qingshuijiang River Basin, supporting the social transformation in the Qingshuijiang River Basin.

In addition, during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, restricted by the principle that "imperial power does not reach the county level", in order to better govern the grassroots society, the court encouraged local gentry clans to establish clans and build ancestral halls, and educated people through family teachings and family precepts to achieve the effect of social governance. Under the guidance of the penalty connection system in which several clans would be punished if one person committed a crime, families were prompted to actively attach importance to the discipline-abiding of their descendants, align with the will of the state, and condense the family and country feelings of loyalty to the monarch and serving the country, and being filial and loyal. In some large families of the Miao and Dong ethnic groups in a leading social position, ancestral halls would be

built to show the orthodoxy of their identities. For example, the prosperous Wu family in Yuankou Town, although the migration history of several generations of ancestors is clear, even though the ethnic identity of their descendants has now changed to the Miao ethnic group, their descendants still build ancestral halls in various villages. This is not only the result of ethnic exchanges, interactions, and integrations but also a manifestation of the identity recognition of social members as part of the Chinese nation. Therefore, during the period of regime stability, the ancestral hall culture remains the bond of social stability.

Society is composed of various fields full of power struggles (Gao, 2004). During the historical period of the prosperity of the timber trade, a large number of Han people migrated to the Qingshuijiang River Basin. The rapid economic development was accompanied by population unrest. In the competition for social resources to seek survival and development, the power of the group was greater than that of individuals. To survive and develop better, the members within various large families united as one, taking the ancestral hall culture as the guide to ensure clan unity. The ancestral hall culture unites the hearts of family members internally and cooperates externally to seek development. Within the family, the ancestral hall becomes a field for uniting family members. In the external environment of the timber trade, the ancestral hall culture is the materialized carrier that constitutes various fields of power struggles, reflecting the material, financial, and human resources of various power struggle forces. For example, the size of the ancestral hall construction, the degree of decoration elaborateness, and the genealogical composition of family members all reflect the relationship of strength in the competitive field of the timber trade, as well as the proportion of social and natural resources. Therefore, in order to obtain social and natural resources better, social groups with families as units use the ancestral hall culture to gather the human resources of the family to ensure that the family's human resources can fully play their roles and form a stable social relationship network. They also discipline family members through family rules and precepts, becoming an educational institution within the family to ensure that the family's human resources keep pace with the times. Such human resources constitute a positive force for promoting social progress, thus promoting social development.

In addition, the cultural items that can reflect the ethnic exchanges, interactions, and integrations in the Qingshuijiang River Basin are not only the ancestral hall culture. The Song Festival in Forty-eight Villages is also formed under the integration of multiple cultures. The Forty-eight Villages are located at the junction of Guizhou and Hunan, consisting of 48 Dong and Miao villages, including Benchu Town, Yuankou Town, and Zhulin Township in Tianzhu County, Guizhou Province, Sanjiang Town and Maoping Town in Jinping County, as well as Jingzhou County, Hunan Province (Yang, 2011). During the Song Festival in the Forty-eight Villages, residents can use four languages and sing in four tunes. The song field has also become an important place for residents of the Miao, Dong, and Han ethnic groups to communicate, enhance friendship, and is no longer exclusive to a single ethnic group but shared by multiple ethnic groups. It is an important way for residents of various villages to inherit and carry forward traditional culture (Wang, 2016).

To sum up, the ancestral hall culture in the Qingshuijiang River Basin is a cultural entity resulting from the integration of Han culture and local culture. In its historical development process, it supports social transformation, closely connects the southwestern border into an integral part of China, demonstrates the cohesive force of the Chinese nation with the same root, the same origin, and the same chain of Chinese culture, and is a living fossil that has come from history and helps to strengthen the consciousness of the Chinese nation community.

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