



A Study on the Feng Shui Customs of Hakka Tombs in Eastern Guangdong

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Abstract. As a distinctive branch of the Han nationality, the Hakka people have experienced multiple large-scale migrations in history, forming a Hakka culture with strong clan consciousness and localized characteristics in the mountainous regions of Jiangxi, Fujian, and Guangdong provinces. The geographical pattern of undulating mountains and crisscrossing rivers in Eastern Guangdong has provided conditions for the site selection and form of Hakka tombs. Adhering to the principle of "adapting to the mountain terrain" and integrating Feng Shui theory, the Hakka people have constructed tombs, forming a cultural system that combines ethical order, cosmic outlook, and environmental practices. This study takes the Feng Shui customs of Hakka tombs in Eastern Guangdong as the research object, adopts a method combining literature collation and field investigation, systematically sorts out their basic forms and types, explores their role in the clan system and cultural identity, and analyzes their inheritance and changes in the contemporary era. It aims to enrich the research dimensions of Hakka culture and provide references for understanding the interaction between folk Feng Shui concepts and local society.

Keywords: Eastern Guangdong Hakka; Tomb Fengshui; Secondary Burial; Clan Identity; Cultural Inheritance.

1 Introduction

In Hakka society, the site selection of tombs is directly related to the prosperity and decline of future generations; therefore, a strong geographical perception and Feng Shui awareness are generally permeated in Hakka funeral behaviors, developing a cultural system that combines ethical order with environmental practices. As an important part of the southern Chinese ethnic branch culture, Hakka culture has long been the focus of attention in disciplines such as folklore, anthropology, and history. Existing studies mostly focus on Hakka settlement patterns, residential architecture, language customs, and marriage rituals, and have formed relatively systematic achievements. In terms of settlement patterns and residential architecture, Qin Luye conducted analysis by extensively collecting traditional Hakka villages in the Meizhou area, compared the similarities and differences between different regions, and constructed a comprehensive

protection system for traditional Hakka villages in Meizhou from the inside out[1]. However, systematic research on Hakka tomb Feng Shui customs, especially in Eastern Guangdong, remains weak. Most existing literatures stay at the level of case descriptions or collation of traditional concepts, lacking in-depth analysis of their connections with social structure, clan relations, and local identity. In addition, with the modernization process and changes in social structure, the survival and transformation of traditional tomb Feng Shui customs in the current era have presented new characteristics, which urgently require more detailed field investigations and theoretical discussions.

2 The Feng Shui Culture of Hakka Tombs in Eastern Guangdong

The Hakka people are a group that formed and grew continuously through migration. Migrating from the Central Plains to Lingnan, they long endured a cycle of migration and resettlement. Facing pressures such as wars, land property conflicts, and alien environments, tombs and Feng Shui concepts gradually became important pillars for stabilizing the ethnic group's spirit. The Feng Shui belief in Eastern Guangdong's Hakka culture is a knowledge and practice system deeply rooted in the group's migration history and mountain survival experience, with its core being the pursuit of harmony and mutual benefit between humans and nature, especially terrain and water systems, to achieve the prosperity of the clan and descendants.

Feng Shui has had a profound and systematic impact on Hakka residences. Jiaying Prefecture Chronicles records: "Deluded by Feng Shui theories, some people delay burial for decades. Several years after burial, they must exhume the remains and store them in earthen jars.... Moreover, they listen to geomancers to seek auspicious burial sites, encroach on ancestral graves, steal burial plots, initiate lawsuits, and even ruin their fortunes to fight over a foot of land. No custom is more foolish and uncivilized than this." This shows that Feng Shui concepts have been deeply integrated into the Hakka people's value system and daily practices. A considerable proportion of Hakka people attribute the success or failure of individuals or families in official careers, wealth, and offspring to the Feng Shui quality of their "residential sites" and ancestral graves. This concept has turned Feng Shui into a scarce resource that can be divided, often triggering resource competition and conflicts within families. Traditional Hakka views hold that the quality of Feng Shui directly affects an individual's luck and often influences the kinship between clans, sub-clans, and even brothers.

In the construction of Hakka settlements and residences, Feng Shui is a core planning principle. The widely spread proverb in Hakka areas, "Check the mountains first before building a house," confirms the status of Feng Shui in house construction activities. An ideal residential pattern emphasizes "authentic dragon veins and proper acupoints, surrounded by sand and embraced by water": the village must be backed by winding "dragon veins" as a barrier (Xuanwu), surrounded by hills on the left and right (Green Dragon on the left, White Tiger on the right), with a gentle slope (Ancestral Mountain) and an open courtyard in front, and a meandering river or excavated pond to "gather qi and accumulate wealth." The shape of the circular house (Wei Long Wu) is a concrete

manifestation of this Fengshui concept—with the rear circular house as the backer and the half-moon pond in front as the bright water, the whole presents a closed "royal chair" shape, forming an internal space that hides wind and gathers qi, perfectly in line with the top-grade auspicious shape described in *Yangzhai Huixin Ji* (Collected Insights on Yangzhai): "The house shape is like a human face, with two hands embracing for protection." **Sample Heading (Third Level)**. Only two levels of headings should be numbered. Lower level headings remain unnumbered; they are formatted as run-in headings.

3 The Forms and Feng Shui Patterns of Hakka Tombs in Eastern Guangdong

The components of a tomb generally include the tomb turtle, protective ridges, backer, stele base, and stele body. The back of the stele is often inscribed with the burial date and the name of the geomancer to confirm the legitimacy of the Feng Shui site selection and the orthodoxy of the ritual. In Feng Shui culture, the tomb is the intersection of the yin and yang realms, and it is generally believed that the connection between yin and yang can be maintained through periodic rituals and festivals.

Qingming Festival and the Double Ninth Festival are the most prominent occasions for this kind of communication. Clan members will return to the ancestral tomb during Qingming Festival, first weeding and adding soil to restore the tomb area to cleanliness and integrity, symbolizing the removal of filth and the dredging of earth qi; then setting up an altar, burning incense, and setting off firecrackers, using sound and smoke as media to "inform" the ancestors and promote yin-yang induction. The kowtow ceremony is the climax of the entire ritual, completing the submission and call to the ancestors through the bending and stretching of the body. Mircea Eliade pointed out that rituals endow space with sacredness by repeating the actions of the "primordial moment"; here, the sanctification of the tomb area means that the spirit of the deceased is reawakened and continues to participate in the ethnic group's ethical order [2].

In the Hakka context, this kind of communication is regarded as having practical effects. If the tomb is covered with weeds or the water outlet is blocked, people will worry about "unsmooth qi veins", leading to the decline of family fortune; therefore, the sweeping behavior is not only a way to respect ancestors but also a necessary means to repair the yin-yang path. Field investigations show that villagers often inspect the stele and drainage facilities after sweeping the tomb and repair them on an auspicious day if necessary to ensure that the ancestral tomb can continue to "gather qi". The sweeping on Double Ninth Festival also emphasizes this kind of communication. It is held after the autumn harvest, and the ritual often includes words of thanking the earth and praying for blessings, incorporating ancestors, land, and descendants into the same prayer chain. At this time, the ancestral tomb is regarded as a gateway for yin-yang interaction, carrying the "yin qi" from the underground and the "yang qi" from the courtyard. Through the activation of the ritual, the two are harmonized to form a blessing for future generations.

4 Inheritance and Changes of Hakka Tomb Fengshui Customs in Contemporary Eastern Guangdong

The recent funeral governance in Qiling Town, Xingning City, Meizhou, provides a real case for observing the transformation of contemporary tomb Fengshui customs in modern society. In September 2025, local media reported that Qiling Town has rectified illegal tomb construction through a model of "drone patrol + daily ground patrol", and has handled more than ten new tombs that year, forming a three-dimensional and regular supervision mechanism [3]. This initiative is placed under the background of funeral reform in Guangdong Province and Meizhou City: as early as 1986, the Measures for the Implementation of Funeral and Interment Management in Guangdong Province stipulated that earth burial reform areas must be centrally buried in public cemeteries or columbariums, and the tomb area must be strictly restricted; the "14th Five-Year Plan" for the development of funeral and interment undertakings in Meizhou City also proposed to optimize the layout of public welfare cemeteries, improve facility coverage, promote ecological burial methods, and gradually realize the standardization and normalization of funeral and interment services [4].

These policies and technical means have brought a direct impact on traditional Hakka Feng Shui practices. The Hakka area has long followed the site selection principles of "adapting to the mountain terrain" and "hiding wind and gathering qi", with cemeteries mostly located by mountains and rivers, pursuing harmony with the natural environment. However, in centralized public cemeteries, tombs are often arranged regularly, with limited terrain choices, making it difficult to reproduce the traditional model of individual families selecting sites according to dragon veins and water outlets. The regular layout of centralized public cemeteries has changed the relationship between tombs and the landscape, making cemeteries lose interaction with the geographical environment and only retain some Feng Shui symbols through decorative components. A field survey report in Gufang Village, Western Fujian, shows that after moving tombs, villagers often try to retain the stele form and protective ridge elements to maintain the symbolic continuity of ancestral tombs [5].

In Meizhou, funeral reform has not only brought spatial adjustments but also promoted changes in ritual and management methods. In recent years, civil affairs departments have advocated civilized tomb sweeping, promoting methods such as "online tomb sweeping", "appointment and diversion", and "agent tomb sweeping", which have gradually transformed the sacrificial activities during Qingming and Double Ninth Festivals from centralized on-site gathering to decentralized and digitalized forms. For example, during the 2024 Qingming Festival, official statistics in Meizhou showed that the proportion of green and low-carbon tomb sweeping exceeded 60% [6], indicating that modern technology and public policies are reshaping the participation methods and spatial pattern of ancestor worship. For the traditional Hakka tomb sweeping ritual that emphasizes reunion, this is an obvious simplification, but it also provides an alternative way for the younger generation working or studying outside to maintain family ties.

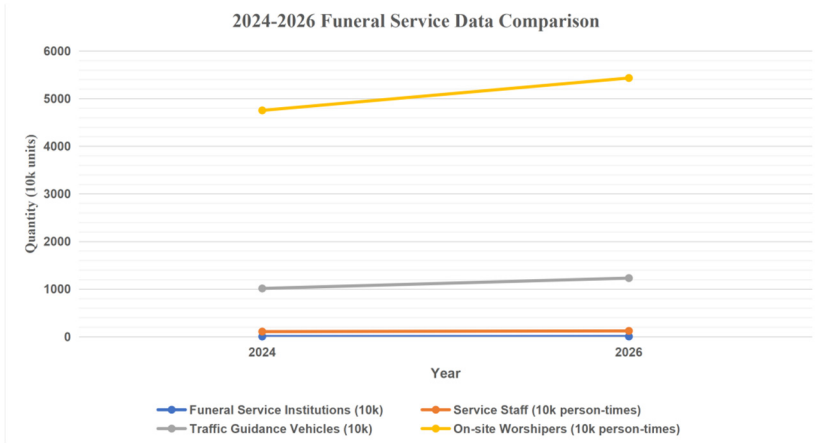


Fig. 1. Statistics from the Office of Tomb-Sweeping Work for the Qingming Festival of the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

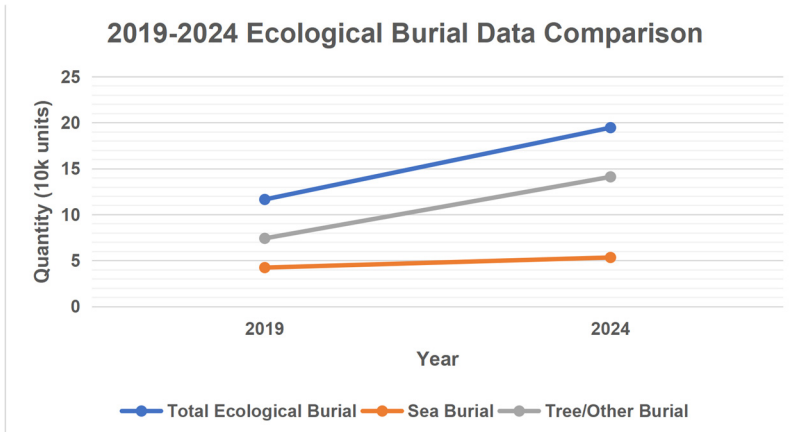


Fig. 2. The Ministry of Civil Affairs vigorously promotes ecological burial.

There are approximately 65,500 on-site memorial institutions nationwide, receiving 54.3395 million visits, an increase of 14.3% year-on-year (Figure 1). In 2024, there were 194,700 eco-burials, a 67% increase compared to 2019. Among them, 53,500 were sea burials, an increase of 26%, and 141,200 were tree burials and other forms, an increase of 90% (Figure 2). Through this series of events, we can see that the impact of contemporary funeral governance on traditional Hakka Feng Shui is various. The construction of regular public cemeteries has indeed cut off the original pattern of "being by mountains and rivers, adapting to the mountain terrain", greatly reducing the role of Fengshui in actual site selection. But at the same time, villagers have not completely abandoned Fengshui; they will try to retain elements such as steles, protective ridges, and orientation within the specified scope, hoping to maintain the symbolic significance of ancestral tombs through these details.

The new tomb sweeping methods have also changed the atmosphere of the ritual. Digital and decentralized tomb sweeping allows young people working or studying outside to continue to participate, which undoubtedly eases the spatial and temporal constraints, but also weakens the solemnity and sense of community that existed when the entire clan gathered in front of the ancestral tombs during Qingming and Double Ninth Festivals in the past. Traditional tomb sweeping emphasized the reunion of everyone at the same time and place, while "online tomb sweeping" or agent tomb sweeping is more of a substitute expression. Although convenient, it is difficult to completely reproduce the past scene of facing ancestors and confirming clan relations at the same time. People still understand and interpret the significance of ancestral tombs within the framework of Feng Shui, but the practice methods have been reshaped.

5 Conclusion

Against the background of contemporary social transformation, the Feng Shui customs of Hakka tombs in Eastern Guangdong are facing multiple challenges, such as the regulation of funeral policies, urbanization dispersion, and digital impact. However, through the continuation of clan consciousness, the promotion of rural cultural revival, and the compromise practice of "retaining traditional symbols" and "cultural publicization", they have achieved adaptive inheritance. This interaction between inheritance and change not only reflects the resilience of Hakka culture but also reflects the running-in process between folk beliefs and modern social governance.

In the future, with the further opening and integration of Hakka society, the Feng Shui customs of tombs may present more new forms, but the cultural core of "being careful in the end and pursuing the distant past" and the core function of "clan cohesion" will still be the key to their survival. Continuous attention to this custom can not only enrich the depth of Hakka culture research but also provide a typical sample for understanding the modern transformation of folk beliefs in southern China.

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