

The Integration of National Identity Construction and Marxist Thought in Borderland Museums

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Abstract

The Chinese civilization is the outcome of the collision, integration and sublimation of multi-ethnic cultures. As an important cultural space showcasing regional culture, ethnic characteristics and urban features, borderland museums play a positive role in carrying forward the national spirit, promoting ethnic unity and enhancing the awareness of national identity, thus contributing to the socialist construction in border areas. Identifying and strengthening the integration of national identity construction and Marxist thought in borderland museums is of great significance for advancing ethnic unity and social progress.

Keywords

Marxism; Construction of National Identity; Borderland Museums.

1. Introduction

China's land border line stretches for more than 22,000 kilometers, of which 19,000 kilometers lie in ethnic areas. Combining the actual conditions of border ethnic areas such as geography, local customs and habits, the Communist Party of China has formulated a series of Marxist ethnic thoughts, theories and policies with regional characteristics. By guiding people of all ethnic groups in border areas to learn and understand these policies, and adapting them into ethnic languages that are easy to comprehend and accept locally, the Party has gradually integrated these ethnic policies into the daily life of local people, enabling them to fully grasp China's socialist theoretical policies. For a long time, such efforts have strengthened the faith and broadened the horizons of people in ethnic areas, making the Marxist ethnic theory of China the ultimate spiritual pillar for the general public in border regions. Domestically, there exist significant disparities between the Han nationality and the 55 ethnic minorities in various aspects, and differences also exist among the ethnic minorities themselves. Therefore, to achieve the long-term, sustained and steady development of China in all fields, ethnic issues are unavoidable and must be effectively addressed.

Museums hold great significance for a city and a region. They represent the cultural heritage and immersive experience of a certain geographical scope, serving as an excellent window to understand the history, present situation and future planning of a region. As a cultural complex integrating learning, education and entertainment functions, museums play a crucial role in urban construction and development. Thanks to their special geographical location, borderland museums carry a more profound and touching history. Their unique ethnic customs and attractive geographical features are truly breathtaking. Moreover, the promotion and presentation of the awareness of the ethnic community for ethnic integration, as well as the exhibitions of political, economic and cultural aspects in these museums, fully reflect the vitality of Marxism. They are a vivid embodiment of the Marxist ethnic theory in a limited cultural space.

2. Ethnic Identity and National Identity from the Perspective of the Sinicization of Marxist Ethnic Theory

As a theoretical system, Marxism draws theoretical nourishment from numerous relevant ideas in the history of civilization. Grounded in the revolutionary program of the emancipation of the proletariat and all humanity, it has a fundamental understanding and rich elaborations on the inherent essence, formative conditions, and developmental laws of ethnic issues. In the works of Marx and Engels on ethnic issues, the origin of Marxist ethnic theory can be traced back to the classical Marxist writers' reflections and discussions on ethnic problems in specific countries. These reflections not only cover various aspects of ethnic issues in particular countries but also demonstrate an international vision for addressing ethnic problems worldwide, embodying a commitment to equality among all ethnic groups and universal human care. From the perspective of the relationship between the individual and the collective, and between the individual and society, it profoundly reveals and criticizes bourgeois oppression of ethnic groups and unjust wars of aggression. Although Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin did not conduct thematic studies on ethnic identity, their interpretations of ethnic consciousness involve relevant research.

In the process of the localization of Marxist ethnic theory in China, the Party and state leaders have deeply recognized that for China—a unified country composed of multiple ethnic groups—it is essential to forge the superordinate concept of identity of the Chinese nation as a community to integrate ethnic identity and national identity, thereby achieving the country's stable development. The interdependent relationship that “the nation is supported by ethnic groups, and ethnic groups depend on the nation for survival” makes “the nation and ethnic groups form an indivisible whole of interests” [1].

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, China has always adhered to the basic principles of equality, mutual assistance and common prosperity in its ethnic policies. The implementation of these policies has steadily raised the living standards of people of all ethnic groups, achieved considerable progress in culture, science and technology, and effectively strengthened the sense of national identity among people of all ethnic groups. Especially since socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, the steady progress of comprehensively building a modern socialist country, comprehensively deepening reform, comprehensively advancing law-based governance, and comprehensively strengthening Party discipline has brought about new leaps in the economic life, culture, and education of people of all ethnic groups across the country. This has further boosted their motivation to firmly carry out the great struggle, build the great project, advance the great cause, and realize the great dream under the unified leadership of the Communist Party of China, thereby enhancing the internal cohesion of the Chinese nation as a community.

Facing the new journey of socialist construction, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: “Adhering to the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the correct political direction that must be firmly grasped to do ethnic work well under the new situation. We must fully implement the Party's ethnic policies, uphold and improve the system of regional ethnic autonomy, continuously enhance the people of all ethnic groups' identification with the great motherland, the Chinese nation, Chinese culture, and the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and better safeguard ethnic unity, social stability, and national unity.”[2] This exposition fully draws on the ideological essence of Marxist ethnic theory and the historical experience of China's socialist construction.

“Foster a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation based on high-level ethnic autonomy; foster a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation guided by the principle of equal development and common prosperity for all ethnic groups; foster a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation driven by harmonious ethnic relations; foster a strong sense

of community for the Chinese nation bonded by cultural identity.” [3] In the new era, the Sinicization of Marxist ethnic theory is a concrete practical process of actively cultivating the sense of community for the Chinese nation under the guidance of Marxist theory. In this process, emphasizing the fostering of a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation and integrating ethnic identity with national identity also provides important reference for building a community with a shared future for mankind in world civilizations.

In the report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics is a historical period when China is increasingly moving toward the center of the world stage. Therefore, China needs to contribute “Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions” to solving the common problems facing humanity. [4] As for “a community with a shared future for mankind,” as the name suggests, it means that the future and destiny of every ethnic group and every country are closely linked. We should stand together through thick and thin, share weal and woe, strive to build this planet where we were born and grew up into a harmonious family, and turn the aspirations of people all over the world for a better life into reality. [5]

3. The Exhibition of National Identity Construction in Borderland Museums

In early 1937, Hu Huanyong wrote an article titled *The Need for Establishing Borderland Museums*, calling for the establishment of such museums. [6] The article proposed that borderland museums should collect a wide range of cultural relics from various border areas and display them by category. This not only serves the research of specialists but also open to the general public, which can break the estrangement of people in inland areas towards border regions. Hence, their functions are “far superior to ordinary museums”, bearing great significance for politics, culture, economy and diplomacy. Objectively speaking, in the eyes of the government and social intellectuals, the construction of borderland museums has always been associated with political and social functions such as “enlightening border people” and enabling the general public to understand the conditions of border areas. It is intended to construct a national cognition consistent with the concept of “the Chinese nation is one”, so as to serve the overall goal of the central government in integrating border areas.

3.1. A Case Study of Exhibition Hall Layout and Display

Taking four representative regional museums—the Qiuci Museum, Aksu Museum and Kashgar Museum in southern Xinjiang, and the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture Museum in northern Xinjiang—as the research objects, our field visits reveal the following characteristics. In 2005, the Qiuci Museum was renamed from the “Kuqa County Historical Relics Exhibition Hall” and moved into the Kuqa Royal Palace, charging an admission fee as part of the larger Kuqa Royal Palace historical scenic spot. The other three museums studied—the Aksu Museum, Kashgar Museum and Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture Museum—are all open to the public free of charge. The Qiuci Museum features a courtyard layout of a rectangular Siheyuan, adopting the local Uyghur architectural style in its construction. It consists of six exhibition halls: the Historical Relics Exhibition Hall, Qiuci Buddhist Culture Hall, Ancient Coin Hall, Folk Custom Hall, Production and Living Tools Hall, and Traditional Craft Hall. The Aksu Museum is composed of four permanent exhibition halls (Aksu Historical Culture, Ancient Coins of Xinjiang, Aksu Physical Geography, and “The Red Boat Sails, Forging Ahead for Dreams—the History and Achievements of the Communist Party of China”), three temporary exhibition halls and a digital exhibition hall. The Kashgar Museum has a three-story main building with an underground exhibition hall (not open to the public for the time being). The first floor houses the “Special Exhibition on the History, Ethnicity and Religious Culture of Xinjiang, China”, the second floor the “Kashgar Historical Relics Exhibition”, and the third floor the “Kashgar Regional Planning

Exhibition". Similar to the Kashgar Museum, the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture Museum is a three-story main building. Its first floor features the "Themed Exhibition on the Centennial Development of Ili under the Leadership of the Communist Party of China", the second floor the "Ili Prefecture Historical Relics Exhibition", and the third floor the "Themed Exhibition on the Chinese Nation Community" and the "Ili Prefecture Nature and Resources Exhibition".

A comparison of the four museums shows that the historical relics exhibition hall has always been the core part of museums, especially borderland museums. In the layout and cultural relic display of such themed exhibition halls, a large space is dedicated to narrating the legitimate jurisdiction of the Chinese government over Xinjiang, mainly by sorting out dynastic wars and cultural exchanges along the ancient Silk Road. In addition, each museum has its own distinctive features. For example, the exhibition of ancient Xinjiang coins and the physical geography hall in the Aksu Museum are unique compared with other museums in Xinjiang. It is worth noting that although the Qiuci Museum also has such themed exhibitions, its exhibition hall area, facilities and application of digital technology are far inferior to those of the Aksu Museum. Similarly, regarding the physical geography hall, the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture Museum, which also has such a hall, is not as comprehensive and rich as that of the Aksu Museum. For the Kashgar Museum, its third-floor "Kashgar Regional Planning Exhibition" is refreshing. This distinctive exhibition hall showcases Kashgar's development achievements in the new century, especially in agriculture and transportation. Through large digital screens and a vast urban sand table, it allows visitors to intuitively experience the steady progress of the city. In terms of the layout of the Party history and Party building exhibition halls, all four museums have certain exhibition areas and historical displays. Relatively speaking, due to its geographical location bordering the Soviet Union, the world's first socialist country, the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture Museum presents more vivid and comprehensive historical facts in its exhibition halls.

3.2. The Role of Borderland Museums in the Construction of National Identity

As guardians and disseminators of cultural heritage, borderland museums provide an important support for the formation and strengthening of national identity through displaying and interpreting rich historical and cultural resources. First of all, borderland museums showcase the diverse cultural characteristics of all ethnic groups. Border areas are inhabited by multiple ethnic groups, and these museums present the ethnic diversity to the audience by exhibiting the cultural characteristics of different ethnic groups in terms of traditional customs, costumes, religious beliefs, languages and characters. For example, the brick carvings of the four mythical beasts (Azure Dragon, White Tiger, Vermilion Bird and Black Tortoise) on display reflect the infiltration of Central Plains culture, and a large number of painted pottery unearthed from ancient sites in Aksu reflect the settled life and aesthetic taste of local residents at that time. This helps people understand and respect the cultural traditions of different ethnic groups and promote exchanges and understanding among ethnic groups. Secondly, borderland museums provide interpretations of historical stories and cultural inheritance. Through rich exhibitions and exhibits, these museums show the audience stories about the historical evolution, ethnic migration and cultural integration of border areas. For example, the Aksu Museum specifically introduces the origin of the name "Uyghur", telling visitors that its translation has evolved and finally been determined as Uyghur, which means "safeguarding the unity of you and me", touching the hearts of the audience. By interpreting these historical stories, people can better understand the cultural diversity and historical background of border areas, and thus form a sense of national identity. In addition, borderland museums also undertake educational and research functions. During the author's visit, group visits and explanations organized by relevant units were witnessed in both the Aksu Museum and the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture Museum. It is evident that borderland museums, as an

important resource for academic research, provide places and materials for scholars and researchers to study the history and culture of border areas. At the same time, museums regularly hold academic seminars, cultural lectures and other activities to promote academic exchanges and knowledge dissemination, and drive in-depth understanding and research of border areas.

4. The Integration of National Identity Construction and Marxist Thought in Borderland Museums

In borderland museums, the dissemination of Marxist thought is deeply integrated with the construction of national identity and promotes each other, becoming an important spiritual bond for ethnic unity and social stability in borderland areas. As a core area inhabited by multiple ethnic groups in China, the borderland is home to Han, Tibetan, Uyghur, Mongolian and other ethnic groups. In the long course of historical development, each ethnic group has formed unique cultural traditions, living customs and values. There are not only differences in regions and cultures, but also profound ties of shared weal and woe and interconnected destinies. As an important carrier integrating cultural display, historical inheritance and ideological education, borderland museums are not only "exhibition halls" of borderland culture, but also "main positions" for the dissemination of Marxist thought. Through the systematic display of various exhibits such as history, culture and art, and the interpretation of the development context of the borderland, they integrate the core ideas of Marxist national theory and historical materialism into the whole process of national identity construction, and effectively play an important role in uniting people's hearts and pooling forces.

4.1. Marxist Ideology Communication in Borderland Museums for the Construction of Ethnic Identity

By displaying rich historical cultural relics and cultural heritage, borderland museums have built a bridge for mutual understanding and identification among various ethnic groups, and this process has always run through the core connotation of Marxist thought. Marxist thought emphasizes the continuity and inevitability of history, holding that human history is a history of mutual communication and common development of all ethnic groups, and the destiny of each ethnic group is always closely linked with the destiny of the country. Through the careful display of production tools, living utensils, religious cultural relics, works of art and other items of various ethnic groups in the borderland, combined with detailed text interpretation and scene restoration, borderland museums clearly present the production and living conditions, cultural exchange achievements and ethnic integration process of various ethnic groups in different historical periods. For example, the display of historical cultural relics about the joint development of the borderland and resistance against foreign aggression by various ethnic groups not only reflects the hardworking, brave and unyielding spiritual qualities of all ethnic groups, but also confirms the historical materialist view of Marxism that "all ethnic groups jointly create history" — the development of the borderland is not the credit of a single ethnic group, but the result of the joint efforts of all ethnic groups working together. This kind of display enables people to deeply understand the historical origin and common interests among different ethnic groups, breaks down regional and cultural barriers, and lays a solid historical foundation for the construction of national identity.

In the display and promotion of cultural heritage, the guiding role of Marxist thought has been fully reflected, further strengthening the cultural identity and identity recognition of all ethnic groups. Marxism holds that culture is the lifeblood of a nation and a spiritual bond that unites ethnic forces. The excellent traditional cultures of all ethnic groups are important components of Chinese culture and should be respected, protected and inherited. When displaying the traditional cultures of various ethnic groups, borderland museums always adhere to the core

principles of Marxist ethnic equality and ethnic unity, without bias or emphasis, and fully present the unique charm and contemporary value of each ethnic group's culture. Whether it is Tibetan Thangka, Uyghur Muqam art, Mongolian Nadam culture or Zhuang bronze drum culture, each has an exclusive exhibition space in the museum. Through detailed interpretation of its cultural connotation, historical inheritance and contemporary development, it guides people to recognize that there is no distinction between high and low among the cultures of various ethnic groups, and all are treasures in the treasure house of Chinese culture. This display method not only practices the Marxist thought of "equality of all ethnic groups", but also helps the people of all ethnic groups enhance their recognition of their own excellent traditional cultures, improve their national pride and identity recognition. At the same time, it also enables people of other ethnic groups to deeply understand the cultural essence of different ethnic groups, promotes the exchange and mutual learning of cultures of all ethnic groups, and further unites the strong consensus of "all Chinese cultures are one family".

By specially displaying the course of dissemination and practice of Marxist thought in borderland areas, borderland museums combine theoretical thought with borderland reality, further deepening the understanding and recognition of Marxism among all ethnic groups, and providing a strong ideological guidance for the construction of national identity. Marxist thought is the theoretical basis guiding the Communist Party of China to lead the people of all ethnic groups in China to achieve national independence, national prosperity and national rejuvenation, and even more the action guide for guiding ethnic work and promoting ethnic unity in borderland areas. By setting up special exhibition areas, borderland museums display historical documents, old photos, physical materials about the introduction of Marxist thought into the borderland, as well as the practical achievements of the Communist Party of China in solving borderland ethnic issues and promoting borderland development by applying Marxist national theory — from the democratic reform in borderland areas and the implementation of the regional ethnic autonomy system to the rapid economic and social development of the borderland and the significant improvement of the living standards of people of all ethnic groups. Each achievement vividly interprets the scientificity and practicality of Marxist thought, making people deeply realize that Marxist thought is a scientific theory in line with borderland reality and the fundamental interests of all ethnic groups.

To further strengthen the dissemination effect of Marxist thought, borderland museums also carry out various forms such as special lectures, academic seminars and thematic exhibitions, inviting experts and scholars to in-depth interpret the core ideas of Marxist national theory, historical materialism and dialectical materialism. Combined with the historical development and realistic situation of various ethnic groups in the borderland, they guide people to understand and recognize the historical changes, cultural development and ethnic relations of the borderland from a Marxist perspective. For example, through special lectures, they interpret the Marxist ethnic work theme of "all ethnic groups work together for common prosperity and development", and combine the practical cases of all ethnic groups in the borderland working together to overcome poverty and build a better home, enabling people to deeply experience the strong power of Marxist thought in solving ethnic issues and promoting ethnic development; through academic seminars, they explore the integration path of Marxist thought and borderland ethnic culture, promoting the in-depth integration of Marxist thought with borderland reality and ethnic culture, and making Marxist thought truly enter the hearts of people of all ethnic groups.

In general, as an important cultural and educational position in borderland areas, borderland museums have always taken Marxist thought as the guide in the process of national identity construction, organically combining historical inheritance, cultural display and ideological dissemination. By displaying the common historical memories and excellent cultural heritage of all ethnic groups, they practice the principles of Marxist ethnic equality and ethnic unity; by

displaying the dissemination and practice of Marxist thought in the borderland, they strengthen the recognition of scientific theory among all ethnic groups and guide the people of all ethnic groups to establish correct views on the country, nation and culture. This integration not only enriches the display connotation of borderland museums, but also promotes mutual understanding, respect and tolerance among all ethnic groups, further unites ethnic forces, provides strong spiritual support for ethnic unity, social stability and high-quality development in borderland areas, and also makes Marxist thought take root and bear fruit in the borderland, becoming an important force in building a sense of community for the Chinese nation.

4.2. Strategies and Suggestions for the Integration of National Identity Construction and Marxist Thought in Borderland Museums

Against the background of the new era for the development of a multi-ethnic country, borderland museums, as an important position for inheriting national culture, gathering national consensus and conducting ideological guidance, are not only a core window for showcasing the cultural diversity of all ethnic groups in border areas but also a key platform for strengthening the awareness of ethnic unity and constructing a pluralistic and integrated national identity. Promoting the organic integration of Marxist thought and the construction of national identity is not only an inevitable requirement for borderland museums to fulfill their mission of the times and exert their social functions but also an important path to support the stable development of border areas and promote the common prosperity of all ethnic groups.

First, focus on the display of diverse cultures to lay a solid foundation for ideological integration. Based on the history and reality of the coexistence of multiple ethnic groups in border areas, borderland museums should focus on displaying the historical context, cultural traditions, folk customs and development achievements of all ethnic groups. Through various forms such as cultural relics, pictures and scene restoration, they should fully demonstrate the unique charm and historical contributions of all ethnic groups. This allows the audience to intuitively feel ethnic diversity while deeply recognizing the historical origin of mutual support and co-prosperity among all ethnic groups, and enhancing their identification with the pluralistic and integrated ethnic pattern. At the same time, the Marxist ethnic theory and the thoughts of ethnic equality and unity should be organically integrated into the exhibition content, avoiding rigid indoctrination. Through concrete and situational presentation methods, museums should explain the scientific answers of Marxist thought to ethnic issues and its important guiding significance for the development of border ethnic groups and the progress of ethnic unity, enabling the audience to clearly understand the inherent connection between national identity and Marxist thought and realize the simultaneous development of cultural inheritance and ideological guidance.

Second, strengthen hierarchical education and guidance to deepen the effect of ideological integration. Borderland museums should take into account the cognitive characteristics and needs of audiences of different ages and groups, design hierarchical and classified educational activities to enhance the pertinence and effectiveness of guidance. For teenagers, research and study practices, interactive classes and other activities can be carried out to guide them to understand the history and ethnic relations of border ethnic groups through interesting and life-oriented forms, and cultivate their awareness of the pluralistic and integrated national identity. For the general public, special lectures, cultural salons and other activities can be held to deeply interpret the core connotation of Marxist ethnic thought and explain its important value for ethnic equality, unity and common prosperity by combining with practical cases of the development of border ethnic groups. Through hierarchical guidance, audiences of all groups can deepen their understanding of national identity and Marxist thought in the learning experience, realizing the organic combination of ideological guidance and value shaping.

Third, innovate display and dissemination methods to enhance the attractiveness of ideological integration. Facing the visiting needs of the audience in the new era, borderland museums should break the limitations of traditional exhibitions, rely on advanced technological means such as virtual reality and augmented reality, and innovate exhibition interaction and dissemination methods. Through immersive experience, digital interaction, online cloud exhibitions and other forms, museums can break the constraints of time and space, allowing the audience to more immersive experience the charm of border ethnic culture and the profound connotation of the integration of Marxist thought and national identity. At the same time, combining with new media forms such as short videos and live streaming, the communication radius of exhibitions can be extended, making the concepts of Marxism and the pluralistic and integrated national identity spread more widely. This not only improves the audience's visiting experience and participation enthusiasm but also promotes the rooting of the integrated concepts in people's hearts, effectively enhancing the role of borderland museums in ideological guidance and national identity construction.

5. Conclusion

Borderland museums need to focus on diverse display, educational guidance, academic research, cultural exchanges and innovative display methods in the construction of national identity and the integration of Marxist thought. Through the implementation of these strategies and suggestions, borderland museums can play a greater role in promoting exchanges and understanding among different ethnic groups and make positive contributions to the construction of national identity. Museums must always bear in mind that as a non-profit institution facing the public and serving social development, their ultimate goal is to educate the public and provide high-quality public cultural services for the whole society. Only when audiences walk into museums can they receive corresponding education, so expanding the audience scope is particularly important. However, the current exhibition forms of museums are limited to fixed basic exhibitions with few innovations and insufficient attractiveness, which makes it passive to attract more audiences to visit museums and thus leads to the weakening of the educational function of museums. This has to arouse the attention of museum workers. In particular, it is more important for grass-roots borderland museums to take cultural relics as a mirror, give full play to their publicity and educational functions, enable the broad masses of grass-roots people in border areas to understand local history and the huge cultural heritage left by our ancestors, and fully enjoy the public cultural services provided by museums. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the publicity of museums, make the public understand that museums are open to the public and serve the society. They are by no means only places for school visits or organized visits by government and institutional units on specific festivals, but spaces where everyone should step in to understand the history, present and future of the city they live in, avoiding making the target audience hesitate to visit.

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