

The Phenomenon of Ethnic Blending in Dunhuang's Documents and Chinese Cultural Identity

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Keywords: Dunhuang document; Ethnic blending; Chinese cultural identity; Historical memory; Cultural exchange and integration

Abstract: This paper mainly discusses the unique role and important value of Dunhuang documents in revealing social integration and the construction of Chinese cultural identity. Through the comprehensive use of text interpretation and cultural research, this paper deeply analyzes the language exchange, the integration of religious beliefs, the mutual learning of living habits and customs, and the integration of legal system and social management contained in Dunhuang's documents. On this basis, the article reveals that Dunhuang, as an important node of cultural exchange and integration on the ancient Silk Road, plays a key role in promoting the construction of Chinese cultural identity. It is found that the Dunhuang document records the mutual influence and integration of various ethnic groups in culture, religion and society. Through these blending phenomena, it shows the gradual construction and deepening of Chinese cultural identity. Ethnic blending is the exchange and integration of cultural elements, but also the sharing and inheritance of historical memory and the innovation and development of cultural inheritance. This process has laid a solid foundation for the formation of the pluralistic and integrated cultural pattern of the Chinese.

1. Introduction

Dunhuang, a famous historical and cultural city in the northwest of Gansu Province, has been the throat of the Silk Road since ancient times. It witnessed the exchange and collision between eastern and western civilizations [1]. The discovery of Dunhuang's documents provided unparalleled and precious materials for the study of China's ancient history, culture, religion and society [2]. These documents covered the long years from the 4th century to the 14th century, recorded the social life, religious beliefs and legal provisions at that time, and contained rich information on ethnic integration [3]. Today, with the deepening of globalization, studying the phenomenon of ethnic blending in Dunhuang's instruments will help us to deeply understand the pluralistic and integrated cultural pattern of ancient China [4]. It can also provide a historical mirror for contemporary society to deal with ethnic relations and promote cultural diversity [5]. By discussing how these blending phenomena promote the formation and development of Chinese cultural identity, we can more profoundly realize that the profoundness and inclusiveness of Chinese culture are based on long-term exchanges and mutual learning among all ethnic groups.

The purpose of this study is to reveal how different ethnic groups interact and merge in Dunhuang's geographical space by systematically sorting out and analyzing the phenomenon of ethnic blending in Dunhuang's documents. At the same time, it discusses how this blending has promoted the deepening and expansion of Chinese cultural identity. Specifically, the research will focus on the following core issues: What specific ethnic blending phenomena are recorded in the Dunhuang document? How did ethnic blending happen under the specific historical background of Dunhuang? How do these ethnic blending phenomena affect the residents' sense of identity with Chinese culture in Dunhuang area? What is the enlightenment of Dunhuang's ethnic blending model to contemporary society, especially in promoting people's unity and enhancing cultural identity? Through in-depth exploration of these issues, this paper hopes to fully understand the cultural value of Dunhuang's documents and its unique role in building a pluralistic and integrated cultural pattern

of the Chinese.

2. Overview of Dunhuang documents and ethnic background

Dunhuang document is one of the most important archaeological discoveries in the 20th century. Its historical value and cultural significance are immeasurable [6]. They cover Buddhist classics, Confucian classics, historical books, literary works, contract documents, account books, letters and other types. Time spans from the 4th century to the 14th century, covering almost all aspects of medieval China society. The discovery of Dunhuang's documents fills many gaps in historical research and provides us with a unique window to spy on the ancient social features, cultural integration and religious belief changes [7]. These documents are mainly in Chinese, but also include Uighur, Sogdian and other languages, showing the cultural exchange and integration of various ethnic groups along the Silk Road. They are indispensable and valuable materials for studying Dunhuang's history, culture and even medieval China.

During the Han and Tang Dynasties, Dunhuang, as an important node of the Silk Road, attracted many business travelers, monks and envoys. The Han, Tubo, Uighur, Turkic and Sogdian peoples met and merged here, forming a unique cultural landscape. With the change of dynasties, the ownership of Dunhuang has also changed several times. Every change in political structure is accompanied by changes in cultural blending.

Table 1 Detailed Table of Socio-Cultural Foundations for Ethnic Integration in Dunhuang

Socio-Cultural Foundation Factors	Specific Manifestations and Impacts
Geographical Junction Point	Located at the throat of the Silk Road, connecting the East and West, facilitating cultural exchange
Commercial Exchanges along the Silk Road	Frequent merchant travels, driving exchanges in commodities, culture, religion, and more
Coexistence and Fusion of Multiple Religions	Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, etc. coexist, promoting the blending and sharing of religious beliefs
Changes in Ancient Dynasties and Ethnic Migration	Shifts in political power led to ethnic migration, fostering integration and interaction among ethnic groups
Cultural and Artistic Exchanges and Mutual Learning	Learn from each other and learn from mural painting, sculpture, music and dance
Shared Production and Lifestyles	Exchanges in agricultural, pastoral, and handicraft production methods, promoting the fusion of lifestyles and customs
Inclusiveness of Ethnic Policies	Inclusive ethnic policies implemented by successive governments, promoting harmonious coexistence among ethnic groups
Mutual Influence of Languages and Scripts	Exchange of Chinese characters, Uyghur script, etc., facilitating the fusion of languages and scripts
Blending and Dissemination of Folklore	Mutual dissemination of folk tales and heroic legends, enhancing cultural identity
Fusion of Wedding, Funeral, and Other Customs	Mutual influence on customs such as weddings and funerals, promoting the mutual learning of customs and traditions

The ethnic blending in Dunhuang area is not an accidental phenomenon, but has its profound social and cultural foundation [8]. These factors in Table 1 work together, making Dunhuang a model of social integration and laying a solid foundation for the formation and development of Chinese cultural identity.

3. An analysis of the phenomenon of ethnic blending in Dunhuang's documents

3.1. Language communication and integration

In Dunhuang's documents, the exchange and integration of language and characters is a remarkable embodiment of social integration. As the main text, Chinese records a large number of official documents, private letters and literary works. At the same time, the emergence of Uighur, Sogdian and other minority languages also shows the unique charm of Dunhuang as a multicultural meeting place. The use of these different languages reflects the activities and exchanges of various peoples in Dunhuang area at that time, and also promotes the mutual learning and integration of languages and characters. Cross-language cultural exchange has enriched the cultural connotation of Dunhuang and left a valuable cultural heritage for future generations.

3.2. Blending and sharing of religious beliefs

Dunhuang was one of the early centers where Buddhism was introduced into China, and the blending and sharing of its religious beliefs was particularly remarkable. There are a large number of Buddhist classics in Dunhuang's documents, which record the blending of Buddhism with Taoism, Confucianism and other religions. For example, in Buddhist grottoes and murals, we can often see the integration of Buddhist themes with Taoism and Confucianism, which reflects the mutual reference and integration between religions. Residents in Dunhuang area also show great tolerance in religious beliefs. Many families worship the gods of Buddhism and Taoism at the same time, and even there is mutual integration in religious ceremonies.

3.3. Mutual learning between living habits and customs

The mutual learning between living habits and customs in Dunhuang's documents is another important embodiment of social integration. We can see the mutual influence and integration of cultural traditions in clothing, diet, residence, weddings and funerals. In terms of costumes, the characters in Dunhuang's murals show the blending of Han people and Uighur costumes. In terms of diet, the residents in Dunhuang area have also absorbed the food culture of various ethnic groups (pasta, dairy products, meat, etc.) and formed a variety of eating habits. In terms of residence, weddings, funerals and weddings, the customs of all ethnic groups also learn from each other and merge with each other: the wedding ceremony of the Han people is combined with the wedding customs of Tubo, forming a unique wedding custom. This mutual learning of living habits and customs has enriched the cultural life in Dunhuang area and promoted the exchange and integration between ethnic groups.

3.4. Integration of legal system and social management.

Dunhuang documents record the integration practice of legal system and social management, and reflect the embodiment of social integration at the institutional level. In Dunhuang area, due to the multi-ethnic community, in order to maintain social stability and people's unity, the rulers at that time formulated a series of policies and regulations to integrate the legal systems of various ethnic groups, as shown in Figure 1.

In terms of social management, Dunhuang area has also formed a unique governance model. For example, through the collaborative management of social forces such as religious leaders and local tyrants, this not only embodies the authority of the central government, but also respects the traditions and customs of local ethnic groups.

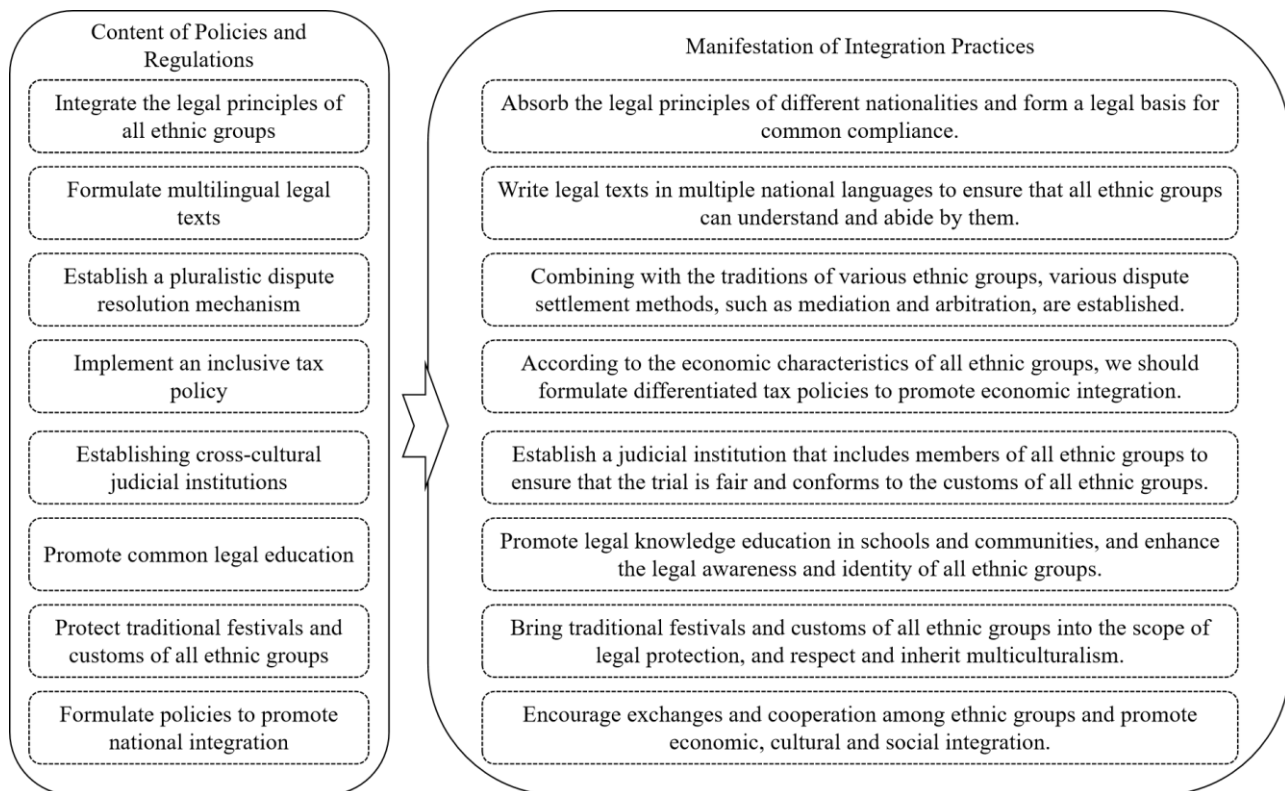


Figure 1 Practices of Legal System and Social Management Integration in Dunhuang

4. The Construction of Chinese Cultural Identity in Dunhuang Documents

4.1. Chinese cultural elements in Dunhuang documents

Cultural identity, as a sense of belonging and identity of individuals or groups to a specific cultural system and its values, is an important cornerstone for maintaining social cohesion and promoting social harmony. It involves many aspects, such as language, religion, history, customs, art, etc., and it is people's cultural consciousness and cultural self-confidence gradually formed in long-term social practice. Through the interaction of ethnic blending, historical memory and cultural inheritance, cultural identity can be continuously constructed and reshaped in a specific social and historical environment.

Dunhuang documents contain rich Chinese cultural elements. These elements are the important cornerstones of building Chinese cultural identity. As the core symbol of Chinese culture, Chinese characters occupy a dominant position in Dunhuang documents. Whether it is official documents, private letters, Buddhist classics or literary works, the use and dissemination of Chinese characters are inseparable. As the core value of Chinese culture, Confucianism is also widely reflected in Dunhuang documents. As an important part of Chinese culture, Buddhism occupies a pivotal position in Dunhuang documents. Buddhist classics, grotto art and monk's life all show the profound shaping of Buddhist culture on religious belief and spiritual life in Dunhuang area.

4.2. Ethnic blending promotes Chinese cultural identity

The phenomenon of ethnic blending in Dunhuang documents has played an important role in promoting the construction of Chinese cultural identity. Ethnic blending promotes the exchange and integration of cultural elements, making Chinese culture absorb the cultural essence of other ethnic groups while maintaining its own characteristics, forming a more open and inclusive cultural system. Ethnic blending promotes the sharing and inheritance of historical memories, and makes all ethnic groups form a common memory and emotional bond with Chinese culture in the common historical process. Historical stories, the legend of heroes and folk beliefs in Dunhuang documents are all cultural treasures created and passed down by all ethnic groups, which provide rich historical

resources for the construction of Chinese cultural identity. Ethnic blending also promotes the innovation and development of cultural inheritance, which makes Chinese culture constantly glow with new vitality while inheriting tradition.

4.3. The inspiration of Dunhuang model for the construction of contemporary cultural identity

The construction mode of Chinese cultural identity in Dunhuang documents is of great significance to the construction of contemporary cultural identity. It reminds us that the construction of cultural identity needs the exchange and integration of multiple cultures. Today, with the deepening of globalization, we should be more open to the culture of different peoples and promote the exchange and mutual learning of cultural elements, so as to enrich and develop the connotation and extension of Chinese culture. At the same time, it emphasizes the importance of historical memory in the construction of cultural identity. Only by being open, inclusive and innovative can we build a more solid and profound Chinese cultural identity.

5. Conclusions

Looking back on the research of this paper, we deeply discussed the unique value and important role of Dunhuang documents in revealing the cultural fusion and the construction of Chinese cultural identity. Through a detailed analysis of the language exchange, the blending of religious beliefs, the mutual learning of living habits and customs, and the practice of the integration of legal system and social management in Dunhuang documents, we get some enlightenment. Among them, Dunhuang, as the throat of the ancient Silk Road, is a distribution center for commodity trading and a melting pot for cultural exchange and integration. Dunhuang documents, as precious records of this historical period, provide us with unparalleled research materials. It gives us a glimpse of the pluralistic cultural pattern of ancient China and the gradual construction and deepening of Chinese cultural identity under this pattern.

The phenomenon of ethnic blending in Dunhuang documents shows the mutual influence and integration of various ethnic groups in culture, religion and society, and reveals how this blending has promoted the formation and development of Chinese cultural identity. Through research, we find that ethnic blending is not only a process of exchange and integration of cultural elements, but also a process of sharing and inheriting historical memories, cultural inheritance, innovation and development. This process enriches the connotation of Chinese culture and enhances the sense of identity and belonging of all ethnic groups to Chinese culture. It laid a solid foundation for the formation of the pluralistic and integrated cultural pattern of the Chinese.

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge The "Innovation Star" Project for Graduate Students in Gansu Province: Research on Dunhuang Documents from the Late Tang, Five Dynasties, and Early Song Dynasties and the Integration of Multi ethnic Communication and Exchange in the Hexi Corridor (2025CXZX-220) has been completed; Supported by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities: "Research on Multi ethnic Communication, Exchange and Integration in Dunhuang Documents" (31920230102); Supported by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities: Special Project for Theoretical and Practical Research on Strengthening the Awareness of the Chinese National Community "(31920240126-18)

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