

# ***The Contemporary Community Practice of Clan Values from the Perspective of the Course——A History of Chinese Society***

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**Abstract:** As the basic unit of ancient Chinese society, clans played a foundational role in the inheritance of civilization and social integration. The management wisdom embedded in clans also provides profound enlightenment for the construction of contemporary communities. However, there remains a lack of sufficient research on how to systematically extract and transform clan values to serve modern community governance. Based on the course A History of Chinese Society, this study analyzes the core values of traditional clans from four dimensions, namely "survival, emotion, institution and belief". By investigating typical cases, it elaborates on the creative transformation and practical paths of these values in such aspects as elderly care, mutual assistance, residents' participation in political affairs and cultural identity within contemporary communities. The research indicates that the value system of traditional clans is not a static relic, but a dynamic resource that can be activated and reconstructed in the context of modern communities. It provides valuable localized insights for advancing the modernization of grassroots social governance.

## **1. Introduction**

A clan refers to a social group centered on the patriarch and founded on blood and marital ties <sup>[1]</sup>. In ancient Chinese society, clans were not only communal living groups, but also the most basic operational units <sup>[2]</sup>. The ancient Chinese civilization has a long and enduring history. From the end of primitive society to the Opium War in 1840, which marked the start of modern society, clans made indelible contributions to the continuity of ancient civilization. General Secretary attaches great importance to the extraction of the Chinese spirit and the interpretation of its values. General Secretary pointed out, "The primary task of strengthening cultural confidence is to base ourselves on the great historical and contemporary practices of the Chinese nation, summarize Chinese experiences with Chinese principles, and elevate these experiences into Chinese theories. We should neither follow various dogmas blindly nor copy foreign theories mechanically, so as to achieve ideological independence and autonomy"<sup>[3]</sup>. In modern society, the tradition of clan members living together has long faded away, with clan members scattered across different

countries, cities, regions or communities. Nevertheless, the clan "management methods" and the "experiences" of clans in national and community governance that have been passed down for thousands of years remain precious resources worthy of our absorption and reference. Therefore, how should we extract the experiences and values of clans from ancient Chinese society? How can we integrate the wisdom of ancient sages into the national community construction? The answers to these questions are expected to provide Chinese theories, ideas and propositions for China's community development and the construction of the urban-rural community service system during the 14th Five-Year Plan period.

## **2. The Practice and Reconstruction of the Four-Dimensional Values in Contemporary Communities**

### **2.1. The Embedding and Innovation of the Survival Dimension in the Elderly Care System**

The survival value of clans is reflected in two aspects. Firstly, during the Neolithic Age of ancient Chinese society, people lived together based on common blood ties to meet their survival needs, thus forming clan tribes. Secondly, within a clan, collective labor and mutual assistance were essential to increase grain yields; externally, the clan needed to unite to resist attacks from wild beasts and other clans. Therefore, the clan's collective gathering was driven by a shared goal and joint actions—surviving and perpetuating themselves in harsh natural environments.

In contemporary society, people with common blood ties no longer live together out of survival necessity. Clan members may be scattered across different communities, cities, or even countries. While traditional clans have lost their original functions, community-based home care has inherited and further developed the survival-oriented functions of clans with new value manifestations. Community-based home care refers to an urban elderly care service model grounded in home living, supported by communities, supplemented by other social forces, and mainly provided through home visits and community-based day care services<sup>[4]</sup>.

Yucun Community in Nanhу Sub-district, Luohu District, Shenzhen, designated a National Model Elderly-Friendly Community in 2023<sup>[5]</sup>, stands as a representative case of communities that have advanced the survival functions of traditional clans despite lacking blood ties among residents. The community has a population of 21,512, among whom 2,026 are aged 60 and above. With the support of the Luohu District Health Bureau and the District Civil Affairs Bureau, the community has leveraged existing venues and the Elderly Service Station, signed a cooperation agreement with Yucun Community Health Center, and taken the lead in launching an innovative integrated medical and elderly care model.

This integrated model consists of four core components. First, it provides home care equipment tailored for the elderly. Anti-fall handrails have been installed free of charge in the homes of 76 elderly households, and anti-slip mats and night lights have been distributed. Residents are also instructed on practical anti-fall tips to reduce the occurrence of home fall accidents. Second, it offers specialized medical services for the elderly. Free physical examinations and the Silver Age Safety Accident Insurance for the Elderly are provided to residents over 60. After evaluation by family doctors, elderly residents can receive home visits, home-based hospital bed setup, and comprehensive care services. Additionally, Yucun Community Health Center, through the "Experts Going to Communities" program organized by the Luohu Hospital Group, hosts regular health mini-courses, including monthly health lectures and free medical consultations. Third, it has comprehensively upgraded the quality of its facilities. Barrier-free renovations have been carried out on Yumin Village Square and the Community Service Center, with ramps at building entrances, staircase handrails, rest benches, and accessible toilets added to facilitate the daily mobility of the elderly. Fourth, it has established the "Happy Aging at Home" service list system for the elderly,

offering 68 personalized value-added home care services across 10 categories, such as daily living assistance, rehabilitation nursing, and healthcare. Specific programs include calligraphy and painting classes, dance classes, singing lessons, and Tai Chi health-preserving courses.

## **2.2. The Activation of the Emotional Dimension in Building Harmonious Neighborhood Relations**

The second major value of clans in ancient Chinese society lies in emotional bonding, which mainly involves forming kinship groups, implementing mutual assistance within the clan, and expanding clan influence. Firstly, kinship groups were formed through blood ties to establish clans with the same surname. The patriarchal system in the Western Zhou Dynasty strengthened communication among aristocrats through ancestral temple rituals, while ordinary people deepened their connections and affection via community altars. Secondly, mutual assistance was practiced within clans. Clans formulated regulations specifying that a certain area of clan-owned farmland should serve as a source of funds for supporting poor clan members and funding the education of clan youth. Thirdly, clans expanded their influence through multiple means. On one hand, wealthy clans sponsored the education of their descendants to help them enter officialdom, which in turn enabled the clans to accumulate more wealth and power. Marriage alliances between clans of equal social status further consolidated their mutual influence. On the other hand, large clans recruited a large number of dependent people who engaged in productive activities under the clan's command. In return, these powerful clans protected them from state taxes and military service.

In contemporary society, the Community Granary Mutual Assistance Program in Shuijingfang Sub-district, Chengdu, serves as a typical example of inheriting the emotional bonding and mutual assistance spirit of traditional clans <sup>[6]</sup>. The sub-district is characterized by numerous old courtyards, an aging population, and a significant wealth gap. In 2011, based on three core initiatives—the Community Granary, Community Charity Fair, and Community Workshop—the community built a warm social network and established a participatory mutual assistance system <sup>[7]</sup>. The Community Granary functions as a benevolence warehouse, encouraging residents to make regular small non-cash donations. Volunteers from the Community Mutual Assistance Center then deliver these supplies to needy families. The Community Charity Fair, jointly participated by the government, community organizations, and residents, converts donated second-hand items into daily necessities such as food and toiletries for vulnerable households. The Community Workshop serves as an economic support platform providing sustainable livelihoods for poor families. These families can operate free booths independently or join the Community Workshop Cooperative to run businesses as a group.

## **2.3. The Transformation of the Institutional Dimension in Community Democratic Consultation and Residents' Political Participation**

Clans made significant contributions to national political development in ancient Chinese society. Clan strongholds acted as defensive barriers for rulers, who relied on clan leaders to govern territories and people, achieving indirect rule over the entire population. Meanwhile, clans also restrained rulers' power, as major state affairs required consulting with clan authorities. During the Wei and Jin Dynasties, the scholar-official class evolved into powerful aristocratic clans. The survival and prosperity of these clans depended on imperial support, prompting them to serve the monarch loyally. Conversely, as aristocratic clans accumulated military and political power, monarchs had to cooperate with them to maintain long-term stability and thus granted them various privileges. Overall, the relationship between clans and rulers in ancient society was dominated by cooperation and win-win outcomes, with conflicts and hostility being only temporary.

In contemporary society, community residents are also entitled to participate in national policy-making. To address the discontinuity in grassroots democratic development caused by inadequate people's congress work at the sub-district level, Zunyi City launched a pilot program of the Sub-district Residents' Deliberative Council in October 2018 and formulated the Guidelines on Conducting the Pilot Program of the Sub-district Residents' Deliberative Council in light of local realities [8]. The Guidelines specify that the council exercises eight core responsibilities and operates through five mechanisms. Its key functions include hearing overall work reports and special briefings from the sub-district office, participating in the research and demonstration of important decisions and major projects, conducting democratic consultations on people's livelihood projects, evaluating satisfaction with the sub-district office's special work, and collecting and conveying residents' opinions, suggestions, and criticisms. The Sub-district Residents' Deliberative Council has thus become a new platform for pooling public opinions at the grassroots level.

#### **2.4. The Continuity of the Belief Dimension in Shaping Community Public Cultural Identity**

In the clan tribe era of ancient China, clans relied on certain spiritual forces to unite their members, which could be natural phenomena or mythological figures. After entering civilized society, clans used ancestral halls as a venue to gather members. On special occasions, clan members would gather to worship their common ancestors, strengthening their emotional bonds. Moreover, ancestral halls served as spiritual hubs for upholding clan rules and imposing penalties on those who violated them. However, population mobility made it difficult for clan members living away from their hometowns to attend ancestral worship ceremonies. To soothe their clan sentiments, these migrants established guild halls to enhance spiritual connections with fellow townsmen.

In modern society, the number of such guild halls and their gatherings is rather limited. People now spend most of their time in their residential communities. A community bound by shared spiritual beliefs can transform strangers into "a clan united by common convictions" [9]. Xiaoying Lane, located on Mashi Street in the downtown area of Hangzhou, is a nationally renowned "Red Lane". Over the past decade, guided by the "Red Lane Spirit" of "daring to be pioneers and willing to serve the people wholeheartedly", the residents of Xiaoying have developed a new path for grassroots governance featuring multi-stakeholder collaboration. In this lane dotted with red memorial halls, the revolutionary spirit has been integrated into residents' daily lives. Every Wednesday afternoon, the neighborhood canteen at the Red Lane Happy Neighborhood Center buzzes with activity. Community staff and enthusiastic residents make steamed buns, which are then delivered by volunteers to over 30 elderly residents living alone. From purchasing ingredients, kneading and fermenting dough, to making pastries and visiting the elderly, numerous residents and students sign up as volunteers whenever a recruitment notice is posted online. The canteen kitchen has become the center of this charitable culinary initiative, and the "Light Rain Steamed Buns" have become a symbol of care for the elderly living alone in the community. While new developments continue to emerge—such as the completion of the Red Lane Memorial Hall and the opening of the Red Lane Happy Neighborhood Center and Red Study Room—the inheritance of the Red Lane Spirit and the commitment to preserving the revolutionary legacy remain unwavering.

### **3. Conclusions**

In summary, the four-dimensional values of traditional clans—survival, emotion, institution, and belief—have been inherited and reconstructed in contemporary social practices. The survival value of clans has been integrated into the community elderly care system, spurring the innovative development of services such as home visits, community day care, and integrated medical and elderly care. The emotional value has been embedded in neighborhood relations, revitalizing

interpersonal bonds through various forms of material donations and community-run businesses. The institutional value has been translated into community political participation mechanisms, allowing residents to voice their opinions on sub-district development and assume the role of community masters. The belief value has been incorporated into public cultural identity; residents have not only integrated the revolutionary spirit into their daily lives but also strived to pass it down from generation to generation.

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