

“How to” Bai San



As performed by Lum Sai Ho Tong each year during Ching Ming

During the month of April we commonly hear the words “Ching Ming” and “Bai San” but what is the difference? Ching Ming Festival, also known as Tomb Sweeping Day or Chinese Memorial day, is a time for the family to gather and pay respect to their ancestors. It is a national holiday in China. “Ching Ming” translates to “pure brightness” and characterizes the coming of Spring. “Bai San” translates to “worship up in the mountain”. In the olden days of China, the elders felt responsible for the future generations so the best place to be buried is in the mountain where they can oversee all their family below. So in the olden days, for the families to worship at their ancestor’s grave, they needed to travel up the mountain. To sum it up, during **Ching Ming**, you **bai san**.

Lum Sai Ho Tong celebrates Ching Ming by gathering at the gravesite of the “first Lum in Hawaii” located at the Manoa Chinese Cemetery. The following is how we “bai san”. The first thing to do is to tidy up the gravesite: cutting back the grass, pulling weeds, and ensuring the tombstone looks clear and bright. Another common practice is to add fresh soil to the grave. The grave is then decorated with flowers. Ceremonial foods are presented: 5 small cups of whiskey or wine, 5 cups of tea, 5 bowls of rice, 5 pairs of chopsticks and 5 dishes consisting of 1 bowl each of the following: pork, chicken, fish, shrimp and tofu. (If you go to a Chinese restaurant, they should know what to prepare for bai san.) It is a celebration so we also bring a whole roasted pig. You also need to bring fruit and sweets and candy and unshelled peanuts. Add any other foods that you think your ancestors would enjoy. The food should be cold in commemoration of the faithful servant, Jie Zitui, who was accidentally burned to death: a sad event which started the tradition of Ching Ming. (Note: If the food is wrapped, ensure part of the wrapping is uncovered so the ancestors can partake.) Light at least 2 candles and sticks of incense (in bunches of 3) in front of the tomb. Honor neighboring tombs by placing incense (in bunches of 3) at their site, as well as all over the place. Ceremoniously drink with your ancestors by pouring a little bit of whiskey and tea on the ground in front of the grave and refilling the cups. The group will then gather in front of the tomb and the leader will say a few words thanking the ancestors for providing health, safety and prosperity for the group. Everyone will then bow 3 times.

Next is the burning of joss paper folded to resemble a Chinese gold ingot. This faux money is often referred to as “hell bank notes”. This is probably a Christian interpretation of the Chinese character which makes reference to an “underworld court”. Being called “hell” bank notes does not have a negative connotation to the Chinese as this is spiritual money for the ancestors to use and enjoy in the afterlife. At Manoa Chinese Cemetery, they normally provide, if available, chicken wire to burn your faux money in to control it from flying all over the place. (Ensure you have a bucket of water available to completely snuff out the burning

embers after you are done.) We also burn fireworks to awaken the ancestors and let them know we are here.

The food is then packed up except for the food prepared for the “san gai”. The san gai is a smaller neighboring grave which serves as a guardian spirit. We honor that grave with a plate containing a salted duck egg, a piece of pork belly and a shrimp. Also provided is a portion of rice and a cup of tea and/or whiskey. Candles and incense is also offered along with candy and peanuts. Before leaving, candy and peanuts is also scattered around the main grave.



Below is a kit that contains incense, spirit money and candles that can be purchased in the Tin Hau Temple:

