

A Coupling Exploration of Intangible Cultural Heritages and the Changes of National Regimes ——Taking Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang as an Example

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ABSTRACT

The intangible cultural heritage represented by Mogao Grottoes (pronounced Dunhuang) is a remarkable history of national political system changes in China (approximately from the 4th to the 14th century). It has recorded system changes of national regimes which contributed its glory and formed a coalition.

Keywords: institutional change; intangible culture; national power;

1. INTRODUCTION

The theory of coupling relationship which is derived from mechanical automation originally means the degree of mutual engagement between two or more components. In this article, it turns a dialectical concept which means different degrees of completeness and a certain degree of independence between constituent elements in a certain system. The coupling relationship theory emphasizes the dynamic relationship of mutual dependence, mutual coordination and mutual promotion among various elements under the positive interaction between subsystems. Mogao Grottoes, the typical representative of intangible cultural heritage, and the changes of ethnic (especially minority) regimes are closely related between sub-systems under the large system of civil capital integration. Therefore, the two constitute a coupling relationship.

2. Dunhuang Coupling of National Political Power System and (political) Culture

The exchanges among national powers are manifested as occasionally economic and commercial exchanges and a large number of political struggles, and political life or political struggle is a prominent topic in the art of Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang. Typical political issues of national regimes like “bad friends hurt brothers” and “it takes 500 thieves to become Buddhas” are usually connected with religion, which is a feature of every feudal regime, including Wu Zetian of the Tang Dynasty. She claimed that the emperor had greatly elevated the status of religion in order to gain political benefits. The Dunhuang culture at this time is expressed as that ①Political struggle is the manifestation of the survival of the fittest in the system,

and various political struggles are reflected here. When one side of the struggle is helpless, Dunhuang has become a place of escape for the victims of political regime struggles, so Dunhuang has become a political regime from a cultural perspective. The last consciousness of struggle is the last method of struggle and sustenance. This method can only be used in Mogao Grottoes or other similar places. Dunhuang is the sustenance of the remaining areas of political struggles. In other words, it is a place where all surrounding ethnic regimes exchanged their systems, and the strengths and weaknesses of the systems participated and collided in the exchanges, which makes Dunhuang a multi-ethnic mixed-living area in the history. In this ancient land, Dayue, Saizhonghu, Wusun, Xunrong, Xiongnu and other ethnic groups have lived and reproduced, as well as Han and Xianbei, Tuhunhun (Tuguhun), Tubo, Huijue (Que), Dangxiang, Mongolia and other ethnic groups have ruled. Together they have created a region of glorious material and spiritual civilization to reveal the historical achievements of multiple nations in the creation and contribution of Dunhuang civilization (Wang Fanzhou, 1995).②Cultural assimilation in the system of ethnic power. An ethnic government, especially a mono-ethnic regime, needs to consider two factors to obtain cultural identity: the first one is the attraction and deterrence of the powerful Han dynasty. Attracted by the advanced culture of the Central Plains, ethnic minorities imitated and adopted them. The culture, economy, and political system of the Central Plains are a kind of assimilation to minority areas. Although there are opposite sides to each other, the economic and cultural exchanges between the peoples are still frequent. Exchanges among various ethnic groups have promoted the great integration of the Central Plains and the ethnic minorities; the second one is the rise and desperation of equally strong ethnic groups. In history, ethnic minorities including Liao and Xixia have absorbed advanced political systems and cultures of the Central Plains in the process of conquering

the Han ethnic rulers in the Central Plains, and have implemented the “divide and rule” system, namely different ruling systems for the nationality and the Han people, which is conducive to promoting national integration.

The fact that regimes, systems, and cultures are inseparable makes the independent regimes of various ethnic groups in the Western Regions consider the national regime system has a decisive influence on culture. The special envoys in the Western Regions and the Western Regions’ yearning for the Central Plains Dynasty all show the dominant role of the political system on culture in national regimes. Cultural identity is manifested in the Western Regions when the national regime is attracted, weakened, or integrated into the Han regime, and belongs to the Central Plains dynasty. The advanced system of the dynasty assimilated the countries of the Western Regions. There needs to be a fusion place which would not be somewhere in the Central Plains, but an important place near the Western Regions. Dunhuang was a major town on the Silk Road. ①The prosperous advanced production condition is a window for learning before the Western Region dynasty ruled. Generally, they were unable and impossible to go deep into the Central Plains to engage in large-scale transactions and had to choose Dunhuang; ②The location of the bustling fortress combined with the throat functions of Yangguan and Yumen was a spot of attention for Dunhuang at that time, and it was also a dividing line for the exchange and collision of regimes; ③Political and cultural gathering place, Yin's political behavior in Dunhuang, Wu Zetian's minister Xue Huaiyi's control of Buddhism cannot but say that Dunhuang has developed political culture to an extreme in political struggles, and has become the epitome of immaterial culture: Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang. Therefore, the Mogao Grottoes and the changes of state power systems built a coupled system relationship between sub-systems under the large system of civil capital integration. This relationship has been running through the regimes of feudal dynasties, the survival of the fittest and the fierce collision of cultures; therefore, the coupling of the national political power system and the culture of Dunhuang came into being naturally.

3. Potential Conditions for the Coupling of the National Regime and Dunhuang

The political system of the ethnic minority power has characteristics such as nationality, religion, and imbalanced development. Therefore, Mogao Grottoes are chosen as an example because they are not realistic but historical. For modern people in general, they are just dead specimen, but for historians, archaeologists, artists and scholars, they are living ecological cultures. Although they are short of human ecology, environmental ecology and economic ecology in real life, the ecology of their historical heritage cannot be denied. ①The inevitability of the national regime in Dunhuang. For the nation, the past of the regime represents the ups and downs as well as the honor and

shame of the national regime. As intangible culture and the historical changes of ethnic power systems, Mogao Grottoes record that “Tubo, Uighur, Khitan and other ethnic groups have established their own power; the Tufan Alliance in Xiliang Prefecture is the ‘Fan-Han Alliance’, hereditary leaders and canonical officials coexist; the Gusiluo Regime is a grass-root organization with the tribe as the political power, and the national lord and the Chamber of Deputies are its political characteristics; Gaochang Uighur adopts the king system, Ganzhou Uighur implements the tribal lord system, and the official name follows the Turkic name while the Han system was adopted at the same time; the political system of the Karahan dynasty was the dual king system and the land closure system; Xiliao continued to implement the ‘two-part system’, and formulated basic policies such as prohibiting land segregation, central control of the army, reduction of taxes, and imprisonment.” (Liu Jianli, 2007). With Mogao Grottoes as a typical example, intangible cultural heritages vividly portray the historical institutional changes of national regimes. ②Concentration of the ups and downs of the regime. The ethnic regime originated from the directional changes in the incentive structure of people’s social, political or economic transactions. Here, it mainly refers to the ethnic minority regimes in the Western Regions around Dunhuang whose systems are built in Dunhuang. Under the influence of Mogao Grottoes, the incentive structure must inevitably live in an advanced system and abandon the backward system, which is the core issue of institutional changes, but it is always hindered by the old forces and the uncertainty of the new forces makes the political struggle abnormal. It is outstanding, but it must be tested by history in the end-the results of the system changes are the survival of the fittest. For example, the Jinshan Kingdom in Western Han Dynasty is a small kingdom established in Dunhuang by the Khrom of Guiyi Army, Zhang Chengfeng, Zhang Yichao’s grandson. A complete and systematic advanced regime should be built because of local advantages, but the fact is that it does not appear as a typical advanced system in Dunhuang, therefore it soon tends to disintegrate. Detailed discussions of this are recorded in Yang Xiuqing’s “*The History of the Jinshan Kingdom in Western Han Dynasty*”. The Jinshan Kingdom is the most special case, because it is in a window for learning systems which reflects the advanced and the outdated. However, like other Western regimes of ethnic groups, the Jinshan Kingdom will not last long or easy to change even without any external forces of oppression because it stands still and refuses to make progress. There are three reasons: ①Assimilation. The history of a multi-ethnic country is that of ethnic integration from the perspective of the nation. The driving force behind the history of ethnic integration is the assimilation of advanced systems. When a nation has advanced systems, its social production has developed rapidly. With great national strength, it affects surrounding nations firstly. If the surrounding nations are good at learning advanced systems, they will easily develop into national regimes and even conquer the Central Plains regime. Even if they conquer the Central

Plains regime, these nations and regimes will still survive and develop in the assimilation. If the surrounding nations are weak in learning advanced systems, they will not have their own national power in history (Even if there is, it is often a flash in the pan). Without having established their own national political power or the image of a protected country, they are quickly attracted and integrated into a powerful nation with advanced systems, which shows that the assimilation of advanced systems has always played a central role in social development, whether it is an ethnic group in the Western Regions around Dunhuang or the Han nationality. ②Political conquest. Like “the fittest survives” in the biological evolutionary theory, social development is manifested in political life as “the law of the jungle”, that is, political conquest is an eternal page in the historical development of dynasties. As a member of ethnic powers in Western Regions, Xixia, Xi, Hui, Xiong, Xianbei, Jie, etc. have different fates. One of the reasons is that ethnic powers taking Dunhuang as advanced, learning advanced systems, improving their trading relationships and the structure of social systems are easy to stand in mono-ethnic regimes, otherwise the object of political conquest is first and foremost oneself. ③Self-improvement. The essence of institutional changes is to learn the advanced and change the backward, which requires nations, especially single-ethnic regimes, improve themselves first, eliminate disadvantages and learn advanced systems to improve trading institutions, systems and social structure. After a long period of turmoil, they gradually became unified and localized with the advantages of advanced systems. Among them, Xiongnu was the earliest and Xianbei was the deepest. Occupied by nomads in turn, Dunhuang was a place of tragic collision between the Central Plains Frontiers and the Hu cavalries. Located at the intersection of the Central Plains farming areas and the nomadic areas outside the border, Gansu had almost become a big battlefield, which shows that single ethnic groups have improved themselves for the window at one time and no improvement, no survival.

The historical changes of a nation are generally reflected in literature and classics, which is one of the main forms. Existing intangible cultural heritages are another major carrier, and the large-scale reflection on the murals is only about Dunhuang, a fortress of both “the East” and “the West”. ①(①The reason why they are separated by quotation marks is to emphasize the hybrid concept of the Central Plains and China. In addition to regions farther away than the Central Asia, the West also refers to some single nations or small countries which are fortified lands of the Central Plains Dynasties. There are only four cultural systems with long histories, vast territories, independent systems, and far-reaching influences in the world: China, India, Greece and Islam. There is only one place where these four cultural systems converge, namely the area of Dunhuang and Xinjiang in China (Ji Xianlin, 1998). The story that gouging out the body to light 1000 lamps, picking eyes for donation, cutting flesh to replace a pigeon, the girl who is “milking the cow”, two sons who are donating, the prince who sacrifices himself to feed a

hungry tiger, the Prince Shan You, giving the head for donation, and 500 blind thieves who get eyes and become Buddhas have implicitly or explicitly expressed the historical progress of national politics and political struggles during this period. The story of Prince Shan You presents a dispute over political rights at that time, or else why his brother E You blinded his eyes for no reason, and forced him to leave, even if Shan You whose personal actions did not represent the state of the society at that time did not really fight for power. From common sense, it can be seen that the society has a high desire for political rights and permits the killing of compatriots. After Shan You returned home after reunification and many links were omitted, but it still can be found that at that time, the people of this ethnic group still took the lead in the word “harmony”. Shan You neither mentioned his personal grudges nor retaliated against his brother, which also speculates that “harmony” had great influence at the time. This is not just a social psychology advocated by our society since ancient times, but also reflects the history of the changes of nation’s political power systems. Learning the advanced culture of the Han nationality, reusing the Han intellectuals, relocating the capital, and successful reform all played a great role in the change of national regimes. The sinicization of national regimes in the canonical system brought about the progress of these regimes, and also marked the overall progress of the society at that time.

4. The Coupling Relationship Between the Two Remembers the History of Human Chronology: The Sublimation of Culture to System

Institutional change theory emphasizes that institutions, like biological evolution, undergo a natural evolution process; due to human ignorance, institutions cannot be accurately designed, and in essence, institutions adapt to the environment. In North’s view, institutions are the rules of a society’s game, which constructs the incentive structure for people to trade in social, political or economic aspects, and institutional change determines the way in which society evolves. North believes that institutional change is not only a complex but also evolutionary, gradual and continuous process. The ultimate path of institutional change is determined by the following two factors: ①the fixed nature of the symbiotic relationship of institutions and organizations who have evolved along with the incentive structures provided by these institutions; ②the feedback process made by human beings about the changes in the set of opportunities (Zhou Ye’an, 2000). It is said that the sense of political scent that can be observed from the intangible heritage of Mogao Grottoes is that a vivid reproduction of the history of institutional changes as a dynasty or nation.

5. CONCLUSION

The national political power is an inevitable product of the economic and cultural development of ethnic minorities, and its emergence has many factors such as the natural environment, economy, culture, military, changes in the national power of the Central Plains dynasty, and external influences. The relationship is different, and it is constantly changing. The general trend is that the relationship with the Central Plains dynasty is getting closer and closer. "Kang-Qian Flourishing Age" completed the entire transformation process (Ma Xiaojun, 2003). Dunhuang at that time can be said to be a bifurcation of the region, that is, with Dunhuang as the axis, the mono-ethnic group, the Central Plains Han regime, and unit measurement between mono-ethnic groups revolves around Dunhuang to achieve inter-regional institutional equilibrium. This concept may be questioned by some scholars, and even feels that we abuse the concept of equilibrium, so it is necessary to define what is institutional equilibrium. Tang Yunyu of Shanghai Jiaotong University believes that there should be two types of institutional equilibrium: one is the ideal equilibrium required by the theory, that is, the equilibrium that must meet the four conditions of humanity, competition, fairness and harmony; the other is the actual equilibrium caused by objective practice; the ideal institutional equilibrium often exists only in theory, and the actual institutional equilibrium is the result of a game between a large number of stakeholders. Our institutional equilibrium refers to an administrative sovereignty (Or national power) at different stages and in different regions, when the design of the state (or power) system and the tilt of policies are different, they gradually transition to a benign system that prioritizes experiments or changes in mandatory systems, or induced institutional changes, and eventually achieve equality in system design, policy intensity, administrative status, etc., which is very obvious in the developing countries (or regimes). It is what we call institutional equilibrium, its equilibrium process and reasons are much like Nena Myrdal's "Circular Cumulative Causality Theory" and Albert Hirschman's "Core-Edge Theory". In fact, there is also an incentive mechanism in the system that stimulates economic development. The favorable or lagging system catches up with the system that promotes the healthy development of the economy. The case of the single ethnic group history around Dunhuang is the best proof that the system catches up with the equilibrium of the system. When the degree of national development in the region gradually becomes consistent, eventually the entire country (or national power) system is moved closer to the advanced system, and what we call institutional equilibrium (still relatively balanced) has also been reached.

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