

A Brief Introduction of Central Plains Culture's Influence on the Southwest Folk Culture of China - Take the Four Folk Tales in Dangqu County as an Example

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Abstract: The southwest of China is rich in folk cultures, and ever since the Qing Dynasty united the country and promoted the WuChi road to enhance the connection with the minority nationalities of the southwest China, there has been a closer and tighter communication between this region and the Central Plains, naturally bringing a cultural exchange. And the cultures from the Central Plains inevitably influenced the local folk cultures in the southwest, which later showed a mixed style of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. A good example is the folk stories told and passed down by the locals in the southwest.

1. Introduction

The Quxian County, also known as the Dangqu County, has a long history and brilliant cultures and is located in the eastern part of Sichuan province. Despite the historic and heroic history of Dangqu County, people in Dangqu County are most proud of the brilliant folk cultures here. As one of the cultural heritages, the folk cultures, which nowadays are scattered around everywhere in the County, were bred and gradually formed in the long process of people's living here, and they need urgent protection due to the current situation. There're four typical folk stories organized and showed in the article, and each of them represents the unique charm of folk cultures with a mixed characteristics of the local southwest culture and that from the Central Plains.

2. The Four Folk Tales

2.1 The Origin of the "Grave Bay"

The number of ghost story in the south is so much bigger than that of the north, but they present in different sects instead of in mythology. However, these "unsystematic" stories were influenced by the mythology in from the Central Plains, showing a unique flavor. And the story "Grave Bay" in Dangqu County is an example of this:

There's place called "Grave Bay" in the Hunagni village in Dangqu County, where was initially called "Bazi" (a kind of basin). On the Bazi lived a kind and generous man, and people all call him

“the kind man”. The kind man has a daughter named Yaomei, who attracted lots of matchmakers to come, but the kind man refused all the proposals for her. One day the king of hell sent two ghost messengers to haunt wondering souls in the living’s world, and they saw Yaomei was such beautiful that they returned and reported this to the king. The king was so excited and happy that he turned himself into a handsome young man, and brought golds and treasures to propose. The king was refused and insulted by her father for he learnt some Yin and Yang tricks and recognized the king as not human being at the very first time. The king was angry and threatened that he’ll kill all the people in the Bazi if he doesn’t agree the marriage. The father was afraid but didn’t know what to do, so he decided to ask his daughter for advice only to find that his daughter was nowhere to be found.

The king didn’t give up, and decided to do the bride-snatching, but failed because he couldn’t find Yaomei. Therefore, he deleted all the people’s names living in Bazi from the “Book of life and death”. Days later, Yaomei came back from heaven and found that all the villagers were killed. Yaomei was the embodiment of the 5th granddaughter of the Goddess Queen Mother and was no common people. She was reporting the king of hell’s crime when the king came to threaten her father in the human world, and the king was punished. But on seeing this, she was so sad that her tears flooded down to the human world from above and became heavy rains. The rain rushed the mud and buried all the corpses in Bazi, and a tomb arose from each body. Later, this place was called “Grave Bay”. To memorize her parents in the human world, Yaomei dug out their bodies and buried them together, but the king of hell was riot and asked some guys to steal their bodies. However, when the grave was opened, two golden fish flew out, one flew to the Wangjia village, the other to the Jiajia village. Years later, two big names appeared from these two villages. One is the rich and powerful “Wang Wanbang” in the Wangjia village, the other is the super scholar “Jia Hanlin”.

There’re lots of cultural elements in this story, and they all shows the process of the cultural blending in this area, for example, the book of life and death, which was initially mentioned in a book written in another part of the country named *Yi Jian Zhi* [1]. The book of life and death also appeared in the *Journey to the West* [2]. Another example is the king of hell. The king of hell is actually the Yama in ancient India, which was described in the *Mahabharata* and his another name “Yanwang” was transliterated from the word “Yama” in Sanskrit [3]. This story is a typical one which combines the Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism because their core values or beliefs were displayed in the plots. For instance, the Goddess Queen Mother and goddess were worshiped images in Taoism, and the king of hell’s ending shows the karma in Buddhism, and Yaomei buried her parents together after revenge demonstrates the morals in Confucianism. In addition, the plot of Yaomei’s tears turning into floods was a representative of the flood myth in the Central Plains, which shows the cultural interchange between the two areas.

2.2 The Legend of the Dragon’s Cave

Dragon is a giant spirit in water, which is a totem or god’s worship in ancient China. After the rise of Buddhism and Taoism, all the beliefs had dragons, and they were shape into the god of water. China has a prosperous agricultural civilization, and drought, floods have always been related to the people’s livelihood. In order to eliminate these disasters, people would raise money to build the Dragon King temple, hoping to get blessed by the dragon so that there’ll be good weathers and a harvest. Chinese have always emphasized that they are descendants of the dragon according to the *Liezi* [4]. And Fu Xi said in “*The Yellow Emperor of Li Zi*”, “Pao Xi’s snake body, human face, ox head and tiger nose”. This is very much like the dragon we speak of now, and the *Lu Shi*

written by Luo Mi in the Song Dynasty also said that Fu Xi is the body of a dragon. Since the ancestor of Chinese was a dragon, so will be their offspring [5].

Qu county is located in the subtropical humid climate zone, and there're many rivers in this area, and almost every year here would be hit by flood in varying degrees, so people in Quxian county respect the god in water dragon a lot. It's long been told that the Cong people are the descendants of dragon, that thousands of years ago, they went into the hills of eastern Sichuan under the guidance of the gods. At the upper reaches of Wang Valley, there was a well-known Dragon King Cave. And in terms of terrain structure, the Dragon King Cave undoubtedly symbolized the origin of people. And there is also a story about the origin of the Dragon King cave:

In ancient times, there lived a Family named Li at the Foot of Caoshan mountain near the Baishui River in Longtan Township. They made a living by farming. The old parents could only rely on their talented son Leon to live. Leon was in his early thirties, and he was tall, lithe and dignified in appearance. He started to study poetry since childhood, and later grew into a kind and knowledgeable man. And his neighbors praised Leon as the most promising boy in the village. The matchmaker came one after another, beautiful and graceful girls were introduced, but Leon declined them all. Just before he went to Beijing to take the Imperial exam, his father died suddenly. In order to take care of his mother, he gave up the opportunity to become an official and set up a private school in the town and enrolled the children of poor families who could not afford to go to school. He was praised and respected by his students. One morning, after the rain stopped, it was beautiful out there. Some disciples were passing by the forest to go to school when they suddenly saw a big magpie flying over in the sky. The disciples chased the magpie and chased it as far as it flew. When they reached a big tree, they saw many magpies pecking at each other on the branches of the tree. What are they fighting about? Pairs of curious eyes stared curiously. Not for a while, a red bead was spit from a magpie's mouth in the tree, and the disciples quickly ran forward, scrambling, to grab the bead. At that moment, the big guy snatched it away from him with an air of triumph that made the other six disciples both disappointed and jealous. The unconvinced child Xiaoman quickly ran to school and told everything to Leon. After listening, Leon felt very strange and wanted to see for himself. Leon arrived and found the bead was not general treasure, so he went to the temple to turn to the elder monk.

Leon held the red bead in hand, and carefully checked it. He weighted, smelled and even tried to taste it. Unexpectedly, the red bead slipped into his stomach, and he couldn't vomit it out. After a while, Leon felt thirsty, and his stomach was like burning up. All the disciples were as anxious as ants on a hot pan. Leon kept Shouting: "I want water, I want water!" The disciples quickly poured a bowl of cold eagle tea for the teacher to drink. But he was still thirsty. The disciples went to pour out a second bowl, but Leon was still thirsty. The disciples used water ladles to scoop water from the stone, one ladle after another, until all the water was used up. But it still didn't work. What to do? The disciples stared at each other, and no one could do anything about it. At this time, the big guy who found the bead knelt down and said: "Teacher, you drank a lot of water but it still cannot quench your thirst and fever. We really can do nothing about it. Maybe we can help you into the river to drink?" Leon thought it was the only way, so he allowed the disciples, and they helped Leon to the Baishui Stream.

Seeing the clear water, Leon headed upstream and opened his mouth, letting the river flow directly into the mouth. He drank a lot and all the fish in the river were afraid and jumped to escape. His disciples were shocked and pondered that only dragon can drink like this. In the meantime, scales came up from Leon's waist, the weather changing fast and it seemed to be raining heavily soon. Later Leon became a dragon and he hid himself under the river and the villagers could not find him any longer. The big guy said that the teacher had become a dragon and he would live in the river in the future. Ever since then, people call this river the dragon king's cave. It's said that Leon

ate the dragon's gallbladder, and that's why he became a one. Later Leon became the manager of raining, and people would worship him when drought happens. In Jiaqing years in the Qing Dynasty, the people raised money to build a dragon Temple and worshiped the statue of Leon. But due to the passing of time, the old temple has been damaged.

The totem of the ancient Sichuan people (Ba people) was snake. However, as a branch of the Ba people, the Cong people regarded themselves as the descendants of the dragon for thousands of years. And Cong people's totem was also dragon, which is the same as that of the Central Plain. According to the classic book *Shuowen*, worms are originally snakes, and people also called dragon the little snake, and snake the big dragon. In this sense, dragon was worshiped by ancient Cong people and people in Quxian county nowadays. In addition, there're many places' name with the character loong (dragon) in Quxian county now, such as Huiloong village, Greenloong town, Loong and phoniex town, Loongtan village, etc. And this phenomenon is rare across China. And the reason might be that the Cong people brought the culture of dragon here.

2.3 The Goddess of the Yellow Flower

Yellow flower planting in Quxian County has a long history, and it's said that it started in as early as the Tang Dynasty. According to folk legend, Wu Zetian had a special love for daylily, and because of her homesickness, she ordered to plant yellow flowers from her hometown Sichuan, and the yellow flowers in Quxian County was selected as a tribute the capital Chang 'an. Wu Zetian ate a small bowl of soup with yellow flowers and white fungus every day. So she was still fresh and energetic when she was in her 60s. And this made the yellow flower in Quxian County a fashion, attracting rich people to follow suit. It's reported that common yellow flower has six stamens, but that in Quxian County seven, which crowned the Quxian flower the queen of yellow flower. And the special natural conditions like the weather, soil and water in Quxian County made the yellow flower here the best. And there's also a sad and beautiful story behind the yellow flower in Quxian County [6]:

It's said that the leader of the ancient Cong people was once haunting in the wild, and saw a beautiful girl Duling. They fell in love at once, and engaged in the night with songs and campfires. When their love was growing, a war broke out and lasted for years. The girl failed to wait until the leader to come back and died in a hill, becoming a yellow flower. After the war, the man came back only to find that the girl he loved so much had gone, and he died beside the flower. Yellow flowers blossomed in his blood, and this is the origin of the story of the goddess of the yellow flower, which is why, in the future, people would say that the yellow flower in Quxian County has an air of deity. This folk is story is very much alike to the story of Amah Rock, both stories appeared at almost the same time in history, and we can assume that this is no coincidence but a result of being influenced by a similar cultural mentality.

2.4 The Legend of the Golden Ducks

There is an ancient town at the north end of Quxian county in northeast Sichuan. It is named Sanhui Town because it is located at the intersection of Bahe, Zhouhe and Qujiang rivers. The ancient town has been the hub of water transportation in eastern Sichuan since ancient times because of its unique geographical environment and water transportation in all directions. It is supported by The Qianli Ba Mountain and connected by the Yangtze River. The numerous boats flowing from south to north have become the gathering place for merchants and materials in the Qujiang River basin. It has been known as the premier water dock in northeast Sichuan for thousands of years and has been praised as "little Chongqing" and "little Hong Kong".

The development of water transport has contributed to the emergence of the town chamber of commerce, history. In Ming and Qing Dynasties, Sanhui town have more than 20 chamber of commerce hall in Jiangxi, Fujian, Hubei and Guangdong province and many other places. The industry and commerce in town is extremely active, and pot factory, match factory, farm tools factory, textile factory and so on are also thriving here. Moreover, a variety of famous snacks such as heart-lung dumplings, red chicken eight pieces, pepper and salt pot helmet are also thriving. The prosperity of the economy has bred the folk culture and art of the ancient town. And the New Year here is one of the most important activities, and the Lantern Festival too.

On the fifteenth day of the first month, people burn paper dragon. And on March 18th, there's also a colorful pavilion event (a kind of lantern festival). And on Dragon Boat Festival, people have a dragon boat race and they win if they grab the duck first. Festivals are so popular here that on those occasions, everyone would participate. In addition to these big events, the town also holds temple fair, Buddha fair, land fair, Qingming Festival, three saints' Fair, prince's Fair and so on every year. And people will rush to Sanhui town to watch. Traditional folk festivals are colorful, and artistic performances are so wonderful, making Sanhui town prosperous.

The Sanhui town was located in front of a big river and has mountains on its back, which made the town be like an aircraft carrier in the air from a distant look, and the intersection of the main streets which resembles a huge "stone plain" acts as its dock. It's said that all the talents came from this town because there're two golden ducks under the stone plain, and some even reported witnessing the pair of ducks. And people in Sanhui town awe the ducks and worship them as sacred creatures of this town, not allowing anyone to get near to hurt them.

One Dragon Boat Festival, people started the boat race after the goal duck was set free. A man dived into the river to chase the duck and he should saw two shinning ducks under the water, and he grabbed them both! When he returned ashore, people were shocked and surprised because those were the two legendary golden ducks. However, they soon decided to send them back and set them free for they thought those were the divine beings in the town, and no one can take them as their own possession. And before long the ducks were free. Unfortunately, some greedy people heard about the news and came in big boats to catch them. Their intention was known by the locals and a plan to cast these guys away was come up with. A 20-year-old orphan Chen Dandy was assigned to deal with them.

It was a dark and windy night. The ship anchored in the river at the front of the stone plate. The river banks there were more than a hundred feet high, and the cliffs were steep. In the middle of the night, Chen Dandy gently stepped down to the boat along the narrow part of the stone plain where he could only step half a foot on. Quietly, he pulled up the bar and slowly turned the boat a little bit. Then he untied the sail and joined the ropes. Then he climbed to the bank and shouted, "Thief! Stealing on board!" The men lying in wait on the shore followed, Shouting, "Stop thief! He's on board to steal something!" The noise broke through the calm night sky. The sleeping people on the ship climbed up, shouting and chasing, but they fell into the water one after another because Chen Dandy and his backups had already done some trick to the boat. Chen and his people helped them out of water and saved them. A moment later, the dying owner woke up, and everyone asked: Have you seen the golden duck? Are we going to be rich now? But the shipowner knew what the situation was so he next day, he held a banquet to entertain all the people of the water wharf, as an apology, and then set sail back to the Lower River.

Similar stories can be found all over China, especially in Sichuan and Chongqing, such as Zhenping County in Shaanxi province, Sansu Shrine in Meizhou, Sichuan Province, Ma Jia River Center in Dujiangyan, Siping Town in Chongqing, Enshi Prefecture in Hubei Province, etc. There is also a golden duck village in Hejiang County, Luzhou City, Sichuan Province. Although the golden ducks appeared in different places, and some places even thousands of miles apart, the appearance

and function of the golden ducks are basically the same. It can be seen that the influence of the Central Plains culture on the southwest has a stable propagation path, rather than randomly formed like scattered points.

3. The Conclusion

The influence from the Central Plains showed in the above four folk tales in Dangqu County can well prove that the formation of the folk culture in Dangqu County, or even the southwest China, was hugely impacted by that of the Central Plains'. Taking these four stories alone as an example to explore the deeper meaning behind, we can see that they're, for one thing, based on the various social practice and brilliant history, for another, they're influenced by the cultures from the Central Plains. Nowadays, these folk stories are on the brink of "distinction", and only a few of them are still remembered and told by the older generation, thus, it's necessary that we draw attention to this and make joint efforts to protect these cultural heritages.

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