

On Clansman Culture Pushing Forward the Development of New Socialist Countryside

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Abstract

Issues concerning agriculture, countryside, and farmers have been the focus of the central government of China. Every year, such issues predominated in the central government's No.1 Document. In October 2015, the fifth plenary session of the 16th central committee of the Communist Party of China mapped out a plan to build a new socialist countryside and so a nationwide movement kicked off. In the paper the author attempts to explore the roles of clansman culture in the building of a new socialist countryside and the relevant ways.

Keywords

Clansman Culture, Roles, Ways

1. The Connotations of the Clansman Culture

By the clansman I mean a unique cultural phenomenon featuring the bonds of the same surname, the same region, and the same blood. It is a branch of social culture and belongs to the category of sub-social culture. It originated from the vast rural area and then spread to the urban area and foreign lands. The clansman culture, which has a distant source, is an important component of the fine Chinese culture. It once played a vital role in promoting the procreation of clans, enhancing the harmony of clansmen, and maintaining the solidarity and unity of the Chinese nation.

2. The Status Quo of Clansman Culture

Though the clansman culture is deeply-rooted and has a distant source, it was once swept unto the rubbish heap of history as a revolutionary object in the political movements called cast away the four olds—old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits (a slogan used at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in the mid-1960s) and so remain silent for many years. After China introduced reform and opening-up to the outside world, the

central government redressed cases of unjust and false charges and rehabilitated those who had been wronged. Then, a sea of clansmen, who were forced to leave their homeland and drift overseas during the Cultural Revolution, returned to their old homes and so the clansman culture began to revive. As the reform and opening-up deepened, the clansman culture played an important role in the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics. However, the sustainable development of the clansman culture is still a problem on the whole.

1) Spontaneity without governmental guidance

For a long period of time, the clansmen organized cultural activities by themselves without any governmental guidance. For instance, compiling pedigrees has been an awkward situation. Undoubtedly, in the old days, the pedigree of a clan was like the history of a country. According to a record, “From the distant past to the 21st century, whether the emperor or the populace, whether the man of letters or the illiterate, whether the overseas Chinese or the villager who had never ventured into the county town, the pedigree has been their primary concern. On countless occasions, when the Chinese people left their homeland, they left behind their huge fortune but never their pedigree. Again, on the wishes of their parents and grandparents, the overseas Chinese returned home to trace the roots of their family—the pedigree” [1]. The family tree, which records the course of the development of the clan, answers from another perspective the question—who am I? Where did I come from? However, for various reasons, the family tree has never been given due respect, to say nothing of being enhanced. And the ancestral hall culture reflects the clansman’s respect for and recognition of the culture and customs perpetuated by their ancestors. However, it has never received any guidance and planning on the part of the local government.

2) Imbalance of development among regions

Owing to historical reasons, the clansman culture in different regions developed at different speeds and the disparities increased. In the developed regions the clansmen attached much importance to it while the less developed regions showed little interest in it. This conforms to the philosophical thought of the economic base determining the superstructure. In the coastal regions, for instance, the clansmen are crazy about building ancestral halls, convening clansmen fraternities, yet in the less developed regions such as the inland provinces or mountainous regions, the clansmen showed little interest in it. Likewise, in the regions inhabited by returned overseas Chinese and their relatives, the clansmen are enthusiastic about such activities, but the regions inhabited by locals are rather chilly about them. Since the returned overseas Chinese have many clansmen living abroad and have close ties with them, and the Chinese government introduced preferential policies, the clansman culture in those regions developed by leaps and bounds. Yet, because the regions inhabited by locals lack the above advantages, the clansman culture much lagged behind.

3) Monotony without the innovation of forms

At present, the development of the clansman culture, which is monotonous in form, is limited to compiling pedigrees, renovating ancestral halls, offering sacrifices to ancestors, convening clansman fraternity meetings, and the like. Yet, very few people bother to explore family rules and instructions, to say nothing of distilling the spirit of the clan. The reasons behind it are varied, such as the poor organization, the insufficient supply of fund, the inadequate governmental guidance, and the like.

3. The Instrumental Role of the Clansman Culture in the Development of New Socialist Countryside

Developing new socialist countryside is what the 90 million Chinese peasants have been looking forward to. To achieve the target, the central government put forward the guideline: Production development, well-off life, rural civilization, clean and tidy village, democratic management. The guideline has painted a beautiful blueprint of new socialist countryside. The 6th Plenary Session of the 17th CPC Central Committee examined and approved the Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Major Issues Pertaining to Deepening the Reform of the Cultural System and promoting the Development of the Socialist Culture, which marked the dawn of the socialist culture’s spring. As an integral part of the socialist culture, the clansman culture should and may play a crucial role in developing a harmonious society, particularly a new socialist countryside. The clansman culture, which is time-honored, will shine for sure in the new era.

1) The clansman culture helps promote democratic management of the countryside

As we all know, most Chinese villages are inhabited by people of the same clan and the same surname. Of course they worship the same ancestors and observe the same customs. The unique dwelling mode gives rise to a

peculiar culture. In the clansman culture, the old man of good moral standing and undisputed reputation, who was often held as head of the clan, took charge of the important affairs. All the clansmen trusted him and carried out his instructions. So the village or the clan moved forward one generation after another. In the current administrative system, when choosing head of the village, we must hold high the principle—that is, the future leader is supposed to enjoy moral eminence and high esteem, and is fair in handling matters, and enjoys a high degree of recognition among the clansmen. Only so can the clansman culture be integrated into the administration of the local government and enhance the democratic management of the village so that the village can enjoy harmony and stable development.

2) The clansman culture helps promote the cultural and ethical progress of the village

Cultural and ethical progress will not be made by itself. Instead it takes rigorous moral norms. The family rules, parental instructions, and domestic disciplines exercised by the head of the clan are to be observed by all the clansmen. They guarantee that the clansmen abide by their traditional rituals and continue to make greater cultural and ethical progress. In this sense, the clansman culture helps promote the cultural civilization of the village. *A Narrative History of Zha Ji Village* (Zha Ji Shi Hua) listed ten family rules and 14 parental instructions. For instance, the 4th family rule decreed that “The clansmen who are given to drinking and do not know how to control themselves will be admonished at first offence and reprimanded or disciplined at repeated offences”. And the 1st parental instruction decreed that “All the clansmen are supposed to show reverence for the emperor. If someone passes the imperial civil examination and is chosen by the emperor, he should give his all till his heart ceases to beat, take advantage of his intelligence to do his duty so that his reputation will endure and he can bring honor and glory to his ancestors. Even the farmhand must bear in mind that all the land belongs to the emperor and is supposed to always cherish his love and esteem for the supreme ruler” [2]. If each and every clan (village) restrains all the clansmen with certain rules and regulations, the clansmen will have somebody to revere, for they fear that they may tarnish the reputation of the country and his ancestors. If things continue like this, the spiritual civilization will prevail in the village and the country as well. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out, “Cultivating and carrying forward the socialist core values must be based on the fine traditional Chinese culture. All strong core values have their intrinsic roots. Forsaking traditions and casting away cultural roots is tantamount to cutting off the lifeblood of our spirit. The extensive and profound traditional Chinese culture is the foothold on which we can stand firm in the surging tide of world culture” [3]. As an integral part of traditional Chinese culture, the clansman culture has its intrinsic roots and norms, which deserve our special attention.

3) The clansman culture helps enhance the cohesive force of the village

As I mentioned above, the clansman culture has the unique features of the same surname, the same blood, and the same place. As a matter of fact, a few villages, which form a big clan, have common ancestors. As a result, the clansman culture takes on a high degree of uniformity of ancestors, blood, surname, region, dialect, and the like. Such sameness helps gather the cohesive force of the village and coordinate the interests of parties and unify the thought and action of the clansmen. Even if they are forced to leave their birthplace, they can still find their seniority in the clan hierarchy and adhere to the old adage—rather sell the ancestors’ land than tarnish their reputation. According to *A Narrative History of Zha Ji Village* (Zha Ji Shi Hua), the clan regulation decreed that “all the clansmen should keep in mind that we are of the same blood; all those within five generations or even beyond should love and respect each other. We live in peace and contentment when all is well, and support each other when in distress. We must refrain from fratricidal fighting or treat the clansmen as passers-by. If so, the clansmen can enjoy immense pleasure of life” [4]. As can be seen, the clansman culture stresses the idea of giving love and the power of moving and inspiring as well.

4) The clansman culture helps promote the development of the village

Development and affluence is the main target of new socialist countryside. The unique features of the clansman culture help villagers reach consensus and make concerted effort to push forward the development of the village.

On the one hand, the clansman culture can easily form the system of mutual help in the locality. Whether you look up or lower your head, all those you see are your relatives close or distant. You help me or I help you, we are like a family. You scratch my back and I will scratch yours. In the cultural background, the clansmen can farm at the right time in the right season and can join hands to push forward the development of the village.

On the other hand, the clansman culture helps draw overseas Chinese investors. The roots of overseas Chinese can be traced back to their birthplace. They are all happy to see the development of their hometown. So, they

will make investment there and contribute to the development of new socialist countryside.

4. Ways for the Clansman Culture to Promote the Development of New Socialist Countryside

1) Passing on the spirit of the clansman culture

Each and every clan has its unique spirit which the clansmen had accumulated over the years. The spiritual prop enabled the clan to multiply endlessly. The pedigree, which carried a certain spirit and glory, was not lost in the turbulent years of war or during the Cultural Revolution, simply because it carried on the spirit of the clansman culture. According to historical records, during the chaotic years of Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Peasant Uprising, to avoid the disaster, Hu Zhigao, a millionaire of Zhaicun village of Anhui province, set aside his family fortune and carried only the pedigree of his clan. Thanks to his great effort, he saved the rare family pedigree and so venerated as hero of his clan [1]. The pedigree occupies such a high position because it is the root and soul of the clan. Also, the ancestral hall carries the history of the clan. According to a report, “All the clans in southern Fujian province have their ancestral temples, which are the roots of Taiwan people and have a great adhesive force” [5]. Promoting the development of new socialist countryside is to popularize the enterprising spirit of the clans and imbue generations of young people with noble sentiments. So long as the spirit of the clan keeps up, the countryside will overflow with vigor and life forever.

2) Taking advantage of the clansman’s spiritual pursuit

The development of new socialist countryside is a wholly new cause, which is based on the principle of production development, affluent life, rural civilization, clean and tidy village, democratic management. Integrating the clansman culture into administration is a vital step to go about the development of new socialist countryside. In a sense, developing new socialist countryside is a cause of bringing honor and glory to the ancestors of the clan. So, we must make full use of the positive elements of the clansman culture, extensively mobilize all the clansmen, and respect the overseas Chinese’s wish to trace the roots of their families. In the course of developing new socialist countryside, the local government should undoubtedly play the leading role, but the positive elements of the clansman culture must not be neglected, because in essence the Party’s target of common prosperity is keeping with the objective of the clansmen bringing honor to their ancestors.

3) Making use of the extensiveness of the clansman culture

A clan grows like a tree or river branching out. Its extensiveness is evident to all. All the people of the surname Wu, for instance, can be traced back to the same ancestors. The descendants of the same ancestors are naturally attached to each other, for the aspirations of bringing honor and glory to their ancestors have been deeply engraved upon their mind. So, if we can direct and gather all the forces of the clan, the development of new socialist countryside will become more effective and fruitful.

4) Taking advantage of the gathering force of the clansman culture

“My hometown, oh, my beautiful hometown, when can I get back into your arms?” The stirring song indeed brought out the heartfelt wishes of numerous overseas Chinese. The hometown, like a huge magnet, draws all the clansmen living at home and abroad. The clansmen think what we think, grieve what we grieve, and rejoice what we rejoice. To develop new socialist countryside, we must attach importance to the peculiar nature of the clansman culture. We should listen extensively to the clansmen’s advice and pool their wisdom. The clansmen journeying north and south in particular are experienced and knowledgeable, and many of them are experts and scholars in certain fields. So, when they return in large numbers during national holidays such as the Spring Festival and the Tomb Sweeping Festival, we might as well call fraternities or have a heart-to-heart talk with them to solicit their advice on the development of their hometown and resolutely adopt their constructive plans. If the local government can take advantage of the gathering force of the clansman culture, the development of new socialist countryside will our desired results.

The biggest challenge of building a moderately prosperous society across the country is in the countryside. The 5th Plenary Session of the 18th CPC National Congress examined and approved the 13th Five-Year Plan, which marked the beginning of the decisive battle of building a moderately prosperous society all over the country. In the course of development, the local government undoubtedly plays a dominant role, but that of the clansman culture cannot afford to be ignored.

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