

The Practical Approaches to Forging a Strong Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation Through Filial Piety Culture

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ABSTRACT

The construction of a shared spiritual home for the Chinese nation relies on the profound cultural foundations of all ethnic groups. Cultural symbols are the most direct and vivid embodiment and carrier of Chinese culture, bearing rich cultural connotations. Utilizing filial piety culture as a cultural symbol to forge a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation aims to foster widespread recognition of filial piety culture among all ethnic groups. Filial piety culture holds profound significance and value, representing one of the fundamental moral concepts in human society regarding respect and care for family and elders. However, building a shared filial piety culture among all ethnic groups requires not merely promoting it indiscriminately but extracting its essence while discarding its flaws. To establish a filial piety culture that resonates widely across ethnicities, sustained efforts must be made across three dimensions: cultural integration, practical transformation, and innovative dissemination. This will transform the spiritual core of filial piety culture into a tangible force that unites ethnic consensus.

KEYWORDS

Filial piety culture; Cultural symbol; Forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation

1 The generative logic and core essence of filial piety culture

1.1 Historical evolution: from ancestor worship to ethical foundation

"Be filial to one's parents" represents the contemporary consensus on filial piety culture. Yet when pressed further about its substance, many remain confined to "respecting elders and maintaining hierarchical order." As a core tenet of Chinese culture, filial piety was pivotal throughout history. As early as the Pre-Qin period, the Chapter on Establishing the Foundation in The Classic of Filial Piety stated: "Filial piety is the root of virtue and the origin of all education." Filial piety is the foundation of morality, from which all moral instruction springs.

The origins of filial piety can be traced back to ancient fertility worship and ancestor veneration. In early human societies, the belief that procreation was essential for the survival of the human race led to the gradual transformation of fertility worship into reverence for ancestors. Under this worship, filial piety began to take shape, establishing that children should honour, care for, and be dutiful to their parents. During the Xia and Shang dynasties, the formation of a patriarchal hierarchical slave-based state integrating "family" and 'nation' allowed traditional filial piety concepts to deepen and evolve. By the Shang period, filial piety became deeply ingrained, emphasising "serving parents well" and ancestral sacrifices as the primary content and form of filial duty. By the Western Zhou period, when the clan system reached its strictest form, filial piety increasingly became compulsory. The clan system demanded "order among elders and juniors, distinction between superiors and inferiors," determining the hierarchical status of descendants based on the closeness of blood ties. Filial culture thus expanded beyond merely serving one's parents to encompass all blood-related clan members^[1].

During the Spring and Autumn period, filial piety expanded to encompass personal virtue, social conduct, and national responsibility. Building upon the Western Zhou's emphasis on ritual propriety, Confucius developed a unique Confucian philosophy. Filial piety was no longer confined to blood ties. Still, it became intertwined with politics, ascending from the individual level to the family and then to social responsibility for the state—It is a progressive relationship.

During the Western Han Dynasty, Dong Zhongshu, building upon Confucius' ethical teachings, further developed a filial culture emphasizing political obedience. Drawing parallels between natural order and human society, he formulated the "Three Cardinal Principles": The ruler is the guiding principle for ministers, the father for sons, and the husband for wives." He advocated understanding human moral norms through analogy with natural order, emphasising the sovereign's authority, the father's guidance, and the husband's responsibility—all deemed expressions of Heaven's will.

1.2 Elevation of meaning: from filial duty to family-state unity

Filial piety occupies an exceptionally vital position in Chinese history and culture, undergoing complex and profound transformations in its essence and expression throughout the ages. From "honoring ancestral rites" to "serving parents well" then to "establishing order among elders and juniors, distinguishing between superiors and inferiors," and finally to the "Three Cardinal Principles," before returning to modern-day filial piety toward parents and support for older people.

As a vital component of traditional Chinese culture, filial piety has evolved over millennia, ultimately crystallising around its core values: reverence and care for elders, emphasising familial harmony and social stability.

2 The logical framework for forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation through cultural symbols

2.1 Symbolic identity: the emotional foundation for community consciousness

Chinese cultural symbols embody five millennia of Chinese civilization, representing the concentrated expression of the nation's outstanding cultural character and the accumulation of history. They are vital for consolidating national consensus and fostering the Chinese nation's identification with its culture. Forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation is not merely about awakening shared historical memories among ethnic groups or making them aware that the Chinese nation is a diverse yet unified family built collectively by all ethnic groups. Based on the mechanism of psychological identification, this sense of community emerges through a cyclical process of ascending from emotional recognition to rational understanding, and then translating that understanding into practice. This mechanism manifests as follows: the consciousness of the Chinese nation community originates from the deep knowledge and recognition of Chinese culture among all ethnic groups. The continuous deepening of this recognition enables ethnic groups to gradually develop a strong sense of belonging, profound reliance, and firm spiritual devotion to the shared identity of the "Chinese nation." This consciousness is deeply rooted in the self-character of each individual and naturally externalizes as conscious cultural behaviour ^[2]. Based on the above discussion, forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation involves promoting ethnic groups' understanding of Chinese culture. This understanding generates "emotional cognition," which deepens into "identity belonging." Ultimately, this process manifests as "externalized behavior," constructing a development trajectory that is clearly layered and logically coherent. The first step in forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation is to awaken the "emotional cognition" of the Chinese nation among all ethnic groups. This cognition requires the use of cultural symbols to achieve. Cultural symbols embody the essence of Chinese culture. Recognition of these symbols, as the tangible manifestation of cultural identity, is deeply rooted in China's outstanding traditional culture and the exceptional cultural heritages of its ethnic groups. These symbols distort historical and traditional expressions and symbolize the nation's spirit. They effectively unites national consensus, enabling the consciousness of a community to be widely accepted and internalised, further strengthening national cohesion and cultural identity.

2.2 Filial piety as a cultural symbol: a shared spiritual symbol of the Chinese nation

Academic circles offer diverse definitions of cultural symbols. Here, we may invoke Ernst Cassirer's pivotal theory that "man is a symbolic animal." For Cassirer, symbols are human-created representations of the spiritual world. They are not material objects but functional entities bearing a certain ambiguous, abstract universality, with meanings that transcend rationality. In essence, cultural symbols are emblems imbued with symbolic significance and functional utility, capable of conveying specific cultural meanings ^[3]. Every ethnic group worldwide possesses its own cultural symbols, highlighting distinctive characteristics and unites the cultural spirit among different peoples, as the crystallization of the collective wisdom of China's ethnic groups. Chinese cultural symbols unites the shared experiences, history, memories, and identity of all ethnicities. These symbols not only bear witness to the vast territories jointly explored and the glorious history collectively written by all ethnic groups, but also carry the splendid culture co-created and the great spirit co-nurtured. They embody the shared emotions and values of the Chinese nation, fully showcasing its unique spiritual character and distinctly highlighting the distinctive paradigm of Chinese civilization, thus becoming iconic cultural symbols of the Chinese nation.

When discussing Chinese cultural symbols, one crucial point must be clarified: the signifying nature of symbols. Symbols are inherently symbolic, always combining a "signifier" with a "signified." The signifier is the perceptible part of the symbol, while the signified is what the signifier points to. The combination of signifier and signified is arbitrary, yet once established by convention, it becomes stable. For instance, when describing "mooncakes," we are not merely discussing the pastry itself but also consciously associating it with the festival it signifies—the Mid-Autumn Festival. This exemplifies the symbolic nature of signs. Therefore, not everything can qualify as a Chinese cultural symbol; it must simultaneously fulfil both the signifier and signified functions ^[4]. Chinese cultural symbols embody the essence and spirit of Chinese culture. For instance, when describing "filial piety culture," we are not merely discussing the act of "filial piety" itself; we also recognise that "filial piety" symbolises family harmony, social cohesion, and national stability. Throughout China's historical practice of filial piety, this virtue has become a distinctive hallmark of the nation's ritualistic traditions, held in the highest esteem by the Chinese people. This symbolic significance grants the filial piety culture an irreplaceable

status within Chinese culture.

3 The practical framework for forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation through filial piety symbols

The construction of a shared spiritual home for the Chinese nation relies on the profound cultural foundations of all ethnic groups. Cultural symbols are the most direct and vivid embodiment and carrier of Chinese culture, bearing rich cultural connotations. Therefore, forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation requires building shared cultural symbols among all ethnic groups based on existing ones, emphasizing "shared ownership" to seek broad recognition of Chinese culture across all ethnicities.

3.1 Prerequisite: examining and refining the filial piety cultural resources of all ethnic groups

Filial piety stands as a core tenet of traditional Chinese culture. Over millennia of interaction and integration, each ethnic group has gradually developed distinctive expressions of filial piety that align with its unique characteristics. While manifesting in varied forms and connotations across different ethnicities and cultures, their shared essence emphasizes respect, care, and support for elders—a spirit transcending cultural boundaries and possessing universal value and significance. Filial piety constitutes a vital component of China's outstanding traditional culture, regarded as the foundation of ethics and the foremost behavioural norm. Confucian culture emphasizes reverence, care, and support for older people, a philosophy deeply ingrained across all ethnic groups.

3.2 Core: building a shared symbolic system of "unity in diversity"

The key to constructing a shared symbolic system of filial piety culture based on "unity in diversity" is transcending a singular cultural perspective. While respecting the diverse expressions of filial piety across ethnic groups (diversity), it is essential to distil and highlight its common ethical core (unity): "respecting elders and caring for family members." This entails extracting contemporary-relevant essence—such as the family virtue of honouring elders and cherishing kin—and discarding outdated elements like hierarchical dependency. Through systematic integration, the most resonant and vibrant elements from each ethnic group's filial piety culture are elevated into shared cultural symbols of the Chinese nation. These symbols embody both profound traditional heritage and socialist core values, thereby providing a solid emotional bond and cultural foundation for Forging a Strong Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation.

3.3 Pathways: multi-dimensional approaches to transforming filial piety cultural identity

After extracting the essence and discarding the dross of filial piety culture, building shared cultural symbols to forge a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation requires sustained efforts across three dimensions: cultural integration, practical transformation, and innovative dissemination. This will convert the spiritual core of filial piety into tangible forces that unite ethnic consensus. At the cultural integration level, efforts should focus on uncovering the commonalities and complementarities among ethnic filial piety cultures to construct an inclusive system. Although filial piety cultures across ethnic groups manifest in diverse forms, their core spirit of "respecting elders and caring for family" remains consistent. Through academic research and cross-ethnic exchanges, we should identify the shared essence of filial piety cultures while respecting each group's unique expressions. This approach fosters a consensus on filial piety that embraces "harmony without uniformity"—where "each beauty is cherished, and all beauties are shared." At the level of practical application, filial piety culture should be integrated into social governance and people's livelihoods, transforming it from a cultural symbol into concrete actions. Elements of filial piety culture can be incorporated into family virtue building. Initiatives such as selecting "cross-ethnic filial piety role models" and organizing "filial mutual aid" community activities can strengthen emotional bonds among families of diverse ethnicities. Textbooks integrating multi-ethnic filial piety case studies should be developed to cultivate filial awareness and ethnic identity among youth through classroom instruction and campus activities. At the policy level, filial piety should be integrated with social welfare initiatives like elderly care and community services. For instance, promote "mutual aid elderly care" models in multi-ethnic residential areas to both preserve the spirit of filial piety and address practical challenges. This allows people of all ethnicities to experience the contemporary relevance of filial piety in daily life, thereby strengthening their sense of belonging to Chinese culture. In terms of communication innovation, leverage diverse platforms to amplify the influence and appeal of filial piety culture. Leveraging new media technologies, create multilingual, multi-format content on filial piety culture—such as short videos showcasing filial stories across ethnic groups and animations interpreting universal themes of filial piety—to break down geographical and linguistic barriers. Integrate filial piety themes into traditional festivals and ethnic events, such as

incorporating "honoring elders segments" during the Mongolian Naadam Festival or the Dai Water Splashing Festival. This allows filial piety culture to spread naturally within celebratory contexts. Encourage artistic creation through novels, plays, songs, and other forms to portray shared filial figures across ethnic groups. This will infuse filial piety culture into daily life more vividly, fostering a cultural atmosphere where "everyone practices filial piety, and all ethnic groups jointly inherit it."

4 Conclusion

By fostering consensus through cultural integration, implementing practical transformations to take root, and expanding influence through innovative dissemination, the refined essence of filial piety culture can genuinely become a shared cultural symbol among all ethnic groups. This process not only strengthens the emotional identification of all ethnic groups with filial piety culture but also elevates this identification into a collective recognition of the Chinese nation. It provides sustained cultural momentum for forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, continuously consolidating the shared spiritual home of the Chinese nation through cultural inheritance and innovation.

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