



Argumentation on Whether the Date of Chinese Minor New Year Is 23rd or 24th December in Lunar Calendar — Time Differences on Chinese Minor New Year and Its Development Course

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Abstract. This paper examines the source and deduction process of the time of “Minor New Year” through poetry literature. According to the *Compilation of Chinese Local Chronicles and Folklore Materials* (《中国地方志民俗资料汇编》) [1], this paper summarizes the time of “Minor New Year” in various regions of China and the regions where the time of “Minor New Year” evolves, comprehensively sorts out the “Minor New Year” timed transition vein, and summarizes the time evolution law of “Minor New Year”.

Keywords: Time of “Minor New Year” · Differences between the south and the north · Evolution

1 Introduction

The “Minor” of “Minor New Year” is relative to the Great Year (the Lunar New Year), and “Minor New Year” is the prelude to the Great Year. The Oracle glyph “𠂔” of “year” resembles a human being in the posture of carrying seedlings, indicating a bumper harvest. In the inscriptions on ancient bronze objects of Western Zhou Dynasty, it was often used as “years of age”. The Warring States Period’s *Gu Liang Zhuan* (《穀梁传》) wrote: “It is a harvest year when all the five cereals are ripe”. *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* (《说文解字》) [6] interpretes in the form of its small seal glyph: “The grain is ripe”. In ancient times, the grain was ripe once a year, so the ripening of grain once was called a year. Xing Bingshu’s *Erya* (《尔雅》) [7] interprets the word “年” as the maturity of the grain, because the grain is ripe once every year, so “年” and “岁” are synonymous. (“年者,

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禾熟之名，每岁一熟，故以为岁名。”) From this, the “year” has been extended to the Lunar New Year, namely, the beginning of a year. “Year” stands for “new” and “initial”. Therefore, on the day of “Minor New Year”, people officially begin to “do shopping for the Spring Festival” to welcome the arrival of the new year. It is generally believed that “Minor New Year” is also called 谢灶 (Thanks for the Kitchen God), 祭灶节 (Worship of the Kitchen God), 灶王节 (Festival of the Kitchen God), 交年节 (the Little New Year Festival), etc., which is related to its festival customs of “Kitchen God Worshipping”. This paper defaults to the same time as the “Minor New Year” and the Kitchen God Worshipping, and will not discuss the inconsistency of time between the two for the time being.

2 Textual Research on the Date of “Minor New Year”

Before the Han Dynasty, due to the calendar and other reasons, the time of the “Minor New Year” was not uniform and the specific time was undetermined. It was not until the *Feng Tu Ji* (《风土记》) of Zhou Chu in the Eastern Jin Dynasty that it was clearly stated that the time of the Minor New Year was the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. (“腊月二十四夜祀灶，谓灶神翌日上天，白一岁时事，故先一日祀之。”) It can be seen that the earliest time of “Minor New Year” was determined as the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. The Kitchen God Worshipping during “Minor New Year” is a common custom all around the country, but at present, the time of Minor New Year’s Kitchen God Worshipping is not exactly the same. In most cases, this day is “the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month in the south and the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month in the north”. There is even a phenomenon that in the same area at the same time, people celebrate the fall of Minor New Year on the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month and the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. Generally, traditional festivals have an exact time. Why are there inconsistencies in the time of the “Minor New Year”?

Through textual research, from the Eastern Jin Dynasty to the beginning of Qing Dynasty, the traditional general date of the “Minor New Year” in the north and south has always been the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. According to the *Dongjing Menghualu* (《东京梦华录》) of the Song Dynasty, the capital of the Northern Song Dynasty, Dongjing (now Kaifeng, Henan), celebrated the “Minor New Year” on the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. (“腊月二十四，都人至夜备酒果送神，烧花钱纸贴灶马子上，以酒醴涂抹灶门，谓之‘醉司命’。”) In the Song Dynasty, Wu Zimu’s *Meng Liang Lu* (《梦梁录》) recorded the days and customs of the “Minor New Year” in Linan (now Hangzhou), the capital of the Southern Song Dynasty: “On the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month, both the poor and the rich will eat malt sugar and beans”. (“二十四日，不以穷富，皆备食汤豆。”) Wen Tianxiang, a Jiangxi poet in the Song Dynasty, wrote in *The 24th Day* (《二十四日》) [8] that “Three days before the Spring Festival, villages of Jiangxi are having the Minor New Year”. At the end of the Song Dynasty and the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty, in *Wulin Jiushi* (《武林旧事》) [9], Zhou Mi also recorded the time of the “Minor New Year” in Lin’an (now Hangzhou) as the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month, also known as the “交年节”. (“二十四日，谓之‘交年’。祀灶用花汤、米饵及烧替代。”) This shows that the time of “Minor New Year” in most areas of the Song Dynasty was the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month.

With the development of the commodity economy in the Song Dynasty, the universality and comprehensiveness of the festival reached a new stage, and the atmosphere of “Minor New Year” festival flourished. According to literature records, the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month was called the night of minor festival and the 30th day of the twelfth lunar month was called the day of big festival in the palace, (“禁中以腊月二十四日为大节夜, 三十日为大节日”) showing that the Song Dynasty officially celebrated the “Minor New Year” on the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. In folk of the Song Dynasty, the Kitchen God Worshipping on the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month was also very common. In addition, it can be seen that there are many records about the Kitchen God Worshipping in the twelfth lunar month in the notes and collected works of Song people, which won’t be repeatedly detailed here.

Regarding the time of “Minor New Year” of the Yuan Dynasty, Zhao Pu’s first poetry and wine aesthetics cultural program “Duan Pian” mentioned that the Mongolian people with profound culture had the custom of offering sacrifices to the God of Fire on the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. At the end of the Southern Song Dynasty, with the founding of the Yuan Dynasty in Mongolia, this custom was also brought along. However, due to the short history of the Yuan Dynasty and the fact that only the Mongolians had the custom of offering sacrifices to the God of Fire on the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month, the Han people still celebrated the “Minor New Year” on the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. Therefore, in the historical documents from the fall of the Yuan Dynasty to the Ming Dynasty, mostly people had the “Minor New Year” on the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. For example, Yuan Hua, a native of Kunshan at the end of the Yuan Dynasty, wrote in the poem *Bingshen Jiaping Ershisiri Dengxia Oucheng* (《丙申嘉平二十四日镫下偶成》) [10], “As the year draws to a close, the wind and rain are rustling and pattering. The Minor New Year happens to be the time to write letters every month to report safety to the family”. Therefore, the time of the “Minor New Year” in the south of the Yuan Dynasty can also be unified as the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month.

Both the poems of *Song Shen Ci* (《送神辞》) by Xie Chengju, a literatus in Shangyuan (now Nanjing) in Ming Dynasty, and *Slogan on the 24th Night of the Twelfth Lunar Month* (《腊月二十四夜口号》) by Yu Qian in Ming Dynasty mentioned that the time of “Minor New Year” was the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month, and they described the customs of the old Kitchen God Worshipping in Jiangsu and Zhejiang in the Ming Dynasty. (《送神辞》“一年一度送神行, 记得人间二十四。”《腊月二十四夜口号》“金炉银烛夜生春, 爆竹声催节候新。自笑中年强随俗, 买砗裂纸祀厨神。”) Gu Qiyuan of the Ming Dynasty also said in *Kezuo Zhuiyu* (《客座赘语》) that people in Nanjing area sacrificed to the Kitchen God on the 24th night of the twelfth lunar month. (“留都人家, 以腊月二十四日夜祀灶。”) Jin Youzi, a native of Jiangxi in the Ming Dynasty, mentioned in *Written on the 24th Night of the Twelfth Lunar Moon by Chance* (《腊月二十四夕偶成》) [2]: “This is the way of farm work in a year. It’s the Minor New Year in a hurry”. It can be told that the time of “Minor New Year” in most regions of the south of the Ming Dynasty was also the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month.

The *Dijing Jingwu Lue* (《帝京景物略》) [3] issued in the eighth year of Chongzhen in the Ming Dynasty recorded the time of “Minor New Year” as the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. (“二十四日以糖剂饼、黍糕、枣栗、胡桃、炒豆祀灶君。”)

Yueling Guangyi (《月令广义》) recorded the customs of the capital of Yan State, saying that the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month was the Minor New Year. (“以纸印之曰灶马。士民竞鬻，以腊月二十四日焚之，为送灶上天。”) The *Yanjing Suishi Ji* (《燕京岁时记》) [4] written by Fucha Dunchong of the Qing Dynasty recorded that the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month was the “Minor New Year”, (“二十三日祭灶，古用黄羊，近闻内廷尚用之，民间不见用也。”) and the *Dijing Suishi Jisheng* (《帝京岁时纪胜》) [4] also recorded that the time of “Minor New Year” was the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. (“廿三日更尽时，家家祀灶，院内立杆，悬挂天灯。”) Through the comparison between the Ming and Qing dynasties, it can be found that the two both recorded the Kitchen God Worshipping custom of “Minor New Year” in the Beijing area, but the time of “Minor New Year” changed from the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month to the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. This may be the source of the inconsistency of the time of “Minor New Year”.

From this, it is speculated that the “Minor New Year” on the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month existed in ancient times. Before the Qing Dynasty, the time of the “Minor New Year” in the north and the south was the same, both of which were also the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. The Qing Dynasty was a period of great social transformation. The development of the customs of the year could be said to be the epitomization of the past dynasties, and it was a critical period when the time of the “Minor New Year” undergone great changes. After the Qing Dynasty, the south continued this custom unchanged, while the time of the “Minor New Year” in the north changed during the Ming and Qing dynasties, from the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month to the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. This is also in line with the relatively ancient law of folk culture preserved in the south.

3 Time Distribution and Development Course of the “Minor New Year”

The *Chronicle of Ji Prefecture* (《蓟州志》) in the 43rd year of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty recorded: “On the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month, joss sticks and candles were set up to ‘sacrifice the Kitchen God’”. The *Chronicle of Ji County* (《蓟县志》) in the 33rd year of the Republic of China recorded: “On the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month, people ‘sacrifice the Kitchen God’, with sugar and melon seeds as offerings, accompanied by joss sticks and candles”. Ji Prefecture was changed to Ji County in 1913. By comparison, it is found that from the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China, the time of Minor New Year in Ji County, Tianjin, evolved from the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month to the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. In order to explore whether the evolution like Ji County, Tianjin is a coincidence or a majority, the author has read through the *Compilation of Chinese Local Chronicles and Folklore Materials*, and sorted out the time of the “Minor New Year” all over the country. And it is found that the time of “Minor New Year” has changed in many areas, and basically it has evolved from the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month to the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month, or from the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month to the coexistence of the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month and the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month.

According to the *Compilation of Chinese Local Chronicles and Folklore Materials*, the author has compiled and summarized the time of the “Minor New Year” in various regions of the country (accurate to counties and cities) and concluded that the areas where the time of the “Minor New Year” evolved in the country are distributed in 15 provincial-level administrative regions. In addition, the time of the “Minor New Year” in other regions also may have evolved, but the local chronicles fail to record its evolution process, only the time of the “Minor New Year” after the evolution.

The time and customs of the “Minor New Year” will interweave and change in different eras and different regions. The above 15 provincial-level administrative regions are divided into three categories: the south, the north, and the junction of the north and the south. Each provincial administrative region is expanded and explored in the order from part to the whole, and the temporal evolution of each provincial administrative region’s time of “Minor New Year” is analyzed in general.

Because the time of the “Minor New Year” in each provincial-level administrative region is complex and diverse, there is no consistent date for the time of the “Minor New Year” at the provincial level, but only at the county and city level is there a consistent date. Therefore, according to the time of the “Minor New Year” of each county and city in these 15 provincial-level administrative regions, the author calculates the proportion of the three kinds of the time of the “Minor New Year” to determine the mainstream time of the “Minor New Year” of each provincial-level administrative region. It can be seen that in the time of the “Minor New Year” in the five northern regions, the proportion of the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month far exceeds that of the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. It can be basically determined that the mainstream time of the “Minor New Year” in the north is the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. In the south, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Guangdong, Jiangxi, and Yunnan all have the time of the “Minor New Year” dominated by the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month and the two provinces of Guizhou and Sichuan are slightly different.

3.1 The South

The time categories and their proportions of the three kinds of time of the “Minor New Year” in the provincial-level administrative regions of the Qing Dynasty are roughly shown in the following “Table 1”.

According to the *Compilation of Chinese Local Chronicles and Folklore Material*, it is clearly recorded that the time of the “Minor New Year” in a small part of the seven southern provincial-level administrative regions in “Table 1” has evolved from the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month to the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. For example, the *Chronicle of Zhuji County* (《诸暨县志》) in the thirty-eighth year of Qianlong in the Qing Dynasty recorded the time of the “Minor New Year” as the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. (“十二月二十四日，俗谓之‘腊月念四’，人家以是夜‘祀灶’”.) The *Chronicle of Zhuji County* in the second year of Xuantong in the Qing Dynasty recorded the time of the “Minor New Year” as the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. (“二十三日，俗谓之‘醉司令节’。”) The time of the “Minor New Year” in Zhuji, Zhejiang changed from the 24th day to the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month in the Qing Dynasty. In the local chronicles, there are 4 places in Xiaoshan County, Linhai County, Dinghai County, and Zhenhai County in Zhejiang Province, 2 places

Table 1. The three time types of “Minor New Year” and their proportions in the southern provincial administrative regions of the Qing Dynasty

| | Shanghai | Zhejiang | Guangdong | Jiangxi | Yunnan | Sichuan | Guizhou |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| The 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month | 2, 10% | 10, 14.7% | 5, 9.6% | 2, 5% | 5, 12.1% | 19, 28.8% | 11, 52.3% |
| The 24th day of the twelfth lunar month | 13, 65% | 48, 70.6% | 45, 86.5% | 35, 87.5% | 35, 85.3% | 25, 37.9% | 5, 23.8% |
| The coexistence of the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month and the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month | 5, 25% | 10, 14.7% | 1, 1.9% | 3, 7.5% | 1, 2.4% | 22, 33.3% | 5, 23.8% |
| The rest | 0 | 0 | 1, 1.9% | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

in Zengcheng County and Yangjiang County in Guangdong Province, Fenyi County in Jiangxi Province, Xuanwei County in Yunnan Province, Pengshan County in Sichuan Province, and Dushan County in Guizhou Province that clearly record the time change the “Minor New Year”.

According to statistics, due to the relatively small proportion of the areas where the time has changed, the mainstream time of the “Minor New Year” in the 16 southern provincial-level administrative regions is still the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. Comparing the two editions of *Chronicle of Huangyan County* (《黄岩县志》) from different eras in the Wanli period of the Ming Dynasty and the Guangxu period of the Qing Dynasty, it is found that the time of the “Minor New Year” of Huangyan, Zhejiang doesn’t evolve in the Ming and Qing dynasties, both of which are the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. (明万历《黄岩县志》：“腊月二十四日 (十二月), 是日扫屋尘, 谓之‘除残’。”清光绪三年《黄岩县志》：“腊月二十四日, 扫屋尘。夜‘祀灶’, 扮钟馗拿鬼以逐疫。”) In the *Compilation of Chinese Local Chronicles and Folklore Materials*, there are 48 places in Zhejiang Province that have similar records, including Hangzhou, Jiaxing, Huzhou, Ningbo, and Shaoxing, showing that most of the places have always followed the custom of “having the Minor New Year” on the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. Similarly, there are 13 places including Huating County in Shanghai, 45 places including Hua County and Conghua County in Guangdong Province, 35 places including Xinjian County and Leping County in Jiangxi Province, and 35 places including Chenggong County and Kunyang Prefecture in Yunnan Province.

Different from the mainstream time of the “Minor New Year” in the south, the proportion of the time of the “Minor New Year” on the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar

month in Guizhou Province is greater than that of the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. It is speculated that because it is greatly influenced by the north, there are many regions where the time has evolved. However, only Dushan County is clearly recorded in the local chronicles. In 1965, the mimeographed version of *Chronicle of Dushan Prefecture* (《独山州志》) in Guizhou Library recorded that the time of the “Minor New Year” was the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. (“十二月二十四夜, ‘送灶’”) In 1965, the mimeographed version of the *Chronicle of Dushan County* (《独山县志》) in Guizhou Library recorded that the time of the “Minor New Year” was the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. (“十二月二十三日, 夜陈糍汤, 焚香楮, 祀司命于爨下, 曰‘送灶’”) In the seventh year of Hongzhi in the Ming Dynasty, Dushan Prefecture was established, and in the Republic of China, it was changed into Dushan County. From the Ming Dynasty to the Republic of China, the time of the “Minor New Year” changed. In the eighth year of Jiaqing in the Qing Dynasty, the *Chronicle of Qianxi Prefecture* (《黔西州志》) recorded: “On the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month, people will sacrifice the Kitchen God, and the house will be cleaned up on the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month”. (“十二月二十三日, ‘祀灶神’, 二十四日, 扫舍宇”) In the sixteenth year of Guangxu in the Qing Dynasty, the *Chronicle of Pingyuan Prefecture* (《平远州志》) recorded: “On the 23rd day and 24th day of the twelfth lunar month, every family will sacrifice the Kitchen God”. (“至二十三、四日‘祀灶’, 则比户皆然”) It can be seen that there were various customs and different time of Minor New Year.

Sichuan Province was also different from other southern regions in that its mainstream time of the “Minor New Year” was not clear. In Sichuan Province, there were three kinds of time of the “Minor New Year” with about the same proportion, and there were many areas where the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month and the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month coexisted and the evolution situation was relatively complicated. In the twenty-first year of Jiaqing in the Qing Dynasty, the *Chronicle of Huayang County* (《华阳县志》) recorded that people had the “Minor New Year” on the 23rd day and 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. (“二十四日, 扫舍宇, 沿街爨灶神、灶马及灶唐‘祭灶神’, 有于前一日者”) In the twenty-third year of the Republic of China, the *Chronicle of Huayang County* recorded that people sacrificed the Kitchen God on the 23rd day and 24th days of the twelfth lunar month. (“二十三、二十四日两日, 人家‘祭灶’, 曰‘送灶上天’”) Here, the time of the “Minor New Year” changed from the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month to the coexistence of the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month and the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month.

3.2 The North

The time categories and their proportions of the three kinds of time of the “Minor New Year” in the provincial-level administrative regions of the Qing Dynasty are roughly shown in the following “Table 2”.

According to statistics, the mainstream time of the “Minor New Year” in the above five northern regions is the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. However, it is clearly recorded in the local chronicles that the initial time of the “Minor New Year” in some areas is not the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. For example, in the eleventh year of Tongzhi in the Qing Dynasty, the *Chronicle of Qinghe County* (《清河县志》) recorded the time of the “Minor New Year” as the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. (“二十四

Table 2. The three time types of “Minor New Year” and their proportions in the northern provincial administrative regions of the Qing Dynasty

| | Tianjin | Hebei | Shanxi | Shandong | Shaanxi |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| The 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month | 4, 80% | 77, 77.8% | 59, 80.8% | 75, 87.2% | 21, 72.4% |
| The 24th day of the twelfth lunar month | 1, 20% | 21, 21.2% | 14, 19.2% | 7, 8.1% | 4, 13.8% |
| The coexistence of the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month and the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month | 0 | 1, 1% | 0 | 4, 4.7% | 4, 13.8% |

日, 涤厨洁, 饴糖‘祀灶’”。) The time recorded in the *Chronicle of Qinghe County* in the ninth year of Guangxu in the Qing Dynasty was the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. (“二十三日, 涤厨洁, 饴糖祀灶, 曰‘辞灶’”。) In the twenty-third year of the Republic of China, the *Chronicle of Qinghe County* recorded the time of the “Minor New Year” as the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. (“二十三日, 涤厨洁, 饴糖祀灶, 谓之‘辞灶’”) The three editions of *Chronicle of Qinghe County* with different time clearly recorded the process of the evolution of the “Minor New Year” in Qinghe County, Hebei Province from the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month to the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month, and the specific point in time of the evolution should be from the period of Tongzhi in the Qing Dynasty to the period of Guangxu in the Qing Dynasty. In the *Compilation of Chinese Local Chronicles and Folklore Material*, in Hebei Province, there are similar records in Zhengding County, Wanquan County, Qingyuan County, Qing County, Nanpi County, Guangping Government (now Guangfu Town), and Xinhe County. For the rest places where the time of “Minor New Year” is on the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month but the evolution process isn’t recorded, it can be speculated that the time in these regions have also evolved, but the point of time of evolution in each region is different. There are still a few areas in the five northern regions that follow the custom of “having the Minor New Year” on the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month, remaining unchanged.

The situation in Shanxi Province is similar. In the 25th year of Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty, the *Chronicle of Linjin County* (《临晋县志》) quoted Fan Chengda’s lyrics to explain that the custom of “having the Minor New Year” on the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month had a long history, and thus, the time of the “Minor New Year” as the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month got to be verified. (“腊月二十四日, 各家扫屋尘, ‘祀灶’, 品用果饵、饴糖, 以为灶神上天, 言人罪过, 取用以胶其牙。虽不经, 然宋范成大《祭灶》词: ‘古传腊月二十四, 灶君上天欲言事。云车风马少流连, 家有杯盘丰腆祀’。则此风由来远矣。”) In the 38th year of Qianlong in the Qing Dynasty, the *Chronicle of Linjin County* recorded: “On the 23rd night of the twelfth lunar month, people will ‘sacrifice the Kitchen God’”. In the 12th year of the Republic of China, the *Chronicle of Linjin County* recorded: “On the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month, the sacrifice of sugar and melon seeds will be made”. (“五月二十三日, 以饴糖作瓜‘祀灶’”。) From the reign of Emperor Kangxi to Qianlong in the Qing Dynasty, the time of the “Minor

New Year” in Linjin County, Shanxi Province evolved into the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month, which has been followed to this day.

The records of the *Chronicle of Ningjin County* (《宁津县志》) in the 26th year of Guangxu of the Qing Dynasty showed that the time of the “Minor New Year” in Ningjin County, Shandong Province also changed. After the Ming Dynasty, it was one day earlier than the traditional time of the “Minor New Year”, which was the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. (“二十三日, 设酒果、糖瓜、黍糍、粬粒以‘祀灶’……情景大都相似, 惟今‘祀灶’早一日, 如《帝京景物略》所载, 乃二十三日也。吾乡自前明至今, 皆二十三日‘祀灶’。盖取其皇极九五之数以敬灶云。”) The county chronicle also speculated that the reason for the evolution is related to “九五之尊” (the imperial throne) (“取其皇极九五之数”), for the reason that 2 plus 3 exactly equals five, so the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month is chosen to “have the Minor New Year”.

The time of the “Minor New Year” in Shandong Province and Shaanxi Province is special, with the coexistence of the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month and the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. For example, the *Revised Chronicle of Xianyang County* (《重修咸阳县志》) in the 21st year of the Republic of China clearly recorded the time of the “Minor New Year” in this place as the coexistence of the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month and the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. (“二十三日或二十四日晚, 以圆饼、饴糖献厨内, 风焚纸印社神像, 谓之‘送灶。’)” The *Chronicle of Xianyang County* (《咸阳县志》) in the 10th year of Daoguang in the Qing Dynasty recorded that the time of the “Minor New Year” in this place was originally the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. (“二十四日, 祭灶与灶陞, 谓之‘送灶’”) It can be speculated that it has not completely changed to the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month in the evolution process and still retains the traditional 24th day of the twelfth lunar month, which leads to the phenomenon that the time of the “Minor New Year” is the 23rd day or the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month in some areas. This situation also shows that affected by the surrounding counties and cities, the evolution of the time of the “Minor New Year” may have been in progress.

3.3 The Juncture of the North and the South

The time categories and their proportions of the three kinds of time of the “Minor New Year” in the provincial-level administrative regions of the Qing Dynasty are roughly shown in the following “Table 3”.

The three provincial-level administrative regions in the above table are all located at the juncture of north and south, but the distribution of the time of the “Minor New Year” is different.

The proportion of the time of the “Minor New Year” in Jiangsu Province as the 23rd or 24th day of the twelfth lunar month is much larger than that on the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month, but the mainstream time of the “Minor New Year” there is still the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. It is speculated that this is related to the fact that most of Jiangsu is located in the south. However, the northern Jiangsu area has evolved under the influence of the custom of the “Minor New Year” in the north. In the process of evolution, the traditional mainstream dates have been retained and new dates have also been introduced. There are even cases in Taixing County where the two dates of “Minor New Year” coexist without complete evolution. In the 18th year of Jiaqing in the Qing

Table 3. The three time types of “Minor New Year” and their proportions in the provincial administrative regions at the juncture of the north and the south in the Qing Dynasty

| | Jiangsu | Anhui | Henan |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| The 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month | 3, 5.9% | 16, 36.4% | 63, 79.7% |
| The 24th day of the twelfth lunar month | 37, 72.5% | 19, 43.2% | 10, 12.7% |
| The coexistence of the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month and the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month | 11, 21.6% | 8, 18.2% | 6, 13.6% |
| The rest | 0 | 1, 2.3% | 0 |

Dynasty, the *Continued Chronicle of Taixing County* (《续修泰兴县志》) recorded: “On the 23rd or 24th day of the twelfth lunar month, malt sugar is offered to worship the Kitchen God”. (“二十三、四日, 设饴豆送灶神。”) The *Chronicle of Taixing County* (《泰兴县志》) in the 12th year of Guangxu in the Qing Dynasty recorded: “On the 23rd or 24th day of the twelfth lunar month, the Kitchen God is worshipped with glutinous rice sesame balls, malt sugar and other sacrifice foodstuffs”. (“二十三、四日, 设粉团、饴豆‘祀灶神’。”).

Jiangsu Province generally presents a situation where various dates of the “Minor New Year” are inclusive, and the time of the “Minor New Year” has evolved in some areas. For example, the transcript *Chronicle of Xuyi County* (《盱眙县志》) recorded: “On the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month, the Kitchen God is worshipped and the house is cleaned up”. (“二十四日‘祀灶’, 扫舍宇。”) In the 25th year of the Republic of China, the *Brief Chronicle of Xuyi County* (《盱眙县志略》) recorded: “On the 23rd and 24th day of the twelfth lunar month, every family will worship the Kitchen God with melt sugar, which is called ‘Kitchen God Worshipping’”. According to customs, the government at that time celebrated the Minor New Year on the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month, and the common people celebrated the Minor New Year on the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. As for what the basis is, there is no way to verify. (“二十三日及二十四日, 家家以灶糖等类祀灶神而送之, 曰‘祀灶’。俗例军家二十三日, 民家二十四日, 究竟何所根据, 无从稽考。”) Xuyi County once had the “Minor New Year” on the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month, but the *Brief Chronicle of Xuyi County* of the Republic of China clearly recorded that the time of the “Minor New Year” was the 23rd or 24th day of the twelfth lunar month.

Different from Jiangsu Province, although Henan Province spans the north and south, most of its areas are located in the north and are greatly influenced by the north, and there are many areas that have evolved. Therefore, the mainstream time of the “Minor New Year” is the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. According to the *Compilation of Chinese Local Chronicles and Folklore Materials*, there are 63 places in Henan Province, including Zheng County, Xingyang County, and Sishui County where the time of the “Minor New Year” is on the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month.

The situation in Anhui Province is rather special, and its mainstream time of the “Minor New Year” is not exact. The proportion of the time of the “Minor New Year” as the 23rd day or as the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month is almost the same. The areas where people have the “Minor New Year” on the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month are slightly more than those on the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. The areas where people have the “Minor New Year” on the 23rd or 24th day of the twelfth lunar month are also slightly more. In some areas of Anhui Province, the time of Minor New Year has changed from the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month to the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. For example, it’s recorded in the *Chronicle of Huoqiu County* (《霍丘县志》) in the 19th year of Qianlong in the Qing Dynasty that: “On the evening of the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month, from the scholar-officials to the common people, they will offer cookies to worship the Kitchen God. This is one of the five sacrificial offerings in ancient times”. (“二十四日, 夜设饧饼祭司命灶神, 自士大夫至庶民皆然, 此古五祀之一也。”) The *Chronicle of Huoqiu County* in the ninth year of Tongzhi in the Qing Dynasty recorded: “On the evening of the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month, people will offer cookies to worship the Kitchen God”. (“二十三日, 是夜设饧饼祭司命灶神。”).

4 Conclusion

“Having the Minor New Year” on the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month has existed in ancient times. Through textual research, from the Eastern Jin Dynasty to the beginning of Qing Dynasty, the traditional general date of the “Minor New Year” in the north and south has always been the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. The Ming and Qing dynasties are a period of great changes in the time of the “Minor New Year”. After the Qing Dynasty, there are obvious regional differences in the time of the “Minor New Year” in the north and the south, roughly showing the pattern of “the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month in the south and the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month in the north”. This paper summarizes the time of the “Minor New Year” recorded in the *Compilation of Chinese Local Chronicles and Folklore Material*, and concludes through analysis that the time of the “Minor New Year” in the north changes from the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month to the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. Influenced by the north, the time of “Minor New Year” in parts of the south has also evolved. Comprehensive factors such as north-south exchanges, immigration, and politics make the time of “Minor New Year” of the north and south present a complex situation of mutual influence and integration.

Due to different eras and regions, the time of “Minor New Year” is also inconsistent, but today the pattern of “the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month in the south and the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month in the north” is still clear. Most of the northern regions have the “Minor New Year” on the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month, and a few follow the custom of “having the Minor New Year” on the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month. Most of the southern regions celebrate the “Minor New Year” on the 24th day of the twelfth lunar month, but there are also phenomena such as the mainstream time of Minor New Year as the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month in Guizhou as well as the coexistence of various dates of “Minor New Year” in Sichuan. The diversity of the national “Minor New Year” time not only reflects that the year custom culture is the

product of changing with the times, but also extends the cultural roots of the Chinese nation. With cultural and spiritual homology, the source and the flow meet here, and the root and the vein are connected here. It is in this process of continuous integration of inheritance and innovation that the year custom culture is everlasting. As the saying goes, “Being accustomed to a certain practice, it becomes a general social conduct; following a certain practice, it becomes a custom” [5], it is precisely because there are the root and origin of the existence and retrospect that the festival custom of the “Minor New Year” has become the longest-running festival custom all over the world.

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