



# Culture, Historical Memory, Symbol, and Spatial Network: The Political Logic of the Chinese Nation Community Construction

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**Abstract.** In recent years, culture, historical memory, symbol, and spatial network have gradually become the focus of ethnological studies in China. More and more Chinese scholars try to explore people's emotions, pursuits and values in the spatial network formed between people and land from the perspectives of cultural anthropology, history, and human geography. To establish a correct view of history and study the excellent and shared cultural symbols of the Chinese nation in the history of the Chinese nation can motivate people to maintain the correct political direction in the cause of the Chinese nation community construction, increase our confidence and strength, and contribute to the early realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

**Keywords:** culture · historical memory · symbol · spatial network · the Chinese nation community construction

## 1 Introduction

Nowadays, there has been a major transformation in ethnological studies in China. It has become the main theme of Chinese ethnological studies based on fostering the strong sense of community for the Chinese nation as the main line and constantly promoting the Chinese nation community construction. The major innovation theory of the Communist Party of China has provided solid theoretical support for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Concepts such as culture, historical memory, symbol, and spatial network are important elements in the Chinese nation community construction. Of course, these concepts are not isolated and immutable. On the contrary, these concepts interrelate and interact with each other, jointly forming the political logic of the construction of the Chinese nation community.

Political logic of the Chinese nation community construction includes the following concepts, principles and views:

One main line: fostering a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation.

One firmly: firmly follow the correct path of solving ethnic problems with Chinese characteristics.

Two common achievements: all ethnic groups work together to achieve common prosperity and development.

Three inseparable relationships: the Han nationality is inseparable from the ethnic minorities, the ethnic minorities are inseparable from the Han nationality, and the ethnic minorities are inseparable from each other.

Four shared views, shared weal and woe, shared honor and disgrace, shared life and death, shared destiny.

Four joint achievements: our vast territory was jointly developed by all peoples; our long history has been written jointly by all ethnic group; our splendid culture is the joint creation of all ethnic groups; our great spirit is cultivated jointly by all ethnic groups.

Five maintains: to maintain socialist democracy, the socialist legal system, the fundamental interests of the people, national reunification, and ethnic unity.

Five identities: to continuously enhance the identity of all ethnic group to the great motherland, the Chinese nation, Chinese culture, the Communist Party of China, and socialism with Chinese characteristics.

All the above-mentioned concepts, principles and views have formed the political logic of the Chinese nation community construction. Only by clarifying the connotation of these concepts, principles, and views by establishing the correct historical view can we stick to the correct direction of the Chinese ethnological studies.

## 2 Why Culture is So Important to the Chinese People?

Culture is a complicated word in Chinese language. In the early Chinese history, the word culture was found in the classic philosophical works and literature such as *Zhouyi* and *Shuoyuan* in Han dynasty. At that time, culture meant *Jiaohua*, meaning: to enlighten people's wisdom, so that they can broaden their understanding of their own identity, society, and the existence of nature. The word "culture" can be divided into two kinds: firstly, the broad sense of culture refers to the social and historical phenomenon, is the accumulation of social history, is the long-term creation of people. It can be divided into three levels, consciousness culture, system culture and material culture. It contains the historical geography, local customs, traditional customs, behavior, thinking habits, values, literature and art of a country or nation. Secondly, the narrow sense of culture mainly refers to the culture of consciousness. With history comes culture. Culture evolves with the development of history as well. So, culture is always fundamental in ethnology. Nearly 100 years ago, the British anthropologist, Sir Edward Tylor, explained the concept of culture in his book *Primitive Culture*. He proposed that cultures-systems of human behavior and thought-obey natural laws and therefore can be studies scientifically. Tylor's definition of culture is widely quoted: "Culture...is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor 1871/1958, p.1). According to Tylor's definition, the crucial phrase here is "acquired...as a member of society." Tylor's definition focuses on attributes that people acquire not through biological inheritance but by growing up in a particular society where they are exposed to a specific cultural tradition [1] Obviously, it is very hard to understand cultural attributes without a particular environment. R.Benedict discussed how a culture integrates into a pattern

after choosing its behavior mode, social value and target orientation. In her view, culture is a whole [7].

China enjoys a huge territory, a long history, splendid culture, and great spirit of the Chinese nation, The extensive and profound Chinese culture has deeply influenced generations of Chinese people. Traditional Chinese culture has the following characteristics: to begin with, inheriting from generation to generation, Chinese traditional culture has been interrupted in some short historical periods, and changed in different historical periods, but it has not been interrupted in general, and there is little change in general. Secondly, be of national characteristics, Traditional Chinese culture is unique to China and different from foreign cultures in the world. Thirdly, it has a long history of more than five thousand years. Finally, be of broad and profound, "broad" means the breadth of Chinese traditional culture-rich and colorful, "profound" means the depth of Chinese traditional culture-enigmatic. Chinese traditional culture is the main part of Chinese culture, but also the rich historical heritage passed down from the ancestors. It not only records the history of the occurrence and evolution of the Chinese nation and Chinese culture, but also has a strong inheritance as a way of thinking, moral sentiments, values, codes of conduct and customs passed down from generation to generation. It permeates the blood of every Chinese. It restricts the behavior mode and thinking mode of today's Chinese people and provides the historical basis and objective facts for the construction of today's Chinese new culture, which has a profound impact on the real society. Traditional culture is the cornerstone of enhancing national self-confidence, the basis of building a good national psychology, the spiritual resources of improving the comprehensive strength of a country, and the important ideological source of promoting the great integration of China.

### **3 The Role of Historical Memory to the Chinese Nation Community Construction**

Professor Wang Mingke discussed the role of social memory after analyzing the relationship between the individual and the ethnic group in his book *Huaxiabianyuan* (the Margin of the Chinese People). He said: "Thus, the altruistic behavior of individuals in a group has nothing to do with "genes" but is influenced by the collective memory of social groups. Especially for "ethnic group" and "nation state", which are gathered by the common historical origin and memory, when "history" is rooted, national emotion often makes individuals protect the group interests regardless of their own interests. This is why an article or speech appealing to national feelings can make countless people not afraid of sacrificing their lives, and the common historical origin or glorious past of the nation is almost without exception the main content of such an article or speech." [2] Professor Anthony D. Smith raised a new methodology to study nation and nationalism, that is ethno-symbolism in his book *Ethno-symbolism and nationalism: a cultural approach*. He said: "Ethno-symbolist...emphasized the importance of regarding the nation as real social community. No matter what kind of imaginative elements enter the process of national formation, the result is much more than one construction or discourse system. Because once a national community is formed, they will have a "life of their own", that is, with concrete results, their members have not, and will not, act in a certain way without

the presence of the nation.” “Each nation is regarded as a historical community rooted in a specific historical and geo-cultural background. Thus, their origins, characteristics, and trajectories all apply to causal historical analysis, as do the ideologies and movements of nationalism. This is not to say that nations are idiosyncratic, nor is it to concretize nations and nationalism, but to regard them as forms of community and movement in a particular context of time and space.” [3] As the Chinese old saying goes: To take history as a mirror, we may see the rise and fall of the nation. The above two scholars explained the importance of historical memory in the process of national community construction from different theories and methods. Professor Anthony especially emphasized that the national community has vitality [8], while Professor Wang Mingke emphasized that under certain circumstances, national emotion can make individuals sacrifice their own interests to safeguard the collective interests.

Historical memory plays an extremely important role in the construction of the Chinese nation community. Firstly, historical memory can help us review the positive historical facts in the formation and development of the Chinese nation and help us to enhance national confidence. Chinese modernization is not smooth sailing, but full of twists and turns and challenges from inside and outside. To draw nourishment from historical memory is to build strength in future struggles. Secondly, the formation of the Chinese national community is conducive to the Chinese nation more vitality. We 56 ethnic groups should not only closely unite, but also preserve and pass on our common historical memory. Awaken the national consciousness with historical memory, jointly foster a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation and strengthen the construction of the Chinese nation community. Thirdly, the study of historical memory should be combined with the actual situation of our current research on ethnic issues, keep the right and innovate. Combining with the present is to emphasize the practicality and pertinence of historical memory research, to transform those enlightening historical memories into powerful spiritual motivation, and to constantly inspire and motivate our ambition of struggle.

#### **4 The Shared Cultural Symbols Improve the Quality of the Chinese Nation Community Construction**

Professor Geert Hofstede thought that culture is a layered onion structure from the inside out, in which the innermost layer is called ‘values’ and the outermost layer is called ‘symbols’. Therefore, the most visible cultural form of a nation is symbols [4] Clifford Geertz interpreted the meaning of cultural symbols in another way in his book *the Interpretation of Culture*, that cultural symbols can shape the spiritual temperament of a nation [6] The ethnic cultural system has not only abstract thoughts, but also quite a lot of symbolistic symbols which are suitable for it [9].

The function of the shared cultural symbols can improve the quality of the Chinese nation community construction. The existing case is the Liangzhou Tibet-Yuan Dynasty Alliance in China. Liangzhou, is the ancient name of Wuwei city, Gansu Province of China, that has always enjoyed the reputation of the communications and defense hub of the country, is the metropolitan city of West Yellow River Corridor. The famous Liangzhou Tibet-Yuan Dynasty Alliance was happened there. The meeting, also named

as Liangzhou Tibet-Yuan Dynasty Meeting, is one of the important historical events in the Chinese history. In 1247 A.C., Mr. Sa Pan Pandita shortly named as Sa Pan, the religious leader of Saja School met with Mr. Go Dan, the Prince of Monglian Khanate, the commander of West Route Army. They held the Liangzhou Tibet-Yuan Alliance Meeting at the White Pagoda Temple in Liangzhou city which had achieved the common consensus according to their own wishes. From then on, Tibet was formally incorporated into China's territory. After the meeting, San Pan began to live in the White Pagoda Temple for more than five years, teaching and writing the Buddhist Sutras for the local people. And the believers were expanded to Han, Mongolian soldiers etc. The cause of Buddhism in Liangzhou prospered and countless followers were successfully relieved. San Pan used to conduct the Buddhist activities in the White Pagoda Temple, the Golden Pagoda Temple, the Haicang Temple and the Lotus Flower Temple. San Pan conducted abhiseka ceremony for Go Dan in the Golden Pagoda Temple, cured Go Dan's disease in the Haicang Temple, and taught Vajrayana in the Lotus Flower Temple. Sa Pan died at the White Pagoda Temple in 1251. To commemorate the great achievements of Sa Pan, Sa Pan spiritual bone tower was built in the White Pagoda Temple to store his sarira. Later, the Ming and Qing Dynasties also carried out repairs and erected monuments to the White Pagoda Temple. Sa Pan has a very lofty historical position in the heart of the people of all ethnic groups along the West Yellow River Corridor. The architectural cultural heritage group represented by the White Pagoda Temple there and its nearby related Tibetan architectural cultural groups create the shared cultural symbol beyond the Chinese ethnic groups in West Yellow River Corridor together. And all these excellent shared cultural symbols have been the strong historical evidence for the unity and fusion of the Chinese nation and will play more deep significances of cultural spatial structure during the Chinese nation community construction.

## 5 The Spatial Network and the Production of Spatial Culture

As the founder and thinker of the Birmingham School, Professor Hall first proposed the theory of cultural representation. In his later period of research, the most important core features are three characteristics: the theory of engagement, the cultural identity of ethnic diaspora and the politics of difference. It provides important cognitive connotation and perspective for the study of postcolonial literature and culture. Hall believes that representation has symbolic significance, political significance, and cognitive significance, and then puts forward the political philosophical connotation of cultural representation. He proposed that the connotation of representation includes power, ideology, discourse power, identity, and subjectivity. He interpreted representation as the output of language (including symbol) and the construction of meaning, which is generally accepted by the public and shows more sunny and positive representation connotation. So that the cultural representation shows the cultural multi-prism and cultural Mosaic landscape.<sup>1</sup> Although Hall's cultural representation theory criticizes modern culture and reflects postmodern culture, reflecting the characteristics of text analysis and critical research of Birmingham School, it fails to make an in-depth discussion on the construction of

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<sup>1</sup> S. Zhang, Culture as ideographic practice: Stuart Hall's theory of cultural representation and its evaluation, *Foreign Language Research*, 2018.2.

representation practice field from the perspective of social action. The research on the spatial network construction of China can learn from the reasonable elements of Hall's cultural representation theory. For example, the connotation of the representation of spatial network highlights the importance of power and ideology, and the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party should be strengthened. In terms of discourse system and identity, more attention should be paid to the study of populism and subjectivity. The output of language (including policies, symbols, and political mobilization) should reflect real policy dividends and benefits that the common people can finally get, highlighting that the goal of meaning construction is to focus on the people, and the purpose of all ethnic policies is to care and serve the broad masses of the people. The construction of the Chinese nation community is a grand practice field and spatial network in which all ethnic groups are embedded.

In combination with Hall's theory of cultural representation, N. Xie believes that since Lefebvre's *Production of Space*, the space problem has been able to get rid of the transcendental rational metaphysical tradition. Based on Marx's practical production theory, Lefebvre understood space as the product of human production practice and put forward the concept of production of space, which indicated: Space is not a physical or geographical fact existence, but a product of cultural representation practice, so the understanding of space is inseparable from sociality, history, and culture. N. Xie also cited Sun Yat-sen Park and Tiananmen Gate Tower as examples to emphasize the construction of semiotic representation meaning of cultural space. Finally, the paper puts forward that "the space theory will construct the cultural space production theory with cultural representation as the main feature in the process of integrating aesthetic theory, literary theory, art theory and cultural theory"<sup>2</sup>. N. Xie's research has filled the gap of Hall's cultural representation theory of "put into action", combining space production with the practice field construction of Chinese nation community construction, which is innovative to some extent. Duan Yifu, a scholar of American cultural studies, published his book, *Topophilia* which mainly discusses the relationship between man and land in different places from the perspective of geography [5] This knowledge of humanistic geography can hardly be found even in relevant geography textbooks and monographs. Many textbooks describe "land" too much and ignore the "man" closely related to the land. *Topophilia* explores the emotional bond between man and land, which can be said to be a brand-new research paradigm. Duan Yifu pointed out that many previous studies on the relationship between man and land involved the relationship between material and energy between man and nature. But the point of this book is to discuss how positive human attitudes and values towards nature came to be, and the nature of these attitudes and values. For example, Duan Yifu talked about the space experience and the degree of space participation in the book. He believed that people in the middle class, like many artists and scholars, have an intimate experience of their houses, because it is related to price adjustment of their houses. Therefore, they also have an abstract and strong cognition of the community. Working-class people's experience of community appears to be concentric circles because their experience of different zones varies in type and intensity. They frequently socialize informally in their own small circle, which brings a warmth that is hard to find in other large working communities [5] This reflects from

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<sup>2</sup> N. Xie, Spatial production as a representation of practice, *Social Science Journal*, 2019.4,

one side of the unique characteristics of man-land relationship shown in the construction of urban space culture in American society. It provides a reference for us to construct the space of the Chinese nation community. We should include the relationship between man and land in the study of spatial network, and at the same time consider the spatial experience and spatial participation of all ethnic groups, to fully respect and demonstrate the connotation and significance of the cultural representation of all ethnic groups, so as to inject new connotation into the study of spatial network. The cultural space theory of America gives us an inspiration that the Chinese nation community construction should adhere to the pattern of integration in diversity. The key is to grasp the integration, so that we will not lose direction.

## 6 Conclusions

To sum up, there is a political logic of the Chinese nation community construction, consisting of culture, historical memory, symbol, and spatial network. Cultural symbols play a silent role in the process of establishing national consciousness. History is an important carrier of cultural symbols. In fact, multi-ethnic sharing of cultural symbols also reflects the spiritual connotation of the Chinese nation. If we explore from the historical development process of the Chinese nation, we will find that no matter from the formation of the Huaxia nationality and the foundation of the Chinese national spirit in the pre-Qin Dynasty, to the conflicts and integration of various nationalities, religions and thoughts in the Qin, Han, Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern dynasties; from the Sui and Tang dynasties "Tang Prosperous Scene", to the Song and Yuan loyalty, filial piety and integrity; from the change of national spirit in Ming and Qing Dynasties to the reconstruction of national identity, patriotic spirit, national introspection and cultural consciousness of the Chinese nation in modern times; from the formation and development of modern scientific spirit to the people's pursuit of democracy; from the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the revitalization of the national spirit to the Communist Party of China's promotion of the Chinese national spirit, it is evident that the concepts of "harmony" and "unity" have formed the cultural symbols of the Chinese national spirit [10] In view of this, multi-ethnic sharing of cultural symbols plays an important role in cultivating national spirit, promoting national unity and progress and national identity in the process of the Chinese nation community construction. With the nourishment of these excellent cultural symbols of multi-ethnic sharing, we can have more courage and confidence in the process of the Chinese nation community construction. Only in this way can we lay a solid ideological foundation for the Chinese nation community construction.

As a new strategy of the ethnic work of China, we need to encourage all ethnic groups to cling together like pomegranate seeds. And the existing space culture symbols should be continuously refined and sublimated ethnic unity and progress with vivid examples. And we need to enrich the existing characterization of connotation of cultural space, to build a more inclusive and cohesive community with a shared future for the Chinese nation. In a certain sense, the Chinese nation community construction is the largest space production and practice field integrating multi-ethnic cultural symbols. In the process of space production, we should adhere to the correct political direction,

grasp the relationships between the history of space, the essence of space, the structure of space and the contradictions of space, focus on dealing with the core element of "space experience dominated by man-land relationship" in space production, give full play to the leading role of space interaction in ethnic interaction. Adhere to the excellent multi-ethnic shared cultural symbols in the practice of space interwoven to give advises to the government, adhere to the people-oriented, to promote multi-ethnic exchanges and integration, to provide more positive theoretical support for the practice path of the Chinese nation community construction.

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