

## **Ching Ming – Tomb Sweeping Festival**



### **Respecting one's ancestors is one of the most important aspect of traditional Chinese culture**

Ching Ming or Tomb Sweeping Festival is held each year in the month of April. It is a time for Chinese families to gather at the gravesites and pay respect to their loved ones. According to Confucius, filial piety is “the law of the universe, the righteousness on earth, and the correct path of human behavior”. This virtue is promoted by all 3 major Chinese religions: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism.

Ching Ming dates back some 3,000 years in China. Legend says there was a man named Jie Zitui who was a loyal servant of a Chinese lord. When the lord was exiled, Jie Zitui kept him alive by cutting off meat from his leg and feeding it to him. Surviving his ordeal the lord came back to power 19 years later. By this time the lord had forgotten about Jie's loyal service and went to look for him in an attempt to reward him. The lord was told the Jie had become a recluse and hid in the mountain with his mother. Unable to find him, the lord ordered that the mountain be set on fire in an attempt to force Jie to come out. Well, although his

intentions were good, all they found were the bodies of Jie and his mother. The lord then established Ching Ming as a holiday to remember the dead.

The following are common practices during Ching Ming:

- 1) Cleaning the gravesite – a sign of respect. Ching ming means “clean and bright”
- 2) Offering of food, wine, tea and flowers – to celebrate the occasion as the family reunites and commune with past generations
- 3) Prayers of thanks and burning of incense – it is believed that all good fortune is derived on the shadows of your ancestors. The smoke from the incense carries your prayers up to the heavens
- 4) Ritual burning of faux money and other representations of things your ancestors will want in the afterlife – keeping the ancestors happy
- 5) Burning of fireworks – although normally used to scare away evil spirits, during this event it is used to wake up the ancestors so they can partake in the festivities

Besides going to the gravesite, people in China enjoy Ching Ming Festival by going on outings in the countryside to enjoy the Spring season, and by flying kites.